

Chapter Three:

Post-Colonial Socio-Political Endeavors to Solve the Ethnic Crisis

Just as much as the ethnic conflict has been going on in the post-colonial period, and socio political violence has been unleashed against the minority Tamils, one should also admit the fact that many leaders of the same socio political sectors have tried to solve this problem in the said period. All in all, both the leadership of the Sinhalese majority and the Tamil minority tried their utmost to end this conflict and to bring about a feasible solution to make socio political peace dawn in this land.

But due to various reasons, such as partiality, fundamentalism, lack of tolerance for the legitimacy of pluralism, greed to stay in power, etc, such endeavors ended with either little or no success. Though failure of previous endeavors gave rise to subsequent attempts seeking solutions, sometimes, very unfortunately, they also triggered violent riots against the minority, branding them as not willing to foster peace.

In this chapter, therefore, we shall trace out the various socio political reasons and endeavors of post-colonial time and evaluate them vis-a-vi the continuance of the crisis, and prepare the way to introduce the theology of symbiosis as a feasible answer for peace and harmony in post-colonial Sri Lanka.

Is an end of Ethnic Conflict and the restoration of peace and harmony possible in Sri Lanka?

Though this question seems to point to a negative answer, as suggested by the last quotation of chapter two, this question has to be asked in all sincerity and considered seriously. Both ethnicity and ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka have been created by historical, sociological and political causes (agents) through an understanding and

hermeneutics of events and situations of various times. Such understanding and hermeneutics have been extolled as classics and unquestionable primary sources, to understand, evaluate and judge future events in the socio-political and religious life of Sri Lanka. (The Dutugemunu – Elara Battle of the Mahavamsa is an example of this.) Hence, the possibility and feasibility of a solution for peace and harmony against ethnic conflict also have to be seen through a re-reading (or re-interpretation) of these so-called basic and primary sources. This "a priori" presupposes a de-reading and de-interpretation of the same. In other words, the text and causes need to be separated or liberated from their posterior understanding and the comments which had been attached to the former as inseparable and integral part of those primary sources. Many times old classics are understood by commentaries on them written centuries later. Hence, a preliminary de-routing should precede a re-routing in the line of relevant and life fostering new hermeneutics.

In the same manner, ethnicity and language too have played their major roles in causing the present crisis for the past five decades as pointed to in the previous chapter, specially in the sections on the 1958, 1964 and 1983 riots. Hence, a new understanding of these inevitable, natural, and existential life categories and putting the values attached to them, to test also, should begin, if new understanding and new values are to be arrived at, and attached to them in the future. Politics and Policies are two more causes for the conflict in Sri Lanka societies. Representational and ethnocentric politics and social policies have caused great havoc within a period of 5 decades of indigenous rule. Representationalism and ethnocentricity have permeated and pervaded even the other national spheres such as education, employment and economics and have caused competition and exclusion among the children of the soil. During ethnic riots the damaging and looting of properties and assets of the “underdog

“ manifest the feeling which lie burning deep down in the mind of the majority. In the sphere of education, the children are taught to hate and despise the minority Tamils as they grow in their rationality. As was made clear in the section on school textbooks in the previous chapters, education itself, besides other spheres, is geared and focused on fostering ethnic and cultural Chauvinism.

Employment in a third world and poor country like Sri Lanka is a matter that determines life and death. According to latest statistics one out of every five adult is unemployed or under-employed. As education even up to primary graduate level (bachelor) is free or subsidized, the students who sit every year at the end of their high school and university life are frantically in search of white collar jobs which are few and are reserved for the “politically recommended“ or “socially recognizable” few. No historian, sociologist or political analyst of Sri Lanka can deny the fact that the Sinhala and the Tamil Insurrections of the youth, which both began in the 70s, were caused partially by the anger and anxiety on the inability the poor and rural but intelligent youth, to accede to higher education followed by adequate employment. Hence, education, employment and economic policies of Sri Lanka too should be brought to the docks of fair reasoning and judgment, if they are to pave the way for peace and harmony in the future.

Culture and religions are the next that should come under inquiry and evaluation and thorough examination. All religions blossomed at different times in different places in order to fulfill a legitimate need of that time and situation and to point to life and joy in community. The teaching of their founders and their recommendation of lifestyles are poignant of their faith in “common good” (Koinonia). But in this sphere too as time rolled away and the original dynamism gave way to vested interests and power, religions not only became exclusive and hyper-ritualistic,

but also began to sanction and perpetuate violence and death in the name of God or the founder of the religion. History of religions all over the world have embarrassing examples of being the parent of death and destruction and trading away their basic tenets and values to obtain wealth and prominence and power.

Religions that were meant to care for and emancipate the poor, the lowly and the oppressed in any form, later allied themselves with the powerful, the aristocrats and the oppressors to legitimize their oppression and exploitation. In Sri Lanka too there are such unfortunate and embarrassing examples of religions either unwillingly or consciously causing violence and riots among the innocent lay devotees of the various religions or among the people of different races and cultures of the country. The existential fact that at least three of the four religions are quasi ethnic-based, has caused riots and violence which had disastrous double-effects vis-a-vi communal and religious flares. Therefore, religions too have to be brought under evaluation, judgment and re-orientation into their original path (marga, sharia, hodos) to play the role of “servants of peace,” “unifiers of people,” and “agents of life.” Hence, in this chapter I shall attempt to weigh and measure the above said spheres of human life and inquire into the possibility for peace and harmony among the races and religions and the dignity of all the children of mother Lanka, in time to come.

