

# SARVODAYA SHRAMADANA MOVEMENT

57th Annual General Meeting

on

21st December 2013 at

Vishwa Samadhi Hall

Sarvodaya Headquarters, 98, Rawattawatte Road,

Moratuwa

at 9.00 am

## CHIEF GUEST'S ADDRESS

Gurur Brahma Gurur Vishnu Gurur Devo Maheshwaraha Gurur

Saakshaat Para Brahma Thasmai Shree Guruve Namaha.

Dr. Ariyaratne, Reverend Sirs, my dearest brothers and sisters!

It is indeed a great honour to have been invited as Chief Guest to your Annual General Meeting and to be called upon to address you. Dr. Ariaratne is an old friend of mine. As a student at Royal I had heard of the Teacher at Nalanda though it was much later that I came to know Ari personally. To those of us who had romantic visions of the type of work done by Mahatma Gandhi, Vinoba Bhave, Jayaprakash Narayan and indeed even of Mother Theresa among common people, their counterpart in Sri Lanka was Ari. His Sarvodaya Movement has now come a long way, thanks to his illustrious son and others who have transformed the Movement to face up to the rigours of modernisation in a competitive, commercial, computer oriented world.

Yet the spirit of Sarvodaya lies in our hearts. The spirit of Shramadana too has its genesis in our hearts. As the word Shramadana connotes it is the sacrifice of our efforts. Sacrifice for what? For Sarvodaya which is the awakening in all. You had set up three principles to achieve such a goal -Truth, Non Violence and Self

Denial. So you are all in a journey of self denial, non violently and truthfully to reach the goal of Sarvodaya, which is the awakening in all.

It is the awakening of our innate basic humanity that could bring peace to this World.

Peace cannot be achieved without a change of heart. This change of heart comes when the pivot of decision making in one's life shifts from the self to an ambience of love pervading all around us. There is natural good will, concern and love in the hearts of all human beings but most often untapped.

Unfortunately all our decision-making centers around the Self. Therefore our decisions are based on what "I" need, what "We" need or what brings happiness to "me" or "us". When a politician has to make a decision which should bring satisfaction to most human beings around him, very often he inquires as to what the benefit would be to him monetarily or politically and thereby there is misery all around him.

A friend of mine became a Deputy Minister. I asked him what he intends doing now that he is a Minister. He said immediately "Don't you know how much I spent on my Election? I intend earning all that money quickly!" So we spend money to obtain positions and power and then our positions and power are used to earn money. Therefore primarily our thoughts centre around us and our welfare. To cease to look selfishly from such a stand point is to awaken into another dimension. The dimension of love and care.

This dimension of love and care is what the Major Religions of the world have been preaching to all of us all this time. Christians preached Charity, Muslims preached brotherhood, the Buddhists preached Metta (loving kindness), Karuna (compassion), Muditha (altruism) and Upekkha (equanimity) while Hinduism said

Anbe Sivam (God is Love). We have all four religions in practice in this country. Yet there is strife, conflict and confusion. Why is that? It is not difficult to answer that question. I am a man of religion of some sort who was forced into politics. I have found what has gone wrong.

We speak of Religion but practice naked selfishness in our lives. That is what is wrong with us. Could we therefore reach a state of selflessness? Let me illustrate.

At the request of the then British Prime Minister John Major, a Committee of learned members called the Nolan Committee spent six months inquiring into standards that should be maintained in British public life. The first Report of the Committee on standards in Public Life was released in 1996. They formulated principles unanimously and the first principle was selflessness. They said holders of public office should take decisions solely in terms of the public interest. They should not do so in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family or their friends.

Thus you would see selfishness is shunned even in the forum of public life. All the Religion we practice today is mere form and rituals whichever religion it may be. We pay lip service to the glories of our respective religions, we eulogize our Gods but secretly worship Satan.

If only we are prepared to move away from the worship of Satan, the devil of selfishness, we would recognize the ideal of all Religions which is "Live and Let Live". What does Christian Charity preach? It is live and let the others live. Let us be charitable to those who cannot afford. What does Islam teach? It is brotherhood of Man. In the eyes of Allah all are equal. Let us behave towards each other as siblings. Let us live, give and let others live. What does Buddhism say? Be kind to all; be compassionate; share with others; be noble and equanimous. In other words

live nobly and let others live nobly too. And finally what does Hinduism say? Love all; serve all. Loving others as themselves is to live and let live.

Thus all our major religions have stressed the importance of living and letting others live too.

Whenever such a lesson imparted by Religions was lost on societies where they paid lip service to religion and stressed the pursuit of selfish values and goals there have been chaos and violence in such societies. If we devise a scheme which benefits you and yours while it equally helps me and mine there is little chance of conflict and chaos.

