

Pravāda

Vol. 7 No. 1, 2001

Editors

Jayadeva Uyangoda
Kumari Jayawardena

Executive Editor and Circulation Manager

Rasika Chandrasekera

Pravada is published monthly by:

Pravada Publications
425/15, Thimbrigasyaya Road,
Colombo 5, Sri Lanka.
Telephone. 501339, Fax. 595563
E-mail: ssa@eureka.lk

Annual subscriptions:

Sri Lanka	Rs.	300
By Air mail:		
South Asia/Middle East	US \$	28
S.E. Asia/Far East	US \$	28
Europe/Africa	US \$	30
Americas/Pacific countries	US\$	40

desperately perverted act to gain world attention to the humanitarian tragedy of the people in Afghanistan for which the Western world is as responsible as is the Taliban regime.

Are there lessons, however belated, to be learnt from Afghanistan? Is Talibanization of politics confined only to Afghanistan? We need to raise these questions, because South Asia has already produced political forces that are in essence similar to Taliban. We may only recall the destruction of the Babri Masjid by Hindutva forces of India, only a few years ago. The rising forces of extreme Hindu nationalism destroyed this Muslim shrine as a part of a deliberate strategy of anti-minority mobilization in order to secure electoral gains. The way in which they mobilized India's Hindu society on an utterly sectarian politics of ethnic hatred managed to bring to the center Hindu fundamentalist forces that had remained in the fringe for many years. They found, in

anti-minority hysteria, a portent force of electoral mobilization. The mass and celebrative frenzy with which the Babri Masjid was destroyed on December 06, 1992, was not a manifestation of spontaneous violence unleashed by Delhi's urban lumpen proletariat. To quote from Stanley Tambiah's authoritative account of the events, on that particular day, "as mahants, pandits and sadhus were getting ready to start the puja on the newly built platforms for the temple to Ram, the Babri Masjid was demolished by karsevaks, who broke the security cordon, scrambled on top of the domes, and smashed them, some of them plunging down the debris. There were evidence of preparations for the demolition among the rank and file, and it was preceded by an immense massing at Ayodhya leaders, activists, and workers of the Sangh Parivar, the family of organizations of the Hindutva movement. All the leaders of the movement – Advani and Vajpayee of the BJP, Joshi of the VHP, and leaders of the RSS, the Bajrang Dal, and the Shiv Sena – were present." (*Leveling Crowds*, p. 249). Present, indeed, at the moment of the Masjid's destruction were India's future Prime minister and two of his senior cabinet colleagues. Therein lies the fact that Talibanization of South Asia had begun long before Taliban came into power in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan's Taliban movement, as much as the Hindutva movement in India and Sihala Urumayas in Sri Lanka, represent a type of politics that is built on religio-cultural and ethnic exclusivism that is distinctly anti-minority in their own societies. They politically thrive on provoking fears and anxieties of extinction among their ethnic communities. Middle and upper class members of ethno-religious majorities are often the easy converts to their ideologies of aggressive self-preservation, based on the most irrational, yet emotionally powerful appeals to protect the majority in their own land. In their political campaigns, they use militant violence as a strategy for both mass mobilization and neutralizing of opponents. Their politics is militantly aggressive, intolerant, anti-democratic and potentially fascistic.

In this age of economic and cultural globalization, the space is certainly

emerging for the spread of Talibanization of politics throughout South Asia. The onslaught of economic reforms has already created a state of instability and uncertainty, a kind of socio-political anomie that had not been felt in the past. Rapid economic and social change, marketization of economic relations, retreat of the state from its functions of social welfare and employment generation, the unchecked rule of capital and the rapid spread of economic disparities are the grounds on which quick waves of social despair are built. The globalization-induced anomie is also taking place in a South Asia which has already been shattered by variety of crises. Politics of intolerance and militant hysteria can easily be built on the waves of mass despair. And the politics of despair respects no democracy. It is inherently anti-democratic and potentially totalitarian, as already demonstrated by South Asia's own experience of religio-ethnic fundamentalist movements.