Reinterpretation of Classics and Myths

Myths serve very often to give a beginning or origin to a reality or situation which seem to exist from very different times and in pre-history. By myths, I mean here, those pre-historic and pristine lores and not mere traditional folklores. In such situation those myths may also elicit divine connection or sanction to the origin of such situations and realities, such as the Creation Story and the patriarchal stories of the

Bible, the Hindu Puranas and Ithihasas, The Buddha's Jathaka stories consisting of his 550 previous births are some of the greatest myths of the world religions comparable with those of Persia, Babylon and Egypt. What is very significant to note in all these myths is that almost all of them contain the aspect of war and violence in some form or the other. Between gods or between gods and demons (negative of gods) or between primordial human beings or dragons, there is fight or tussle which results in a good situation or in the solution of the existing problem. Even the natural changes such as day and night, drought and rain, winter and spring, autumn and harvest were all perceived in the pre-scientific age, as fight among the praetor-natural forces and the victorious emergence of one over the other. Thus one is faced with the blatant truth that, the seeds of war and violence are inherent in almost all religions, besides their claim to deliver life and peace. As Aho explains:

All Holy Wars have as their final goal the protection of the world from nothingness. But order, and by implication the violent struggle to eradicate chaos, have been mythically conceived in radically different ways throughout history. In some mythologies chaos is viewed as a disruption of the historical order and sacred warfare as an act re-establishing a faithful relationship between man and his god. Such a myth posits the divine to be an ethereal person inhabiting a realm separate from the world of natural affairs, which is "fallen" that is, not sacred. We shall call this holy war myth the transcendent-historical type. It is approximated in ancient Hebraism, Islam, and Protestantism. In other mythologies, the divine is said to be an impersonal pneuma, spirit or law, intimately pervading the material world. In this case, chaos is understood as an interruption of the cosmological order, and the holy war as an act reunifying man and the divine. This we shall call the immanentist -cosmological myth of holy war. It is exemplified in varying degrees by Buddhism, Hinduism, Confucianism, Nahuatlism and medieval Christianity. Each of these holy war myths is associated with a particular type of military ethic. (Kriegethik)

The Duttugamunu and Elara story of the Sri Lankan epic chronicle of the 6th century CE. The Mahawamsa is such a powerful myth that it seems to come to life more vividly reincarnate at every successive situation in the recent communal conflicts

of the country. The Battle scene is well preserved in sculpture (made at a later time) in the 1st century Sacred Dagoba the *Ruwanweli Saya*. Thus every Buddhist pilgrim who goes there a few times a year (at least once a year in April) to observe *pansil* and listen to scriptural chants and sermons, also visits this particular shrine and contemplate anti-Tamil stories and feelings. Quite often Buddhist preachers make it a point to inject into their sermons this historical myth - because it is a historical war (and heavily clothed with mythical components) and the anti-Buddhist happenings during the Chola invasions and colonial times, besides also exhorting people to live in peace and harmony. Though this may superficially look like being forthright about history, the 70% rural devotees who listen to such predications are not always in an intellectual position to distinguish one from the other. For them, history is nothing more than their present reality.

Another salient factor about the Duttugemunu Elara myth, is the legitimization of the killing of Elara and the other Tamils by the Buddhist monks - the guardians and exemplars of non-violence.

The ancient chronicles agree on the problem of a conscience that Dutugemunu apparently suffered from; he had been compelled to kill so many Tamils in capturing "Rajarata" from Elara, the Chola king and this conflicted with his view of himself as a non-violent Buddhist, a conflict which in a way echoes the sentiments of Asoka suffered from similar guilt feelings. According to the pali texts written by the Buddhist monks, at the time the king's conscience was disturbed, he was visited by some "Arahats" - i.e. monks who had attained Nirvana; they advised the king from this deed arises no hindrance in the way to heaven. Only one and a half human beings had been slain by thee, O lord of men...Unbelievers and men of evil life were the rest no more to be esteemed than beasts.

This is comparable to the incident portrayed in the Bishma Parvam of Mahabharatha, where man wishes to keep away from war while god proposes war.

At the battle field of Kurukshatra, just prior to the commencement of the battle. A thought of compassion flashes in the mind of Arjuna. Do I have to destroy all

these people who are my brothers, relatives and mentors to win back the throne and the kingdom? Bewildered by this thought, Arjuna drops his bow saying “never mind if they have taken wrongful possession of our share of kingdom, never mind if they kill us...I will not fight with my kith kin.” Then Krishna his charioteer (the lord Vishnu now incarnate as a king and friend of the Pandavas with the name Krishna), enlightens Arjuna. “...your grief arises from a delusion...do you refuse to fight the righteous war? You can only kill their bodies not their soul...your duty is to fight the war. Gain or loss, defeat or victory is not within your power...I am the lord of the universe...Though I have neither birth nor death, whenever truth languishes and evil triumphs in the world; I am born in every age to destroy evil and stabilize the truth...The preaching and enlightening of Krishna to Arujuna in the battle field is the Bagawat Gita (the song of the Lord - the gospel of Hinduism). What is noteworthy here is that man proposes peace while god proposes war. Unwillingness to kill is called “delusion” - maya and destruction is declared as righteousness.

