

e EDITION

Vol. 44 No. (201)
Nov/Dec 2021

Registered as a Newspaper
in the Sri Lanka Press Council

ISSN 1391 - 0612

Social JUSTICE

if delayed then denied

**HAVOCK
TO
HOPE**

CONTENTS

Editor's Page... **03**



Two special features :
On the 200 Edition



Hoping Through the Unprecedented and the Unexpected Havoc
↔ Ajith Wellington OMI



Rising from Havoc to Build Back Better
↔ Ruwan Palapathwala



Impact of Covid 19: Havoc on Women and their Future
↔ Nazia Khanum



A Perspective from Sri Lanka
↔ Jehan Perera

Endeavoring **28**
↔ Dilantha Gunawardana

Publisher says...

WE HAVE A BOUNDEN DUTY MAKE THIS 'HAVOCKED HOME' BACK INTO A 'HOME OF HOPE'

Rev. Fr. Rohan Silva OMI

The pandemic represents the permanent threat to the whole world, labelled as the worst social shockwave and the unprecedented economic down turn in recent history. Sri Lanka with this viral outbreak like the similar middle-income countries is also most vulnerable where the economic tremor is already felt and its severe assault may be expected to be significantly direct and indirect. The scarcities or the fear of such possibilities are what has created part of the havoc. However, the human potential is to win these hurdles of life with hope and courage. This edition of Social Justice, its 201st volume has thematized this very notion that if there is havoc then there is hope with all human imagination and effort.

The life styles have been changed too, some people for two + years have not seen their friends and family living overseas and just beginning to normalize but not without anxieties and fears. The teachers and students have been aloof from primary school to the postgraduate students in universities managing through just with cloud technology devising different platforms of communication. Many national and international symposia, conferences have been held in similar methods and media. The havoc hit the core of every single stratum of life and living from a new born to the oldest civilian cutting short his/her life grossly terminating the fondness of the grand children with their grandparents. Complete havoc has caused in the traditional households and wonder about possible alternatives to reconnect and relate like before.

The psychosocial impact is not even being assessed and what we hear and read are predictions and possible psychosomatic scenarios yet to be addressed. The religious traditions are still struggling to make sense of the havoc that the pandemic caused even though they have been the traditional institutions that provided a pathway to hope. But in this specific instance of the pandemic, they too have been in the back burner or relatively dormant not being able to express fully and boldly what the pandemic meant in terms of their theologies and religious teachings. God-talk should happen in times of havoc as such is potentially a hopeful moment as per of the Sacred scriptures and tradition, but it seems like they are yet to discover what the Sacred means and does in times of pollution/havoc.

The pandemic caused many redundancies in employment

Page 21 »»



Social Justice

Tri annual Journal published by
The Centre for Society and Religion
Vol. 44 No. (201)
Nov/Dec 2021

Editor-in-Chief

Shanthikumar Hettiarachchi

Co-editors

Crystal Baines
Joe William

Editors Advisors

Prabha Manuratne
Wijith Rohan Fernando

Assistant editors

Franklin Sanath Fernando
Niranjan Kehelella

Pioneer Editors

Late Rev. Fr. Peter Pillai OMI
Late Rev. Fr. Tissa Balasuriya OMI
Rev. Fr. Oswald Firth OMI

Publisher

Rev. Fr. Rohan Silva OMI
(Director)
Centre for Society & Religion
281, Deans Road
Colombo 10
Sri Lanka

Lay out and Designing

Thilina Alahakoon

Computer Support

Neyma Mohamed

Printer

K. S. U. Graphic Pvt Ltd.
No. 510, Rajagiriya Road
Rajagiriya, Sri Lanka

The views expressed in the volume,
Social Justice by its panel of
contributors need not necessarily be
interpreted as a reflection
of its editorial policy.

Editorial...

Current *havoc* is only an experiential basis to a determined *hope*

God-talk should happen in
times of *havoc* as such is
potentially a hopeful
moment as per most of
the Sacred scriptures
and tradition, but it
seems like they are yet to
discover what the Sacred
means and does in times of
pollution / *havoc*.