If religions are to give leadership to contribute to an atmosphere of peace and harmony, as Buddhism has laid the foundations to your Movement, it is the stressing of altruism that would have a positive impact on society. This has been stressed by the Easterners from very ancient times.

In seeking to do so, it is essential to distinguish Western and Eastern Ideals. The Eastern Ideals based on the wisdom of the ancient saints and sages were lost sight of and overwhelmed and submerged by the Western Ideals based on the Rights of the Individual after the Colonial powers took control of the countries in the East. I am not blaming the Western Nations for that. I am only trying to point out that the ideals were different. From the middle of the 18th century a number of changes took place in the West. In England the feudal system got shaken up. In France the system fell with a crash under the might of the French Revolution. These sudden or gradual breakdowns brought about in the West a rapid growth of the mundane mind dealing with concrete objects. This was the reasoning mind, the questioning mind and the so called scientific mind. This mind takes for granted the "I" principle or the *ahamkara* which sees differences everywhere. It distinguishes the

"I" and the "you", "me" and the "he" and this separateness gets stronger and stronger. The strengthening of the feelings of the personal self started growing on the basis "I am myself", "you are yourself", "this is mine", "that is yours" and so on. From this was born the Ideal of the Individual. Man was looked upon not as a part of the whole, a part of the Universe but as an independent man, as a self reliant self dependent being not depending on others but standing by himself with a right to exercise all his powers for his own advantage. The society thus became a group of self reliant, isolated individuals.

So the ideal of the strong, free independent Man in whom various rights were inborn, inherent, incorporated became the foundation for the Western Ideal. Such an Ideal is not quite understood by the Easterners. They do not realize that to an Englishman, an American or a Frenchman on account of the historical conditionings they went through, tyranny and oppression are intolerable outrages. Such qualities on the part of the Governors are an insult to their personal dignity, to their self respect to their pride of individuality.

But the Ideal of free, independent self reliant Man of the last three centuries had the characteristics of selfism which invariably would lead to war and disharmony. The only Peace and Harmony that might be possible under such culture was one built on toleration. "I don't like you, I don't believe you, I don't understand you and I don't trust you but I will tolerate you so that we could keep the peace." This type of peace is not genuine. It is not built upon understanding nor mutual respect. Thus such individualistic Ideal built up selfism.

Now let us turn to the Eastern Ideal which had been nurtured by the ancient civilizations of India. In this regard I must confess Modern India in the hands of leaders oriented in the Western Ideals is fast becoming more Western in its

attitudes and assertions. The Eastern Ideal I wish to refer to is the Ideal nurtured by our ancient saints and sages and followed more or less by the Indian Society until it was over shadowed by outside influences.

The Eastern Ideal is embodied in one word. And that is the word "Dharma" which in English due to the want of a better word could be translated as Duty. This Ideal is basically a by - product of the Eastern Way of Life. Their fundamental teaching was Unity. Thus the core of Hindu thought was that there was but One Existence in which all beings are rooted. However varied the appearances, however different the forms and structures, all such differences branch out from a single trunk. Modern sub atomic researches have now confirmed the correctness of such an outlook. What it meant was that each person was but a part of a whole. Such a person was not independent. He or she was a portion of a vast interlinked and interdependent order. Such a person was not, as the Westerners thought, born free. On the contrary he or she was born into numerous obligations. Thus the happiness of the individual could not be divorced from the happiness of the whole. It was upon the harmony and due integration of the parts that the whole was able to be happy and contented.

Thus an individual existed not for himself nor his separate ends. He existed for all and for the common ends. It is like a finger in a hand. It is part of the body. It exists in the body for the use of the body. A finger cannot call itself free to do as it pleased. It existed only for the body. So too Man was part of the larger society. If you think otherwise it would be the outcome of the illusion of separateness.

Under such a view of Man and society, it was but natural that the Hindu society stressed not on individual rights but rather individual duties. Man was expected to recognize all his obligations and live as a part of a greater whole not as an

independent being. There was no need for a Social Contract by Rousseau which in any event was an artificial agreement or a legal fiction foisted on society. The truth was that every person was born into a society and with his birth obligations arose naturally. Though rights and duties are the two sides of the same coin the approaches were different. The perspectives were different. The standpoints were different. When I speak from the standpoint of Rights, I say, "This is mine, I demand it as my right". But when looked at from the perspective of Duties, I would say, "This is yours. It is my duty to render it to you". You would notice here the attitudes are also different. From the standpoint of Rights my attitude is one which is aggressive, combative and savours of separateness. From the point of view of Duties, it is an attitude of yielding, it is peaceful and tends towards unity. When we are nurtured by a sense of duty, we look at ourselves only in relation to others and we are interested in performing our duties and not in demanding anything for ourselves.