The possibility of Talibanization of South Asian politics brings to the center of South Asia's democratic agenda the question of resisting and defeating the politics of ethno-religious exclusivism and intolerance. Respect of differences and the inclusion of the other are indeed human virtues that have immensely democratic relevance to the task of re-building political communities in our societies. One of the key challenges in the democratic politics in South Asia today is the question of intellectually and politically dealing with the regressive dynamics of identity politics of communitarian parochialism. Identity politics, particularly its culturalist version, has been attractive in a context of the decline of working class and progressive politics associated with the socialist Left. If Afghanistan is an example, it provides the extremist of the destructive possibilities of what identity politics can do to a society with a fabulously pluralistic cultural heritage. Once again, the synthesis of democratic and socialist programs have become exceedingly relevant for South Asia's future, because the agenda of transformation is a project of secular democracy in which cultural and other differences are not a disabling evil, but an enabling virtue.

P

SOME PARAMETERS FOR A PEACE SETTLEMENT

Laksiri Fernando

There is no doubt, irrespective of the campaigns against peace negotiations by the extremist forces; Sri Lanka is close to negotiations between the PA government and the LTTE. Most probably the UNP will be completely out of this process at least initially. What we had witnessed in the last three months over the issue of "ceasefire vs. LTTE ban" in the UK was merely a dress rehearsal, though a bitter one, by the two parties to test their diplomatic wherewithal contemplating not so distant actual negotiations.

Any intelligent observation of the nature of events since last April on the ground would guarantee that the LTTE would never be in a position to achieve its separate state through military means. What the LTTE has done by its adventurous attack on Jaffna last April is to strengthen the military muscle of the Sri Lankan state in no uncertain terms quite detrimental to their own interests. Anyway a separate state carved out from the existing regions is not a solution to the rightful grievances of the Tamils given the intermixed and interdependent nature of different ethnicities living in many parts of the island. For a lasting and a reasonable solution to the ethnic crisis, the interests of all communities should be taken into equal consideration.

But what would be worrying the moderate Tamils at the moment is the sheer disadvantage that the Tamil side would encounter in any negotiations in the near future. Perhaps this is why the most of the Tamil parties objected to the banning of the LTTE in the UK. But whatever the reason, the LTTE or any other party would not have any escape from gross violations of human rights including terrorism within the evolving international trends in the world today. This is why the moderate Tamils and their parties should speak up and speak up independently from the LTTE on the issues of the Tamils. If this was not possible due to duress a year ago, this is not the case today given the national and international circumstances. It would be difficult for anyone to believe that the LTTE is the sole representative of the Tamils under any circumstances. The proposition is so mystical and even dangerous.

What is necessary to work out a reasonable solution to the ethnic crisis is to temperate the extreme positions of all sides on issues that are controversial at the moment. This does not mean that a solution should be based on a "common denominator" without perhaps satisfying any party in their main interests. Or it should not be a "marble trick" as Justice Vignesvaran has explained (*Daily News*, March 9, 2001), where you "offer few marbles after confiscating all." The moderation of positions should be done on a rational and a reasonable basis taking into full account the

democratic and human rights principles, the world has so far developed.

There are two main areas of controversy where the moderation of positions should take place for a possible agreement or a lasting solution. First is in the area of political principles. Second is in the area of political structures. It is in the area of political principles that the Tamil side almost unanimously has put forward the demand for an "equal nation," "self-determination" and much controversial "homeland" concept.

In respect of political principles, I don't see any reason why the Sinhalese cannot accept the Tamils, as well as the Muslims, as nations while they address them as *Jati* (nations) in day-to-day practice. The recognition of Tamils as a nation was one of the Thimpu principles in 1985 that the then government totally rejected. The term nation is used in two meanings in many countries including Sri Lanka, on the one hand, as a cultural or ethnic identity and, on the other, as a political or country identity. This is equally true in academic parlance.