The infamous Spanish Flu (1817-1819) has been referred as a historical reference of a centenary to the eruption of the Covid19 virus (2019-2021) with its devastating consequences right across the global communities walk into the end of 2021. All discussions, political, economic, social planning and the regular education of millions of youths were callously determined by these unpredictable spikes of virus variants of the pandemic. It has no longer manifested in clusters but more at large among the general population in alarming proportions in many countries, some sadly are not even reported. It is in this context of the global economic down turns, social disconnectivity and other regional and international geopolitical tensions that human communities have little or no choice but be determined to rise from *havoc to hope*. This volume campaigns and urges its readership and beyond as the UK based English Weekly, TABLET too has reiterated the appropriateness in order to *build back better* (BBB). Coincidentally one of our contributors rightly picks it up in his article too.

It Must Pass

What has happened in the world in the last two years seems so unreal. The pandemic has driven our attention to a key teaching on the notion of Impermanence (*anicca*) profoundly illustrated by the Buddha. People were going on 'as usual tours' with their lives.

They never thought that they would face such precarious circumstances like this pandemic with ‘no near cure’. Suddenly the world has changed drastically, and people have had to adopt ‘new ways of living’. This shows how fragile and uncertain the current human situation is. The Buddhist notion admonishes that ‘everything is impermanent’ (*anicca*), nothing is certain per se, nothing lasts but in a state of flux (also by the Greek philosopher Thales of Miletus, 626/623 BCE). If everything is changing then one can causally deduce that this pandemic too ‘shall pass and it must’, because the *havoc* it has caused is incomparable as the century ago the people who suffered the Spanish flu are not here tell us their tales of woe. But we have this generation to work it out so that the current *havoc* is only an experiential basis to a determined *hope* and work hard on all fronts that this pandemic should pass. Pass in the sense that people might be able to get on with their lives in a relatively ‘normal’ fashion perhaps with proper health measures in place ensuring that our common humanity will survive and we would be able to live our lives as hoping such cannot be given up.

Global Havoc

The US communities are divided just like the way they were divided at the last presidential election (Nov. 2020) in the context of the ‘pro-life and pro-choice camps’ now turned on the pro-vaccination and anti-vaccination camps causing *havoc* in the US health sector. This division is also referred to by one of our contributors. The US has shifted with its usual pro-vaccine and vaccine-hesitancy movement highly politicized making the nation more divided. Glasgow’s COP26

ecology summit did not reach what it had desired even though thousands gathered in the city pressurizing the global leadership to do more while Russia and China being absent in the Summit proceedings. The Caribbean Island of Haiti is ‘back in crisis’ with a deeply humanitarian disaster leading to a total *havoc* and alongside is Myanmar’s military regime destroying once gained *hope* for democracy. What certain African countries are going through perhaps is unknown to the rest of the world which is not good news



we have this generation to work it out so that the current *havoc* is only an experiential basis to a determined *hope* and work hard on all fronts that this pandemic should pass



as the Congo, in Central Africa is emerging with internal fights over gold mining with untold suffering to the masses and Sudan’s military coup d’état *havocking* the already crippled nation after its secession as South Sudan (July 2011). Neighboring India which suffered immensely earlier with the pandemic but has picked up a unique pace with its inoculation process in the first week of August, averaging over 5 million a day, well

above the 4.3 million in July on a daily average. Cumulative jobs exceeded 700 million and India seems to be hopeful to be out of the current health *havoc*.

Local Scene

As we write this piece, Sri Lanka has reached a death toll over 14000 since March 2020 when the first locally transmitted patient was diagnosed for Covid19. Reaching the middle of August 2021, Sri Lanka had reached its worst infection rate as well as the highest vaccine administration ratio per day. Now with the economic downturns globally Sri Lanka too has plunged into a new streak of social unrest and a looming political uncertainty with some of the government led radical decisions made not necessarily alongside the people. Could this island nation *hope* through this *havoc* is yet to be seen as she breaks into 2022? Despite these feelings and a sense of certain social discomfort among the average people through their resistance, agitations and in their expression of views and perspectives in the public domain have displayed *hope* even though its currently messy and considerable *havoc* within.