Two famous kings of the early and late middle ages in the history of Sri Lanka are constantly referred to in modern times by politicians and preachers as strong and committed Buddhist kings. We have already seen them passim in the first and second chapters. They are Parakramabahu the great of the 11th century and Vimaladharmasuriya II of the 14th century. They are both extolled and lauded for their hydraulic, architectural and belligerent achievements. Regarding Parakramabahu, what comes to the forefront are the megalithic and monolithic ruins and shrines of Polannaruura, the gigantic irrational reservoirs and the extensive rice fields of the country. Everyone who visits the tooth relic temple in Kandy realize that the magnificent palace and shrine are the works of Wimaladharma-sooriya II. But as I had already alluded to, the Sri Lankan tourists and pilgrims or the visiting school children

are never told about their achievements in establishing peace and harmony in their days. Such sociological achievements of this duo are completely blocked out in the Sinhala/Tamil tourist manuals and school text books.

On the other hand the Duttugemunu Story, the Chola Invasions and the colonizers' atrocities add fuel to the fire and cause an upward mobilization of religious and cultural sentiments, to at least mentally despise the minority Tamils, Christians and Hindus by the otherwise peaceful Buddhists and Sinhalese. This, however, is not to deny the many peace-loving Buddhist monks in towns and villages throughout the country, who on full moon festivities, preach on peace harmony, tolerance and mutual respect. But their voices and waves do not reach the radio and television, and their writings are not made public.

Hindu, Christian and Muslim preachers and politicians too are guilty of the same type of omissions and commission. Though they face the hardships of having to face the winds and waves of majority politics daily, it cannot be said that they have done justice to work for peace and harmony within their limited power and resources. Ethnocentricity and religio-centricity is strong and fostered in the minority circles too. Ethnocentric fanaticism, religious fundamentalism and cultural exclusivism are rampant here too. They also imbibe myths and truth claims which come from equally old traditions and classics, not only to sustain and nourish themselves in their ethno religious or cultural identity but also to insulate themselves either from being absorbed into the others or to absorb others into their identities. Popular and religious songs, literature, theatre, political speeches and religious sermons also can be heard among the minorities which cause the same upward mobilization of sentiments not only against the Sinhala Buddhists but also against one another. This is the reason why here and there in the country one hears once in a while of Hindu-Christian and Muslim-

Tamil clashes and skirmishes.

All religions in Sri Lanka (as every where) by and large like to claim people into their community or company. Very often conversions to other religions are induced by reasons such as marriage, convenience and advantage as the case may be. In such cases a particular religion exerts influence over the other to leave one's own religion to enjoy the new situation. Both Islam and Christianity are referred to as religions which are quite keen on claiming people of other religions. Both by Evangelization, advantage and marriage these two religions have claimed thousands of adherents of the other religions. Though when considered from within the Islamic-Christian points of view such as "conversion, great commission, true faith, salvation" and so on, such claiming may be legitimized; from the point of view of the one side, it is equally natural and legitimate that such prosylithisms are totally against pluralism, peace, justice and harmony. Islam mostly claims people of other religions through marriage; but Christianity (particularly groups with fundamentalist tendencies) seeks to claim people both by evangelization and marriage. Buddhists and Hindus are both especially saddened and angered by the Christian proselytization (as they term it) of the past 500 years. More over the inter-Christian conversions (from one denomination or Church to the other) either for marriage or advantage or by proselytism, has caused double effects that are not conducive to the good of Church in Sri Lanka. In the first place, the others deride the rivalry, competition and spitefulness among the Christians who are like wolves to each other; in the second place, the spirit of Ecumenism and Church's witness to unity, love, peace and harmony are jeopardized by this rivalry and spite.

Moreover, in the last decade, the Sri Lankan Church in general as in the world over with the promulgation of the last decade of the 20th century as a "decade of

Evangelism” and preparatory decade for the millennial Jubilee, was reinvigorated by missionary activities. Words such as “Missio Dei, conversion of 200/2000 villages as birthday present to Jesus; second coming in 2000,” were repeatedly heard in all churches and religious conventions. Mass rallies and public prayers and healing inclusive of open air exorcisms were held by both the free and main line churches to attract crowds for Christ. Even in those fostering and prayer sessions for Peace in Sri Lanka, the heavy accent was on healing, exorcism and inducing commitment to Christ. These rallies did attract crowds both of Christians and people of other faiths and resulted in some conversion, but at the same time they gave rise to fear and anxiety both to the church which is sincerely involved in religious amity and dialogue and also to anti-Christian campaign instigated by Buddhist, Hindu and Muslim religions. Baudha Balavegaya (Buddhist power), Success (an association of Buddhist intellectuals), Hindu Aranery Movement (doctrinal development), the Muslim Majlis (development forum) are some of the reform and power movements of the different religions that surfaced in the last decade to counteract what they termed “unethical Christian conversions.”

I do not question here the validity or legitimacy of religious liberty. It is one of the fundamental human rights and freedoms of all religions. The decree of the Ecumenical council of Vatican II though of the Roman Catholic Church only, speaks for the doctrine of the Church of Christ in general.

