

Appeal as new Sama Samajists not strong enough to turn the tide!

Sunday 9 January 2011, by [KARUNARATNE Vickramabahu \("Bahu"\)](#) (Date first published: 26 December 2010).

I met many interesting people in my recent trip to England. One of the most interesting was Dr Roger Srivasan, president of the UNP group in the UK. Though this was the first time I met him, we have communicated through e-mail for a long period. I believe he works for a pharmaceutical company as a professional scientist. His wife is a doctor; a very humble person but a giant as a consultant. So, he is quite well off. Strange thing is, though a loyal supporter of the UNP, he was prepared to spend time and money for my work in England! As a Tamil he was impressed with the stand I have taken in defending the rights of Tamils; that maybe one reason why he wanted to help me. Also, I believe he was not impressed with the new trend within the UNP that supports the war efforts of the government. I make this point, because I believe that many radical democratic elements that would have associated with Sama Samajism, walked into the ranks of the UNP, because of the betrayal of the old leadership. Since 1965 the middle class Sama Samaja base in urban areas eroded rapidly, as modern educated middle classes could not go along with backward populist drama of the SLFP. In particular they could not digest the chauvinist campaigns against minority communities. This has affected a large section of the proletariat as well.

Particularly, the workers of minority communities have shifted their loyalty. Most families that departed from Sama Samajism went to the camp of the UNP; not because they rejected Sama Samajism, but they were against the betrayal of the old leadership. Our appeal as New Sama Samajists was not strong enough to turn the tide. But now things are changing. Particularly, the failure of Ranil is seen by some, as a failure of liberal democracy advocated by Ranil and the old UNP leadership. While Ranil is identified as a westernized liberal, the new leader Sajith is classified as a Sinhala nationalist.

In spite of the claim that conflict within the UNP is over, it cannot be extinguished so easily. It is not a conflict of personnel interests; that is only a part of the problem. The real issue is political. Is the UNP going to be a Sinhala nationalist party as it was at the time of independence, or will it stand by the professed liberalism of Ranil's leadership? Both sides do not reject the neo liberal economic programme that the UNP inaugurated. It is true that Sajith always clamoured for the poor and plays for the have-nots. But it is a facetious display not taken seriously by the leaders of the masses. If there is a demand, Ranil too could be an agitator in the streets; he came to paste posters in the streets of Colombo with me, just a few weeks ago! So the issue is democracy and the national problem.

A dream

Roger was driving me to Cambridge to attend the function of Goodwins; and we discussed the problem of the UNP. It was relatively warm, and there was no snow on the highway. Away from London, we were going through the greenery extending to infinity. Surprisingly greenness has not faded in spite of unexpected snow. As we approached Cambridge the time I spent there came to my mind. Now it is more like a dream. The Lankans, who were with me, around fifty, are now dispersed world over. Few of my engineering faculty batch mates, including Rane and Basil were there as post graduate students. Harsha Sirisena, one year senior to me, probably the brightest among us, is still

interested in politics and makes very intelligent comments in our e-mail discussions. Hydraulic Galaps used to entertain us with his guitar. Then in my department, the department of applied mathematics and theoretical physics, the department brought to repute by Stephen Hawking, Shanta and Maheswaran were with me as research students. Among law students, apart from Kumar P, there was unforgettable Priya Amarasinghe who later got married to an attractive Obesekara girl.

Not political meeting

The Cambridge meeting I addressed was a family gathering; certainly not a political meeting. It was a difficult task for a proletarian leader from a developing country, to address a Kultur Cambridge gathering. In my speech, after explaining how nicely I was received by Prof Reg Goodwin and Darwin College, I said "I got undoubtedly the best academic opportunity at Cambridge. But the kindness and care I received from Reg and the Goodwin family, and also at Darwin College helped me immensely to serve my family and the people back at home. I came to England to learn about physics, plasma physics; but from being invited into the Goodwin family I learned more about relationships and family and that was the more important aspect that I took home for my people. Family remains the organic society to which one is naturally tied. It lingers behind you never mind how cultivated you are. In fact I wrote about it in the Sinhala press.

I would not come to England at this time of year even if I was offered gold. But when Mark informed me about this party, I could not resist the chance to come and show my gratitude to Reg Goodwin. I was thinking of a present for my friend and it came to my mind that the lion symbol is common to both English and Sinhala. I was told that Richard the lion heart selected the lion to represent the English. However, the Sinhala chronicle *Mahawansa* says that a highwayman named Sinha who was clad in a lion skin, used to attack traders going through the silk trade route, at the time of the Buddha; that Sinha was the founder of the Sinhala people. So I got this lion from Lanka for his birth day". Reg was so happy to see that crafted bronze lion from Lanka!

P.S.

* 26 DEC, 2010 lakbimanews column.