Not Blame but Hope and Work

In the backdrop of the pandemic there are the dilemmas for governments and social institutions and they seem to have lost focus and are uncertain about the right management of the pandemic/post pandemic which had been the most challenging with the resistive virus variants. But people cannot afford to subscribe either to a ‘blame game’ as its pointless unless they too are willing to change their patterns of social behaviour. The

‘unpreparedness’ and the ‘politicization’ of knowledge and research seem like the same or the similar even with the highly developed scientific community across the spectrum. The worst of all is that the local struggles cannot but compelled to be in the midst of a staggering plummet with the sluggish regional and national economic growth and the fiscal irregularities at different levels of governance and civil administration. Hence, all have to ‘think and work’ not ‘wait and blame’, because *havoc* will remain embroiled unless people are willing to *hope* differently.

Three Urgencies

The other challenging issues confronting are: the Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), a UN body in their report (August 2021) which was prepared in view of the COP26, Glasgow (November 2021) that directs and indicates the suffocating seas with melting ice pouring into the ocean causing imbalance and acidity increase, fossil burning for energy, deforestation with carbon dioxide in the air is their highest level in epochal proportions.

Secondly, an equally thunderstruck religious traditions are conspicuously silent for a proper theological response to at least for their devotees to *hope* for better ever since the Covid crisis.

Thirdly, the scarcity of land and the toxicity in soil, complexity of water properties and the increase of non-communicable diseases related to ill-fated food consumption have epicentral consequences on the younger generations and the yet to be born. These alarming signals raise a new suspicion whether there is an ‘engineered evolution’, and



Sri Lanka has reached its worst infection rate by middle of August 2021, as well as the highest vaccine administration ratio per day and as a polity has plunged into a new streak of social unrest and a political uncertainty with some of the government led radical decisions made not necessarily alongside the people



that it’s no longer ‘an evolutionary process by natural selection’ as explained in the Darwinian axiom but a subtle construction. The desperate calls are numerous yet humans must also gear themselves and reactivate their panoptic capacity to rise up like the Phoenix - *havoc to hope*.

There is no doubt that this pandemic has aroused intense feelings of panic and anxiety in the majority of people all over with no exceptions even across the so-called economic divisions of the developed, developing and underdeveloped worlds. Interestingly and very unusually the four contributors on this specific theme are all South Asians but

living in four different locations of the globe and we are glad to collate their perspectives on our theme, *havoc to hope*.

Nazia Khanum from the United Kingdom tells us how women have been impacted by the pandemic in her part of the world and further afield with all their already felt discriminatory circumstances of being black and minority ethnic groups. She embarks on a cutting-edge critique of how the cultural domination of patriarchally structured societies act and even govern, she braves to state that the system works still against women - but inviting the readers work robustly, hoping for better out this specific *havoc*.

Ajith Wellington currently residing in upstate NY in his article refers to how the ‘human’ functions and organizes itself in political structures and also presents a measured critique of today’s political architecture in many places, particularly draws the reader attention of his native island-nation. Unless governance and rule of law are not formidably built on the will of the people then such institutions would be self-centered and bound to decay and remain socially pathological. The philosophical angle is incisive in between the lines of his theological disposition but in politics and society.

Ruwan Palapathwala from Melbourne in his deliberation shares with us mostly being inspired by Paul Tillich, a philosopher-theologian who emphatically suggests that ‘faith as the energy which provides us courage to be’ - indeed *hope* despite the unprecedented *havoc* caused to humanity by the pandemic. Palapathwala says that this ‘crisis point’ has impacted the world on





“

The Buddhist notion admonishes that everything is impermanent (*anicca*), that nothing is certain per se, nothing lasts but in a state of flux

social, economic as well as psychological fronts across the continents immensely. The suggestion to rewire in order to *build back better* is a human entitlement, he reminds us assertively - the way to *hope* out of the *havoc*.