But these aspects are not what we hear from pulpits and public sessions. What is often heard in rallies and revival meetings are “the uniqueness of Christ; personal commitment to Jesus to be saved; Christ the universal judge, atonement that has caused the unfathomable riches of Christ, true faith as the only way for happiness and plenty in this life and in the next, truths in Christianity (most often only in the church of

the preacher) and myths in the other religions.” Bible quotes such as the healings of Jesus, his exorcisms, his pronouncements of judgement and the great commissions are the only portions that are repeatedly preached on in these rallies. Jesus’ parables and teachings on the Reign of God, the Christian life (through human life) or the values of the reign of Heaven in the Sermon on the Mount, the need to carry the cross, to be of service to one’s neighbor, walking the extra mile to ease the burden of the weary, to be charitable without expecting anything in return, love of enemy, looking after the sick, naked, hungry and the displaced are as if absent in the Bible of the community of faith or the warring communities of the country.

I am of the firm opinion that the religions inclusive of Christianity should dig out the peace and harmony texts from their scriptures and preach, peace and harmony repeatedly in their sermons, banas, parayanams, and thuaahs (the word for preaching in Buddhism, Hinduism and Muslim religions). The good Samaritan, the reconciling Father, praise of the pagan centurion, the audacity of the Canaanite widow, the great banquet for the poor and the lowly, the compassion and anger of Jesus vis-a-vi death and violence, the Beatitudes, the tolerance of the crucified Jesus ought to take priority over the so-called “missionary texts“ to resound again and again in all parts of the island and Sri Lanka. If similar texts of the other scriptures equally resound and blend in the different directions of the country, peace and amity among all races and religions will seem a possible agenda. It is indeed a great pity that many churches, both new and traditional, should give hyperbolic importance to the appendage or the epilogue of the gospel according to Matthew rather than to the entire body of the gospel which speaks about living a life in solidarity with the neighborly human persons.

If Church aggrandizement and proud proclamation of achievements in membership and financial development become the criteria to determine truth and

relevance of a church and God's favor and blessing of it, then peace, harmony and pluralism are *ipso facto* diametrically opposed considerations for that particular church. It is an unfortunate reality that still many Christians, both laity and clergy, are convinced that the non-Christians will not reach heaven after death. Therefore, they feel the "burden" of neighborly love to take them to heaven, which can happen only through conversion and baptism. Such fundamentalist convictions have also caused general suspicion of genuine Christian charity and philanthropy and sincere inter-religious dialogue. While, it is true that some Christians consider dialogue and charity good and straightforward strategies for conversion, there are many other Christian agents and institutions who engage themselves in such "corporal works of mercy" and "open search in to spiritual riches" without any hidden agendas. They are inspired by the ideals of the kingdom of God as postulated by our Lord and the conviction that God has been both creatively and providentially active at all times, in all places and through many prophets and sages of the world. I believe that the Pauline text of the "last activity of God in his Son" is only to say that up to that particular time and not to the rest of Chronos.

There are inter-religious and inter-communal associations such as the Satyodaya (dawn of truth) Center for society and religion, the Thulana (balance), the National Peace Council, the Christian workers fellowship, Subaseth Gedera (house of fellowship), Navajeevanam (new life) which, though some of them have a heavy Christian presence, strive in sincerity to accept and respect legitimacy of plurality. They do not as many accuse them of, dilute their faith and convictions or mitigate their Christian commitment or hide the witness and allegiance to Christ. Quite many of them have proved their loyalty to their Church through martyrdom, loss of positions of ability and their calm behavior even in times of misunderstanding and slander. The role

and influence of some of these Religious Catalyst movements and persons will be discussed in detail in chapter four.

Reasonable and Fair Educational, Employment and Economic Opportunities for Establishment of Peace

These three components of human life both in the individual and society are related to each other and one leads to the other in ascending form. Man the rational animal of Aristotle, can develop into an individual (person) according to Karl Marx, only in society. Hence it is also obvious that ultimately it is the society that makes or breaks the individual. It is needless to dwell more on the importance and the *sine qua non* nature of economics in modern day society for a dignified human life. Economics is tied both to voice and power of a person in a society - if one is to be seen, heard and marked, i.e. to assert the existence of one self in public. A modern Tamil Indian poet (Kannadhasan) of Marxist leanings composed a song that goes like this: "Money is God and God acknowledges it too."

As stated previously, in Sri Lanka a country of the two-thirds world, one out of every five persons is unemployed. Roughly 70% of the country's population is rural peasantry. The density of the population of 18 million, which is said to be 243 per square kilometer, does not give a proper picture as it is an average for the entire country. The actual density is found only in the one and only megatown or metropolis, the capital city of Colombo, which proudly houses all modern developments. According to many sociologists, there is one big town and one small town in Sri Lanka, i.e. Colombo and Kandy, and all the others are big or small villages. It is therefore understandable that Colombo would be quite centripetal to that sector of the society which takes economic development in their life seriously. Because of the fact

that urbanization in this country in the strict sense is applicable only to Colombo and its suburbs now called “Greater Colombo,” that part of the country is over-populated vis-a-vi the other provincial towns. This fact is proved in the last parliamentary elections held in October 2000 for which about 1 million 900,000 registered voters were from adult residents living within roughly 50 kilometers radius from Colombo. Just this figure which does not take into account the unregistered voters and the youth and children below 19 years of age, is over one-tenth of the island’s total population. Therefore one can reckon from these figures the high density of the population in the capital city.

