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Wars in Peace Building In Sri Lanka in the math of the war

The proposed theme for paper presentation and discussion directly shows the urgency of establishing peace building process in the aftermath of the prolonged ruthless wars in some Asian countries. This urgency is strongly felt in Sri Lanka, which has commenced breathing somewhat freely, without dark shadows of fears and dangers looming around. Nearly three decades of suffering is more than enough to drive sanity into all-whether they are victims or victimizers to realize that peace is something not only to be wished for and cherished, but something that should be fostered, protected and preserved for the good, benefit and happiness of the present as well as for the good benefit and happiness of the posterity.

However, experience shows that peace is very elusive and becomes sustainable only if the ground situation is properly prepared for it. We have had patches of peace in our recent history regularly punctuated by breaches of peace, sometimes on most flimsiest grounds. This shows how fragile peace is and therefore, this also serves as a warning for us to handle peace with utmost care.

Now, we as the religious leaders who have undertaken this onerous task of facilitating the fostering and sustenance of this peace which at the moment is utterly 'crisp' as it were and even a mere slip of the tongue could shatter it. This perhaps is because peace has not dawned but 'imposed' as it were on the people. Peace is something that cannot be really imposed if it is to last long and also if it is to be constructive and beneficial. everyone should be made to feel that they all are living in peace: that all are free to talk, move about, express views, exchange ideas, engage in disputation and arriving at amicable solutions. All should be made to feel and experience that they are not looked at with suspicion but considered sons and daughters sisters and brothers of the nation.

To build this kind of mindset, confidence building is a indispensable precondition. It is in this area that the religious leaders themselves should stand on a footing cemented reinforced and strengthened by a common program regarding which there is total consensus. This is no easy task. Just by word of mouth we can be very idealistic and articulate eloquently on idealistic

may be for reasons which are cogent yet sometimes vast majority; and at others not at all suitable in the basic importance is this preparation of a level ground from which we, the religious leaders who represent different nationalities would jointly launch a common program to prepare required mindset of the average person.

We have to understand the role we have to play and agree on it. We have to know the ambit within which we should function, how we should operate, what powers we have, the furthest point we could go together and such other matters. just because we are religious leaders we cannot shed all our connections to the nationality we belong, the views and aspiration of the people whom we represent as religious leaders. I do not think any average religious leader could completely alienate himself from these ‘duties’ obligation and bondages; and in action be an idealist. One may find it possible to do lip service to such ideals and remain at that.

Therefore, doing a proper assessment of the role we should and could play, we should be more realistic than idealistic, though the latter may sound more modernistic . Being ready only to do lip service to a cause and wag eloquent using idealistic jargon will not serve any purpose other than making us the religious leaders get alienated from our followers and consequently make us lose even the power-base we have to do some useful service in this regard.

Therefore, when preparing ‘common action program ‘ it is advisable for us to focus our attention to fundamental humanistic issues and make first our own followers agree on the need of upholding these just and fair principles . We religious leaders could effectively use religious teachings themselves to drive in these ideas into our own followers and make them understand that we are all of one humankind and hence deserving to be treated so. In this regard the Vasetthasutta of the *Majjhimanikaya* as well as in the *Suttanipata* will show us the way. It mentions “ *To you such as you are, I will explain (O Vasettha said the Exalted One) in due order as it really is, the classification of the species of living things, for mutually discrete are the (various) species. Next (know) the insects, moths even as far as ants, ..know even the four footed, both small and large, know the long backed snakes, those that crawl on their bellies, .next know the fishes, the aquatic creatures with their habitat in the water, next know the birds carried aloft on their wings roaming in the sky their distinctive sign pertaining to species, for mutually discrete are the species. Unlike among these species with separate*

There is no separate distinctive sign among men. Not in the nose, lips or eye-brows, not their neck, shoulders, belly, or feet, nor in the sexual organs, not in hands and feet, fingers, nails, calf muscles, thighs, colour or voice, there is no distinctive sign pertaining to species as in the case of other species. This not seen among men individually on their bodies; and the difference among men is said to be their designation. Whosoever among men subsists on cattle-keeping, know thus O Vasettha that he is a farmer, .. men lives by varied crafts, .. an artisan subsist on trade .a trader, .by serving others .a servant ..subsists on thieving a thief .subsists on archery ..a professional soldier ..lives by serving as a priest .a sacrificial priest ..enjoys (the revenue) of village and kingdom .the king . I do not call him a brahmana if born from a (particular) uterus, or born from a (particular) mother, he is but to be addressed as Sir for he has material possessions him who has nothing (to taint him) and is free from grasping do I call a brahmana . . .

(Suttanipata, p 242-245, edited by N. A. Jayawickrama, Post-graduate Institute of Pali and Buddhist Studies, University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka, 2001)

If such an understanding can be developed at the ground level that could be gradually nurtured to make that operate at different other levels and spears. What I feel is that before going further we have to establish peace in the minds of the average person. To do this, mutual trust, tolerance, regard and affection has to be established in a very practical manner. This kind of trust and confidence have to be nurtured not merely by word of mouth but also by deed of body that is by good actions : helping each other, sharing with each other, appreciating each other, respecting each other and so on.

What I propose is to start peace building at the basic humanistic level all could understand and operate at this level and all would be sensitive to such issue. Besides, these issues will not give rise to conflicts and debate for these are all legitimate basic right of all.

The religious leaders will be best resource persons to inculcate practice of such basic principles for this precisely is the legitimates area of their activities. Besides, the religious institutions could be used as readymade 'operational centre' for dissemination this kind of humanistic practice and views. In fact, such programs of dissemination could be carried out on a

ous institutions of the same denomination. If they are this kind of activities could be extended further and of different religions. Conducting of such programs could be coast-effective sizable and will also carry a ‘personal touch’ .

This kind of grass root level activities will help to defuse whatever distrust and suspicion there exist among different denomination. Besides, such forums could be mainly used to inculcate these humanistic sensitivities among adolescent and the youth, which will serve a good purpose in the long run.

The indirect good effect of such an approach will be that conducting of final ‘joint programs’ will naturally bring about close rapport between religious personalities of different denomination promoting better understanding among them. This understanding will gradually lead to the unity of religious leaders and facilitate their joint activities even at higher levels.

Such activities will not only make the religious leaders see and feel for themselves the cause of conflicts and distrust, lack of mutual confidence; and also this will enable the religious leaders themselves to get first hand information about the feelings of the ‘victimized’ if we are to call them so. The religious leaders can then examine whether such feelings are ill-founded or well-founded; if ill-founded take preliminary steps to dissolve them through dialogue; if well-founded take up such matters at higher -levels and try to ease the situations.

Besides, such constant dialogues carried out openly and with committed sincerely will give the religious leaders the opportunity to bring some sobriety to instances where one find extremities taking foothold.

These pocket forums carried out mainly for peace building could be used as avenues of feedback for organizing activities at a higher level making representation to political authorities and such other bodies. Such representation could be made on well-founded evidence and facts for religious leaders would be by then well armed with such evidence and facts. Besides, the unity that would by then be created among the religious leaders and also the conviction they would have gained by then regarding the justifiability and urgent necessity of their work would embolden them to exert enough pressure on authorities to dispense justice and fair play.