Jehan Perera, with us here from Colombo tells us that there are several messy and havocs in his context and brings to the reader a snapshot of the situation in Sri Lanka. His reference to a letter to the people of the US by the Catholic bishops in 1983 suggests that similar prophetic role could be adopted by the religious leadership of his country too. Secondly, he takes the reader to the controversial co-sponsored UN resolution (30/1 2015) with the US at the UN Human Rights Commission to hold the governments of Sri Lanka to deliver what they agreed in 2015. He in an abidingly formidable position urges all those responsible for governance to take decent approach to civility and ethical conduct in politics and integrity of leadership.

Magazine's poet **Dilantha Gunawardena** in his usual practice poetically glides from East to West via Africa back to Sino-Lanka relations with a vivid literary insight into a political satire from the prophetic attire of Nostradamus and Jeremiah. Interestingly, the poet drags Christopher Wren, the English architect who built London

city after the historic fire (1116) wraps on to the theme, "the greatest *havoc* calls for the greatest *hope* and that there is no one without other".

Also, there is a younger poet, **Wishmi Katugampala** who responded to our theme *havoc to hope* with her first poem ever to be published and innovatively personifying *hope*. We are thankful to **Jane Clements** for her *review* and **Aruna Gnanadason** for the *comparative insight* into the 200th edition of Social Justice (March/April 2021).

This edition basically suggests and reminds its readership to rise from *havoc to hope* which we think is sufficiently a compelling call to move together for better management of human affairs, devise new troubleshooting mechanisms, reskilling professional communities, damage control strategies for institutions and to cherish wellbeing despite crisis upon crisis - the basis for *hope*.



SJ

It's Hope



She's got,
No red rubies to cover her neck,
Just imitation to hide the shame.
No big heels to match her height,
Nor those dangling earrings.
No room to call her own,
Nor house to claim for.
Just an emptiness
overwhelming.

She looks around to others
cherishing.
It's not jealousy, she tells
herself,
It's just that feeling...
That feeling of havoc...
That feeling of fate...
That feeling she's got less.

Years later, she has it all
Some say luck, the others'
chance.
All in all, she has it all.

Once speaking up
'It's hope!' she says.
The need to keep going.
The hunger to see better.
The desire to soar higher.

↔ **Wishmi Katugampala**

SJ

WE HAVE TWO SPECIAL FEATURES ON THE 200TH EDITION OF *SOCIAL JUSTICE* (MARCH-APRIL 2021) INSTEAD OF THE REGULAR 'WHAT THEY HAVE TO SAY' COLUMN

First is a **Review of the previous Magazine** (Jane Clements, UK) and the second is a **Comparative Reading of the Content of the 200th volume with the Context of the contributor** (Aruna Gnanadason, India).

A Review:

The 200th edition of *Social Justice* (March/April 2021), *Constitutions and Institutions*, could give only the merest hint of the content. From the editorial onwards, the reader is challenged to reconsider how we build our societies, what nudges the trajectory of development and what each nation and society needs to take into account.

The editorial begins by outlining the struggle for social justice; there has been a “rupture in the fabric of society”, not just in Sri Lanka but further afield, with the rise of politicized ideologies and groups and their attempts to gain power through violence. Observing the contemporary world, one can find the truth of this in many, if not all, nations. Lack of global social justice can be seen in the ‘vaccination poverty’ in those countries unfortunate enough not to be able to produce their own adequate supplies of anti-Covid vaccine, with the reluctance of vaccine-wealthy countries to share out supplies more equitably. This is even within the acknowledged context that no country can consider itself protected unless all are protected.

I visited Philadelphia a few years ago, for an interfaith conference. One of the excursions offered to delegates was a tour of the city’s ‘Museum of the Constitution’. The sign above the entrance proclaims ‘We the people...’, the opening words of that document. Visitors to the museum were invited to view a dramatic presentation which emphasised the importance of democracy and the young nation’s efforts to find a more equitable and just mode of governance, in contrast to the absolute monarchies its citizens had

left behind. The presentation lauded the far-sighted actions of the ‘founding fathers’ in achieving this exemplary form of government and their point was well made. However, understanding this national ‘myth’ made it clear why the scenes of the storming of the Capitol Hill in January this year (2021) shocked so many Americans to the core. Who are ‘the people’ for whom a successful government works? What happens if fellow citizens buy into another narrative from the one you believe to be true? These questions, among others, are interestingly implicit throughout this 200th edition.