Greater Colombo houses exhibit extremes from mansion, condominia and apartments to slums. Though in the other towns and villages there are wattle and daub huts, there are no slums. (The only other place where quasi-slum houses can be found are in the plantation areas where the “line houses“ were built by the British to house the Indian Tamil coolies.) This therefore explains the unhealthy factors which cause socio-political and economic contentions. The majority of good attractive jobs both in the government and private sectors are also invariably available only in Colombo. Though there are big schools and universities in practically all provincial towns, with the exception of a few, the schools and universities of Colombo are at a disproportionate advantage point over the provincial ones. Therefore graduates from the provincial schools and universities are placed at a disadvantage when it comes to job opportunities. Since everything is in Colombo, opportunities and development also stagnate in Colombo. The southern youth of the Sinhala society staged the aforementioned insurrection in 1971 and 1987-89, angered and frustrated by the irredeemable political and economical policy of the two governments - SLFP and UNP. Their popular slogan *Kolambata Kiri Apata Kekiri* - Milk for Colombo people

while for us only gourd - was composed due to the fact that all milk produced by the poor peasant farmers of the south was transported to Colombo, and they ate only yams and gourds, which are products of the dry zone.

The insurrections of the southern and rural Sinhala youth was triggered basically by the educational and economic factors and they saw that only a revolutionary change in Politics could better those inequalities. On the other hand, the revolution of the Tamil youth of the North East is directly politically motivated because they are convinced that only political sovereignty will change socio-economic life of the minority Tamils. Hence, though both parties converge in the end result, i.e. dignity of the oppressed and the strategy, i.e. armed struggle and Marxist ideology, the interpretation of the causes are slightly different and peculiar to each of them.

The present school children who were born after 1980 have no knowledge of the insurrection of 1971, as if it were unimportant and did not happen. The textbooks say nothing about it. The students know about Marx, Stalin and Lenin, the French and Russian revolutions, the Industrial revolution and so on, but are ignorant about the first Marxist revolution of the country. They know about the second JVP revolution of 1987-89, and the prolonged Tamil LTTE revolution because they are facts of their lifetime. Real transparency calls for acknowledgement of the failure of the governments to deliver the goods to the people at large and requires that the country search in sincerity and seriousness for alternative fair policies, in consultation with all sectors of Sri Lankan society, that will provide for all of them. Like the divine providence that showers rain and shines the sun on all without bias, politics that rules the people should care for all the subjects without partiality, if peace is its prospect.

This therefore calls for revolutionary thinking in the government of Sri Lanka for centrifugation of developmental opportunities such as education, employment and

economic fairness and equality into the rest of the island especially at least to the other provincial towns. The Carnegie Commission summarizes this point quite vividly:

Other explanations for conflict (within states) can be derived from economic factors, such as resource depletion, rising unemployment, or failed fiscal and monetary policies, particularly when discriminatory economic systems create economic disparities along cultural ethnic or religious lines...few doubt that economic conditions contribute to the emergence of mass violence, although experts disagree about exactly how the stresses of economic transformation contribute to violent outbreaks.

Azeez, a Sri Lankan Muslim politician and trade unionist, elucidates how the lack of development of the other provinces has caused the escalation of the socio-political crisis in the country:

The third equally important aspect of this matter is development. Economic, cultural, social, educational, health and all other branches of human activities in the region will receive closer attention. When we look at the development set up in the country today, we find that except the Mahaveli Scheme, whatever development there is, is concentrated mostly in the Western province. Provinces like Uva, Sabaragamuwa, North Central, Eastern and Northern provinces are more or less backward without a hope of early solution of their several problems. Provincial legislatures and executives would be compelled to concentrate on their own problems and seek solutions to their needs of development. Thus in the provincial solution are contained the seeds of effective and positive solutions and above all of uniform development in the entire country.

The Role of Mass Media in Kindling Division and Violence

Both press and mass media, the powerful voices of the government, also contribute to the ordinary people's hatred, bias and suspicion of the "other race." In Sri Lanka the newspapers, radio, and television are mostly controlled by the government and they tow the policy laid out by it. However, now the opposition parties too have created their own such channels through the private sector. The LTTE in the same manner has formed its own press and media and its own website. There is therefore a triangular conflict in reports of news, data and policies mostly one opposed

to the other. Opinions may vary as to who is to be blamed first, but the existential truth is, propaganda of one's own policies and achievements and the anti-propaganda of the opponents policies and actions, are what people see and hear in the mass media. Thiru Kandiah, a Sri Lankan scholar and writer, appraises the role of the mass media in contributing to the kindling of violence:

As far as the ethnic, issue goes the practice of the newspapers reflects a general approach characterized by two main goals: (1) The projection of a distinct Sinhala consciousness, against those on the other side of the ethnic divide; and (2) The pursuit of this effort in a manner which pervades the interest serves the interests of rival groups within the internal politics of the south.

The methods used in pursuit of these goals involves selective presentation and/or concealment of news, strategized timing of the release of news, distortions, slanting, misreporting or even blatant untruths, covering up failure of policies, attempts to embarrass internal rivals and so on. Also involved is the process of criminalizing the other side, a process in which the LTTE willingly cooperates, for obvious strategic reasons. Concerns which have their own intrinsic validity - censorship, for example, the plight of civilians or the armed forces are treated, but often in ways that are designed to discredit internal and external rivals.