It is true that when the cultural/ethnic identity is over emphasized as the nation, the political nation would become undermined and the political stability diluted. That is what happened in Sri Lanka since independence and both communities are culpable of this mistake perhaps not on equal terms. However, there is no point in harking back on history and try to blame each other as to who did the most damage. What is important is to understand the corollary of cultural rights, language and religion being the most important, implicit in the recognition of all three communities as cultural nations. This is of course has to be done on an equal basis and perhaps enshrined in the constitution. It is best in this respect that Sri Lanka becomes a secular state without any particular recognition to any religion in the constitution.

What are perhaps inimical to the extremist view are not the recognition of the Tamils or the Muslims as cultural nations, but the recognition of equality of them with the Sinhalese nation. The standard objections are based on history and numbers. There is no question that the history is important and all communities should respect each other's heritage with mutual admiration. However, it is in terms of quality and not quantity that we talk about equality between nations. This primarily means the equal recognition of cultural identity, dignity and respect of all communities recognized in the constitution. It does not mean equal representation in decision-making institutions or division of resources irrespective of numbers.

Another apparent misunderstanding or controversy is in the area of self-determination. The right of self-determination of peoples cannot be simply ignored, as Sri Lanka is legally binding to respect and promote this right by virtue of its ratification of two international covenants (ICCPR and ICESCR) on human rights. Self-determination is a basic principle of democracy that allows different peoples to "pursue their economic, social and cultural development." It does not necessarily mean the right of peoples to form separate states unless they are under colonialism. The said international law (covenants) does not confer the right of self-determination to nations but to peoples. This distinction is important. Peoples are composed of several cultural nations within countries as well as within regions of countries. What is important is to achieve self-determination as far as possible within viable and rational political divisions (regions) through devolution, autonomy or federalism.

It is true that not only the LTTE but also many Tamil groups consider the demand for "homeland" to be somewhat sacrosanct. But this cannot be the case. This demand does not satisfy the modern standards of human rights except in the case of indigenous people where they may require territorial protection to preserve their culture or other interests. This is an issue that the moderate Tamils should seriously reconsider. There are possibilities of preventing a threat of "ethnic cleansing," if there is any, without recognizing a homeland concept. The recognition of a homeland of one group in a particular region would amount to the denial of equal rights of other groups in the same region. The rights and the status of the Muslims and the Sinhalese in the North-East should be taken into account seriously in this respect.

Dr. Laksiri Fernando, teaches at the University of Colombo.

Available soon

HECTOR ABHAYAVARDHANA

Selected Writings

Published by the Social Scientists' Association

In terms of political structures, the two extreme positions have traditionally been between federalism and unitary state. However, the divided nature of the Supreme Court decision on the thirteenth amendment had already indicated, the Sri Lankan constitution is at the verge of a federal system. It is true that the PA government has offered more in terms of a "union of regions" and eliminating the ambiguity between the "provincial functions" and the "central functions." However, the recognition of a federal structure would undoubtedly go a long way in reassuring the Tamils about their rightful rights. Federalism has been their key demand since independence although it was raised and interpreted in different ways. A clear-cut acceptance of the federal principle also might facilitate any necessary re-drafting of the constitution without leaving any ambiguities as at present.

Another area of structural consideration is the unit of devolution. The best policy for any practical settlement is to follow the existing demarcations as far as possible. This means the existing nine provinces. The Tamils may need to re-consider their demand for merger of the two provinces on the basis of more autonomy for provincial parliaments under federalism. The demarcation of units purely on ethnic grounds would betray the highest intentions of the equality of cultural nations and the application of self-determination on the basis of peoples. What might in addition be necessary is the "devolution within devolution" to mean the strengthening of local government institutions within provinces to reassure the minorities within minorities. This type of a policy will go a long way in reassuring, particularly the Muslims in the Eastern Province and the Hill Country Tamils in the Central Province.