The journal considers, not only implicitly but explicitly, how social justice is often a balancing act. The familiar approach to this, and an effective one, is to balance government through the familiar ‘three pillars’ of legislature, judiciary and executive, but there is also a need for balance in terms of the needs of minorities and majorities. Andrew Gooden, in writing about the Northern Irish experience, shows how the changing realities there can shift in favour of the majority without real protections for the minority. Both his article, and that by Jeeva Niriella concerning social justice for women, point out that in taking the accepted, traditional or majority course, governments risk ignoring the strong issues of identity and culture, and the potential contribution of others in society. This inequality can, in some cases, foster grievance and frustration, key elements in civil unrest and, in extreme cases, aggression and violence.

Different nations to take a ‘one size fits all’ approach is counter-productive says, Basil Fernando in his analysis. Constitutions need to meet the needs and allow for the aspirations of all its citizens, and provide a realistic model for national identity. Indeed, the imposition of a constitutional model which works in one setting is always in

danger of collapsing or leading to corruption in another. Those nations which have emerged, for example, from British imperialistic domination, have had to wrestle with this; many have managed it, but it has been a long and painful process. Questions asked today about democracy have even included what might be considered radical and extreme: are some cultures and experiences better suited to, for example, clan-based systems? Furthermore, any assumption that a republic is a more likely to offer a more equitable society is challenged by Prasantha Lal de Alwis and Shanthikumar Hettiarachchi in their examination of the ‘Bhutan model’, whereby the powers of the executive, in this case the monarch, are effectively counter-balanced.

The importance of ensuring that founding documents and constitutions are clear about the national character they intend to facilitate is highlighted in the current debate taking place in Israel. When David Ben Gurion set out the blueprint for a state that was both democratic and Jewish, it was clearly not expected that those two elements might be viewed as mutually exclusive, to the detriment of its minorities. The example of Bhutan, referred to above, is instructional in this respect, although the case of Israel’s establishment, as with other nations, has its own pattern.

In acknowledging all this, the sub text is that nations are composed of societies and society is composed of individuals. Each constitution is born of a specific moment and situation in time, with a specific background, history and geography, but in order to ensure that each generation is won over to democracy, the constitution must be a living document, allowing for growth and development of whatever minorities or influences might arrive. The challenge for constitutional architects is also the avoidance of ideologies, or allowing the implicit

favouritism of one class or social group above another. These challenges the constitution of the United States certainly tried to meet, with a degree of success, while other constitutional traditions, arguably such as that of the United Kingdom, have not managed definitively to overcome. To achieve a truly democratic system which incorporates social justice into every aspect of its process can only be achieved, as the joint contributors, *de Alwis and Hettiarachchi* illustrate, by the imperative to put public good at the centre.

Jane Clements MBE, holds a PhD (Holocaust Education, Institute of Education, University of London) and has worked in interfaith relations for over 20 years, including Anglican-Jewish relations and was the director of the Council of Christians and Jews. She is the Joint-Chair of FODIP (Forum for Discussion of Israel and Palestine), which she founded (2008), edited *Talking of Conflict: Christian Reflections in the Context of Israel and Palestine*, (Matador, Leicester, 2012).



Shared Histories, Life Struggles, and Commitment to Justice and Peace

A Comparative Reading:

I begin by saluting the courageous and the visionary late Fr. Tissa Balasuriya OMI, activist, thinker and theologian who is remembered and honoured in India too, as a man who broke through many boundaries between the Church and the struggles of the people. His memory lives on not just in the activities of the *Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians* (EATWOT) circles, but wherever liberation theology is discussed and taught even to this day.

What struck me as I read the 200th edition of *Social Justice* (Tissa Balasuriya, one of its early editors) is just how much our countries share! I was imagining what words would change if the magazine was being produced here in India today – nothing much to be changed. Our histories,

contexts but more importantly our commitment to struggles for justice and peace are so much the same.