A significant consequence is that frequently made overt professions of gestures toward peace are effectively undermined, in some case quite deliberately...The picture of the media that emerges from all this is a dysfunctional one which defeats the high expectation we might have on them as "conflict specialists" who might contribute toward the resolution of conflict by fair and balanced reporting, which give people exchange to arrive at better understanding of the issues, etc.

In Sri Lanka, the people realize what they can expect from television, radio, and the newspapers. They are able to de-code the data and "read between the lines." Hence the politicians and those with political power cannot rouse the majority of the people to that frenzied tempo of violence as they did in 1983. Yet one cannot be complacent about it and be lethargic about the unconscious and induced racism and calculated violence and human rights violations which are still rampant in Sri Lankan society today. All the religions of the country proclaim basic values and are based on

the bedrock of “human dignity“ as the basic yet pivotal point of all aspirations. It is perhaps now their hour to legitimize their existence and *raison d’etre* by endeavoring to be agents of peace and harmony, racial respect and amity in Sri Lanka.

Breaking the Horns of Ethnocentrism and Racial Fundamentalism

As I have already mentioned, right from primitive times humanity had belonged to different ethnic, racial, religious and linguistic backgrounds, awareness, individuation and articulation of such differences and identities developed very much later in time than the existence and origin of such differences. I believe that it may even go into pre-historic or even times before the awareness of time itself. The Biblical narrative of the Babel Tower pericope (Gen. 11:1-9) is an apt example of pushing linguistic origins into mythical and metahistoric period. The very fact that some of the languages both classic and modern are linked with gods or heavenly beings also corroborates this opinion. Equally true are the links of racial or ethnic origins with animals or trees. Anthropologists posit the theory that primitive totems which individuated and identified pre-civilized tribes, later on evolved into their standard and even deities. Animals such as the lion, the wolf, the bear and trees such as the oak, the Palmyrah, date palm, the willow, the banyan are even today hailed as sacred and precious by many nations in spite of scientific and technological advances. Though it is commonly understood that they did not actually take place at any given time, the myth is so potent that no one dares to disprove it. The myth has also the alchemic power to unite the members of a society to perform powerful actions, both positive and negative, in which as individuals or otherwise they might not engage. Mob demonstrations showing allegiance or unleashing violence, are some examples of the

potency of myths and totems. Therefore, one has to admit that side by side with science, technology and philosophy also survive vestiges of primitive societal and religious practices and traditions in post-modern societies and religions.

Hence, in Sri Lanka, I believe that a radical re-thinking of the concept and role of ethnism, myth, totem, language, culture and religion need to be seriously undertaken by theologians and anthropologists, and popularized in all sectors of society even down to pre-school kids.

Though it is true that societal hatred, disrespect and violence toward the alien (a person not of one's own background) happen among the adults in Sri Lanka, as stated earlier, such negative attitudes have been calculated and systematically injected into the population beginning from their school days through the textbooks. A Sri Lankan child from the time of the age of reason grows up hating the other and considering the other as incompatible and an enemy. Although both the Sinhala and Tamil forbears proceeded from India, only the latter are shown to be intruders and invaders and illegal immigrants. Although both Buddhism and Hinduism are religions of the Indian soil, only the latter is shown as imported from India. Forgetting the historical fact that Buddhism is an offshoot or an evolution from Hinduism (just as Christianity is from Judaism), only Hinduism is depicted as the rival and threat to Buddhism. When such partial and one-sided data and knowledge is repeated year after year into the growing and forming minds of the children, one need not wonder why there is in Sri Lanka the aforementioned "unconscious ethnocentrism."

Triggered by this attitude of the leaders of the Sinhala majority, now the Tamil militant leaders too over the last decade, have undertaken the project of rewriting the Tamil textbooks in pro-Tamil ethnic terms, thus injecting similar hatred and disrespect of the other. All government printed Sinhala-centered lessons have been taken away

and lessons showing the dignity of Tamil language and culture and Hinduism have been incorporated into them. Though this undoubtedly makes Tamil children aware and convinced of their greatness and dignity, as a tit for tat or counteract measure, it also induces hatred and disrespect of the other. Thus these two attitudes create bipolarity or polarization of the children of the same soil and the national womb, to be viewed as enemy of one another that to come together to live in peace and harmony. Both parties therefore in my opinion are guilty, though one has caused the other, of poisoning tender minds and destroying the possibility of considering difference in amity and magnanimity.

Sovereign States or Federal States?

As I have argued in the first and second chapters, until the beginning of the modern age, Sri Lanka was a country with many kingdoms. The unification of the land into one nation under one government is undoubtedly a creation of the British empire. The introduction of the representational political or parliamentary system of administration by them, had proved to cause controversy and contention, in this country right from its inception in 1931. From that time on, it had caused more dissention and distrust than accord between the majority and minority communities. The eleven general parliamentary elections conducted to date, have proved beyond doubt that majority minority party coalitions do not last for more than a few years, as pacts fall through on assumption of political power.

The Tamil political parties did not, in the beginning of the period of independence, ask for separation. Though there was some agitation about unification, they had all accepted it as the legitimate mode of administration of the country for the future. They had tried to make the best use of the representational political system with

all its limitations, to be apt and adequate to maintain the dignity of the minority communities of the nation. They thought that the representatives of the people in the parliament would be able to lift the life and human dignity of the entire population represented in the national parliament, than only those who are represented by many. The Tamil political leaders of the Independence period like Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan, Sir Ponnambalam Arunachalam, Sunderalingam, S.J.V. Chelvanayagam, and G.G. Ponnambalam proposed many and different policies (sometimes one incompatible with the other) to make the existing parliamentary system satisfactorily workable to all. The requests ranged from 50% of parliamentary seats to a federal state comprising the northern and eastern provinces for the administration of the Tamil population.