DEVELOPMENT AS A HOLISTIC PROCESS: LESSONS FROM THE LAST FIVE DECADES

W.D. Lakshman

Many of us have been trained in the traditions of learning, which developed in Europe over the last two centuries and later had spread to other parts of the world. Under these traditions, knowledge remains divided into different faculties and departments and transferred so from generation to generation. This compartmentalisation of knowledge probably facilitates specialisation. But at the same time, it makes our knowledge about the world rather partial and incomplete.

This departmentalisation of knowledge has affected our understanding and perceptions about human development, as well as our conceptualisation of policies and strategies for its achievement. Development is studied in many subject areas, from distinctive disciplinary points of view, which are separated from one another by arbitrary but rather rigid boundaries. Even if the focus here is limited to that part of knowledge called 'social sciences,' we will find the disciplines of economics, sociology, political science, anthropology, geography and so on, having their own distinctive analyses and interpretations of development and development strategies. The extent of cross fertilisation among these different analytical perspectives has been limited.

Disciplines like sociology, political science, geography and demography, to mention only a few, have their contributions to the analysis and interpretation of development. Yet it would be broadly correct to say that the dominant paradigm in development discourse remains economics-based. Similarly, policies and strategies recommended for the achievement of development are informed largely by 'economic analysis,' or that sub-discipline of economics called 'development economics.' After the end of World War II, in scores of developing countries, development was planned and development policies worked out in accordance with dominant 'development economics' perspectives. As there was extensive failure of this development effort all round the world, there was increasing concern expressed, since around the 1970s, about limitations of the economic analysis of development. Increasing interest was seen in what other disciplines offer towards understanding and management of development.

Some pioneering authors of 'development economics' abandoned their concentration on economics. One of these pioneers described this as 'trespassing' from economics to other social sciences.¹ Today very few theorists and practitioners of development would believe that development can be analysed or development policies designed from just one disciplinary perspective. That development must be viewed from a multi-disciplinary perspective as a holistic process is widely accepted. However, no genuinely multi-disciplinary approach to development (or for that matter, any other socially significant subject) has yet been developed. Moreover, a

person trained in one discipline is likely to have limited analytical skills in or awareness of other relevant disciplines. Because of these reasons, most available discussions of development or the lack of it are exercises in economics or sociology or political science, depending on the disciplinary specialisation of the person presenting the discussion. This is often not because he/she believes in uni-disciplinary explanations of development but because of his/her limitations in expertise and/or the cumbersome nature of combining several disciplinary inputs in the same analysis.

The dominance of 'economic' explanations of under-development and development has been noted. So has been the fact that 'economic' variables occupy the pride of place in development strategies. The point is not that 'non-economic' variables are totally ignored in development strategies. While 'economic' variables are explicitly taken into account, the 'non-economic' variables are often placed in subsidiary positions, using the familiar *ceteris paribus* or *mutatis mutandis* assumptions. The more dominant or the more widely used development policy packages – e.g. the so called 'market friendly policies' – indeed constitute basically configurations of 'economic' variables. In the implementation of such development strategies, often the *ceteris paribus* or the *mutatis mutandis* assumptions are forgotten. The authorities would entertain the hope that, by adjusting the 'economic' variables according to the policy model at least approximately, the desirable development outcomes can be achieved. In the process, however, the variables in 'non-economic' spheres, not explicitly addressed in the policy model can become binding constraints, defeating the developmental objectives underlying the policy model.

My intention is to explore some of the above ideas using Sri Lanka's post-independence experience as a case study. My focus will be restricted to the *development policy side*. The message I will try to convey is that some very important 'non-economic' variables or factors have received no attention at all or very scant attention in our plans, policies and strategies. I will argue that the anti-development impacts of some of these non-economic factors have gradually acquired such high proportions that, *even from the narrow point of view of 'economic development,'* our development has been significantly inhibited.²

Development Policy: Neglect of 'Non-economic' Factors

During the post-Independence period, Sri Lanka has had several exercises in development planning and many more official and semi-official statements about development strategies. Planning documents like the Six Year Programme of Investment (1955), the Ten-year Plan (1959) and the Five-year Plan (1972), to