Our focus in India in the recent past has also been on the deadly Covid virus (India had the second highest number of Covid related deaths in the world). It's impact on the earth stays with us. The virus has brought with it awareness of many challenges, many seem to be the same for Sri Lanka - health as a justice issue, the humanitarian crisis particularly faced by marginalised communities, the food crisis, climate justice, the intensification of racial, ethnic and caste based discrimination, education and the digital divide, the migration crisis, callous human trafficking, the aggravation of violence against women and other subaltern communities such as Dalits, Muslims, Tribals/*Adivasis*; and not least the impact of the virus on the global community - all are major issues that have to be dealt with in our countries.

Attacks on religious minorities have created an atmosphere of fear and insecurity in India where we are witnessing a systematic attempt to spread communal hatred, dividing people on the religious lines. The Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) 2019, destroys the secular fabric of India's *Constitution* by making religion the basis for citizenship. The 200th edition of the magazine deals with it not just in the context of Sri Lanka but also on the possible models of constitutions that can revisit possible people-centred reforms and changes.

People all over India protested in a peaceful and unique way, like the Gandhian times, but women-led, movement against this law amended (CAA) so as to protect the *Constitution* and particularly the Muslim community. Unfortunately, targeted communal violence backed by the ruling party unleashed a counterattack to the uprising. Instead of arresting ring leaders who made hate speeches inciting violence, the women and all those in the frontline worked for unity, peace and the safeguarding of the *Constitution*, were arrested and incarcerated. The sublime right to

dissent was challenged and most unbecoming in the context of India as many activists, students and others were charged on sedition, and were thrown in jail. People all over India, (included all democratically inclined people of all faiths and political parties), were outraged by the treatment meted out in prison to the much revered and loved 83-year-old Jesuit priest Stan Lourduwamy, who was arrested on trumped up charges and finally died while still imprisoned. His memory brought all people together with a resolve to challenge the ruling dispensation.

Last year saw the birth of an amazing national movement titled *If We Do Not Rise* – a network of movements of women, Dalits, human rights activists, LGBTQIA+ (the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual and two-spirit) movements, environmentalists, lawyers, farmers, artists, poets, journalists and many more who raised their voices demanding a repeal of unjust laws and reaffirmed the determination to reclaim the sanctity of the *Constitution* and the rights enshrined in it. That spirit has continued with 50 of the best minds from every field in India speaking out about 'Reimagining India'. These interventions have offered the vision for an India which people aspire for as we resolve to struggle for change in the 2024 national elections. The 200th edition of *Social Justice* indeed was an edifying reading and would inspire these groups and individuals as 'destiny designers' of our countries.

Aruna Gnanadason has a (D. Min.) in Feminist Theologies (San Francisco Theological Seminary, USA), former director, global programme on Women in Church and Society, Justice, Peace and Creation (WCC, Geneva, 1991-2009) a member of the EATWOT. *With Courage and Compassion: Women and the Ecumenical Movement* (2020 Fortress Press: USA), is her most recent publication and currently is the National Convener of the Indian Christian Women's Movement.



HOPING THROUGH THE UNPRECEDENTED AND THE UNEXPECTED *HAVOC*

⇨ Ajith Wellington OMI

Desolation, confusion and global disturbance brought about by outbreak of Covid19 are often compared to the impact and aftermath of the infamous Spanish Flu. This reminds us of the famous adage that 'History repeats itself' but have we learned much?



Preamble

By December 2019, my native country, Sri Lanka, was preparing for an election and the country where I live now (USA) was also preparing for an election. Politicians, who make life difficult for the people in the name of serving them, were all gearing up to do their usual business, to tarnish the names of their rivals. It is very unfortunate that they focus much of their energy and time not on their policies and what they can do to enhance the quality of life of their people but on their political rivals, with the unwarranted interest of getting political leverage. That, in my opinion, is the only thing they are good at because truth is not their forte and virtue is not their ambition. Sadly, lies, a justified and glorified tool in political dealings, have become part of the fabric of daily political life. Political campaigns are run on the foundation of lies. Ideally, politicians should be motivated by