All these requests made in consultative, democratic and nonviolent manners did not gain consideration or compliance from the two government-forming parties, viz UNP and SLFP. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, they were met with stark state violence. It is this failure of consultative methods of 28 years and non-violent protests of 12 years that made the united Tamil parties in 1976 to settle down finally to the demand of separatism i.e. a separate Tamil political state, and to accept the method of armed struggle to obtain it. Hence it is important to note that the demand to separate sovereign state was the result of prolonged political frustration, inclusive of socio-economic situations, induced by the apathy and callousness of the majority in power.

I am reminded of the request of the 5 Pandava Princes to their cousins the Kauravas, through Lord Krishna, in the Hindu Sacred Epic "The Mahabharatha." The Kauravas (hundred cousins) had usurped Pandavas' Royal domain and driven them into exile for 14 years. Hence at the end of it, Pandavas sent Krishna as their mediator to return the kingdom to them. Krishna was requested to first ask for the entire

Pandava kingdom. If Kauravas did not agree to give it back, he should ask for 5 districts, and if they do not agree to that too, to ask for at least 5 towns. Should they agree to give just 5 towns to the Pandavas, then the matter would be peacefully settled. But if they do not agree even to the least of the requests, then Pandavas would have no other alternative than to wage war to regain possession of their domain. (Virata Parvam of the Mahabharatha).

There is a similarity between the above stated Mahabharatha story and the present Tamil militant struggle of the LTTE for Separate Tamil State. All the earlier requests which I had mentioned from 1948 - 1976 were attempts to live within one political system in the one nation as emancipated, dignified and mutually respected citizen. They had thought and searched for different policies and solutions to make socio-political co-existence of the Sinhala-Tamil communities a feasible reality. The unfortunate turning down of all such requests as too much, unrealistic and illegitimate, and the unlawful and undemocratic penalties and atrocities unleashed for daring to ask such requests by the Major Sinhala Parties, gave rise to the famous Vattukkottai Resolution of 1976 for armed struggle for Tamil Eelam.

This is not to explain away or legitimize the ongoing armed struggle and the ethnic crisis in the country, or even to merely make an analysis of the current crisis situation. Yet a relevant and impartial diagnosis, in my firm belief, is a prerequisite and *sine qua non* to arrive at feasible strategies for political conflict resolution in Sri Lanka.

I do not believe that a mere academic analysis or research of the ethnic crisis in Sri Lanka will automatically lead to resolution of this crisis. If the purpose of the analysis or research is only to examine the causes or conditions or to see in what ways it is similar and dissimilar to intrastate conflicts or interracial conflicts in the rest of the

world, one would be able to collect, compare and sift through the data and arrive at conclusions to state that this is yet another complex political complication similar to this or that country in the world. There is a proverb in the Tamil language that a pumpkin (gourd) in a book cannot be cooked. Similarly, the analysis and research into the causes, conditions occasions of this ethnic crisis is relevant only as a prerequisite diagnosis to look for possible and feasible solution of the same.

At the same time, I am aware that this political and social conflict is so complicated and deep-rooted and involves many local and international factors which have to come together to dismantle as if it were, the live wires that keep on sparking violence and destruction from time to time. There is also a proverb in the Sinhala language which says that what could have once been nipped by the fingernail, now needs an axe to remove. Hence this study is a humble attempt to make a rational research with the sole purpose to seek a feasible solution to this crisis. I am aware of hundreds of articles and books written about the Sri Lankan political crisis by experts, anthropologists, sociologists and political analysts of world famous universities. But nearly all of them are written more with the purpose of the academic analysis of the sociopolitical situation of the country and that of giving a vivid picture of the situation rather than that of proposing paths for peace. Like making a super grade film or a bestseller book on war, they fulfill their *raison d'être* with their publication.

While I am fascinated by their in-depth knowledge and interest and research and am stimulated and guided by them, I often wonder how many of them had real and ground level experience of seeing and experiencing the inhuman and humiliating treatment that the oppressed and the underdogs have to face daily in this country. Diagnosis, as I earlier mentioned, is necessary for cure, but not sufficient. Guided by the diagnosis research and mindful of the similarities and dissimilarities of conflict

situations of the other countries, and guided by the inherent, positive characteristics and resources, pathways for peace have to be continued where they have been pioneered by promoters of peace, or explored and pioneered anew in directions yet to be discovered. As Bernard Swan, a Sri Lankan professor of Geography and initiator of “Programs in Peace Studies” and “Geographies of Peace” says:

Seen as a field of inquiry in its own right, peace studies is a well-intentioned enterprise, engaged in largely by western academic and fellow travelers with all their cultural baggage: stimulated by great goodwill, but also tinged with arrogance and prejudice, and constrained by the taboos of western academia. Because most of the international publications that find their way into libraries, across the world, emanate from western sources, it is the west that is widely seen as the fount to be tuned to for the understanding of and education on peace. Although violence is decried, in its confidence that it has the answers, peace studies may be guilty, albeit unwittingly, of some of the very cultural violence and academic imperialism that it deplores as compounding problems of unpeacefulness on earth.