Thus in the East Religious leadership had been given from ancient times by the saints and sages setting up the norms and standards of behaviour for the society. They stressed on duties and obligations rather than on Rights and Privileges. Peace and Harmony could prevail only if we could negate our aggressive egos as far as possible and consider the wants and needs of the other person. In this connection self analysis is very important. Unless we understand our strengths and weaknesses and adjust ourselves to the environment and to those around us we must expect quarrels and controversies. It is only the person who is duty conscious who could adjust to his environment properly. He would then learn to oppose the deed rather than the doer. That is the philosophy behind non-violence or *ahimsa*. If our politicians without thinking of the next election and their chances of winning that

election were to consider their duties towards the society today we could solve the ethnic question or for that matter any problem without difficulty.

I would therefore commit the Eastern Ideal for the consideration of our powers that be. Sri Lanka needs a leadership which is able to ask “Have we done our duties so far to all communities who are denizens of this Country?” Then naturally the question would arise “What exactly are our duties?” The answer to my mind is simple. The answer is another question.”Have we done enough for us to live peacefully and allow the other person to live peacefully too?”

I must confess there are groups among all communities who want to stress the differences and not the commonalities. When my student the late Parliamentarian Raviraj was trying to stress our commonalities and trying to get close to the Sinhalese masses he was brutally killed. They could quite easily decide to do the same with his teacher speaking to you today. In fact a lot of my students are worried about my security and safety.

But it is time we realized the futility of stressing the differences and pursuing human separateness. Those who are bent on keeping an Army of Occupation five years after the War for fear of separative ideas on the part of the denizens of the Northern Province should realise that their very presence itself could be the catalyst for separation. If the Military have done a job of work then they must withdraw from the area of erstwhile conflict to allow the people to fend for themselves, to rebuild themselves the way they want. To continue to keep nearly 150000 armed men within an area different in language, religions, way of life and even different in topography to their own would be to sow the seeds of future conflicts. There is a feeling among the powers that be, now that the Northern Provincial Council has been established, the Military could go ahead with their

secret agenda of “Sinhalaizing” the North even more energetically not giving us any powers but talking about our democratic presence positively!

I have been addressing the Sinhala media to say “Api rata bethanda nemei ahanne balaya bethandai”. We ask not to divide the Country. We ask for a division of powers. But in reality our powers are diminished while the Army progresses with added enthusiasm.

We ask that we be allowed to look after ourselves while forming an integral part of the entire Island. Give us the power to do good to our people, to do good to our language, to do good to our culture, our religions and our way of life. We ask please do not foist your language, your religion, your way of life on us. Is this too much to ask?

Ari is one who has always fought the deed rather than the doer. Let me hope I could learn the intricacies involved in this exercise from Ari. Because I get misquoted or misunderstood many a time. If I say we must have a Civilian Governor the media says I am against Mr.Chandrasiri. Surely I have nothing personal against Mr.Chandrasiri. If I say please allow a Maths’ teacher to teach mathematics to my son and not to allow the Chemistry teacher to teach him maths, does it mean I am against the Chemistry teacher? Similarly I am asking for a civilian Governor not a former Military person.

Similarly when I say withdraw the Army from the North it is said that I am against the Sinhalese coming to the North. Have we asked Ari to remove the Sinhalese volunteers sent through the Sarvodaya to the North and East? Sarvodaya is interested in humanitarian services. Who would believe the Army who are criticized for murder and mayhem in the North during the latter part of the War by the International Fora are in fact stationed there now to do humanitarian services?

We have no doubt that the Army is stationed in the North with ulterior motives. We see it taking place. Our lands are being grabbed. Our businesses are being grabbed. Our employment opportunities are being grabbed and to say it most mildly our war widows and women are definitely not safe. How long does the Government want to keep its Military Forces in the North?

The latest we hear is that a former LTTE military commander is being commissioned to restart an LTTE outfit subservient to the powers that be. Thus the White Van drama could now be enacted by a different cast.

Why does the Government not enhance its Police presence in the North and reduce progressively its Army presence if it does not have a hidden agenda? These are questions which must be posed by reasonable ordinary humane Sinhalese in the South. It is indeed their duty to do so.

Let me thank Ari and the Sarvodaya for giving me this opportunity to be with all of you today. You have constructed a window of opportunity to speak to my Sinhalese brothers and Sisters. Please remember always that the Tamils are not against the Sinhalese but certainly against Sinhalisation of the North and East. Thank you once again.

Justice C.V. Wigneswaran