The LTTE itself has undergone evolution in this 25 years of armed struggle. What started as a simple liberation movement of about 3 million Tamils on a small island, has in two decades grown to be the most powerful guerilla movement in the whole world. It has invaded cyberspace and appropriated practically all the most recent technologies in its strategies. Whether arms and missiles or communication equipment from the West, the LTTE has them all. Its military achievements as in the words of T.D.S.A. Dissanayake, the Sri Lankan Sinhala diplomat, “is the principal bargaining chip” for the LTTE and “annihilating it militarily is not feasible.” The LTTE has grown from an underground movement to an international corporation and is a government of its own category.

What are the opinions of the Tamil civilians of the north and east in particular and the other Tamils and Muslims living in the southern and western parts of Sri Lanka? This cannot be answered in a sentence. In spite of the fact that Tamils of the

north and east do not generally approve of the violent deeds of the LTTE such as murder, abduction, extortion, and bombings they do not deny, and openly say that it is because of the LTTE that they are able to assert themselves as respected people in this country. They are convinced that many humiliations that the Tamils faced from 1958 onwards and the calculated colonization of the Tamil areas with Sinhalas and thus creating Tense Border zones, the bullying of powerless Tamils by thugs and forces all stopped because of the LTTE. Many affluent Tamils are not happy with the LTTE's methods of extortion and taxation and lament how much they have been forced to donate to the movement and its operations. Many of them had opted to transfer themselves to live in the southern and western provinces. But mostly all of them, too, have similar sentiments about the LTTE as guardians of the honor and dignity of the Tamils.

The Indian Tamils who live in the hill country - called Malaiyaha Tamils - did not engage in the liberation fight in 1976 for the following reasons: (1) They were mostly stateless and therefore did not have citizenship; (2) They were aware that they have to live as a minority among the majority community; (3) Their political leaders were determined to make them into "voters" than rightful citizens; (4) Their organizations were mostly trade unions focussed on jobs, salaries, and infrastructure, rather than on political and social emancipation and dignity. They too suffered humiliation and disrespect by the majority Sinhalese during times of riots. They lost their meager belongings and were driven away from their slum-like lines. Even now, one can see how they are shabbily treated on the roads and in public. Their bosses and officers yet address them in the most despicable ways, as slaves were addressed by their masters in other countries in earlier eras.

Now therefore, the younger generation and the educated of this community too

feel that they also need to be respected as human beings and emancipated politically. They are aware of the exploitations of their political leaders who had made them their stepping stones to reach power in politics without improving the lives of the average plantation worker. They now begin to organize themselves to assert themselves as citizens and agree that they too should follow the methods of the Sri Lankan Tamil militants, but in their own way. In the recent past, incidents have been reported of sabotages, demonstrations and violence in the plantation areas and there is wide speculation about the presence of the “Tigers” in the hill country too.

The LTTE is considered by Tamils to be an important movement for the dignity of the minorities in Sri Lanka. Their atrocities are not legitimized or approved but tolerated. There is contradictory speculation on what types of rulers or administrators they will become if they assume power. Some feel there will be a rule of terror, while others feel that as civil administrators they will be different, like the military leaders who ruled their countries after World War II. In spite of all their negativity and violent strategies, for all the good things they have achieved for the oppressed minority, the LTTE is judged and accepted to be the necessary evil and a *sine qua non* for Tamil dignity.

Over one million Sri Lankan Tamils now live in Western countries such as England, Australia, Canada, USA and other European countries. They are the Tamils in diaspora. Though their quality of life is better socio-economically, they feel like socio-political non-entities in those countries. They are convinced that their homeland is Sri Lanka and would like to return or commute at will. Most suffered loss and humiliation repeatedly during the ethnic riots or escaped death in such situations. Hence, many also have similar sentiments about the necessity of the LTTE. A majority of them willingly donate generously toward LTTE emancipatory activities. According

to a recent survey, over 60% of the ex-patriot Tamils in Canada, are for a separate Tamil sovereign state. Like the Jews “beyond the rivers of Babylon,” they wait for the day to return to their traditional homeland of Palmyrah and Coconut palms, rice fields, sea and lagoon, churches, temples and Vidhyalayas (schools) and their broken homes and neglected properties, cherished in memory. They nostalgically long to see all this before they die. It is also encouraging to see that in many of the Sri Lankan Tamil expatriate homes, the children are learning Tamil language, culture, and history in weekend or night tutorials. Whether the new generation of Sri Lankan Tamils will opt to return to the country is not something that can now be predicted. But the serious and committed attempts to keep their language, culture, religions, and customs of life alive, is an indicator of a more basic shift in paradigm and of a new way of being a Sri Lankan Tamil.

We have seen in this chapter the various initiatives of the Sri Lankan socio political leadership in the post-colonial period of Sri Lanka. We have also examined the various causes and conditions that have either given rise or intensity to the crisis at different times. Failure of the good will attempts are mostly due to the inability or unwillingness to liberate oneself from a fundamentalist attachment to one’s race, culture, religion, tradition and a lack of consideration of the equality and legitimacy of the “other.” Hence, the next chapter proposes and explains the conviction that the only feasible path for peace and harmony in Sri Lanka is racial and religious symbiosis – a society that respects and reinforces religio- cultural equality and plurality as the Sri Lankan reality.