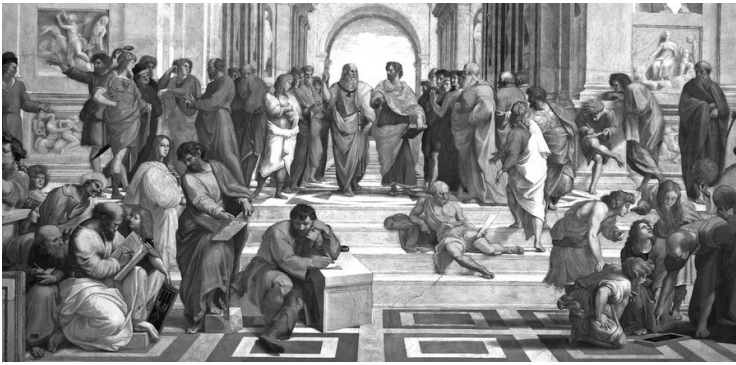
the noble aim of serving the people, but, unfortunately, in my native country and elsewhere most end up being served by the people whom they promised to serve.

What happened in the world scenario at that particular juncture with the outbreak of Covid19 confronted us with the infamous question, "what is life?" Over the centuries, numerous answers have been proposed by different philosophies and religious traditions to this perennial issue. Nevertheless, the possibility of different and multiple answers to this existential question of the meaning of life has not been exhausted. One answer I found most appealing is – Life is what happens to us while we make other plans.

Just Epidemics and Pandemics

This is not the first time that the world has seen disasters of great magnitude. There have been major

occurrences of epidemics and pandemics in history. The Black Death Plague was a devastating global epidemic that struck Europe and Asia in 1346. The plague arrived in Europe in October 1347, and over the next five years, it would kill more than 20 million people in Europe, almost one third of the continent's population. The Spanish flu of 1918, one of the deadliest flu outbreaks in history, infected about 500 million people, and killed over 50 million. The Cholera outbreak that began in 1910 in India subsequently spread to the Middle East, North Africa, Eastern Europe and Russia. The Asian flu of 1957 was an avian influenza outbreak that spread in the late 1950s and later died out after a vaccine was introduced. The Hong Kong flu of 1968 was a global outbreak of the influenza virus, which originated in the Asian continent. The pandemic was caused by the virus H3N2 subtype which is



suspected to have evolved from a previous influenza outbreak in 1957. There was also the HIV/AIDS pandemic which was first identified in the Republic of Congo in 1976 but did not become a pandemic until it peaked between 2005 and 2012, largely affecting the African continent.

The desolation, confusion and global disturbance brought about by outbreak of Covid 19 are often compared to the impact and aftermath of the infamous Spanish Flu. This reminds us of the famous adage that ‘History repeats itself.’ This aphorism is rich in meaning and relevant to many aspects of our lives. Even though similar events, of course with different magnitudes, keep recurring, unfortunately the human beings do not seem to learn from the past and prepare well for the future.

Born to Coexist

Epidemics and Pandemics affect human beings and disrupt the human mobility and progress. Nevertheless, we cannot deny the fact that humans are rational beings and that rational beings are also uniquely imaginative beings. It is their rational faculty that makes them uniquely imaginative. Aristotle in his *Nicomachean Ethics* draws our attention to “what is peculiar to man”.¹ According to him, what is peculiar to humans is “the element that has a rational principle”.² The form of life which human beings peculiarly possess, enabling them to communicate thought, create works of art, and associate with each other politically is a life of reason. In fact, rationality can be described as the crucial differentiating characteristic of human beings. The rational faculty

has enabled them to invent the airplane and fly though they do not have wings. It has given them the possibility of crossing the ocean though they do not have fins.

The Greek philosopher Aristotle reminds us that a human being is not only rational but is also social and political.³ Owing to their very nature, humans naturally have the desire to belong, and to form bonds of friendship. We do not grow to our full potential in isolation. It is our relationships born from our natural desire to belong, that help us realize our potentials as human beings. But we create havoc out of our own situation while outside elements too could create such, disrupting the patterns of coexistence. Interestingly the social nature in humans is well-highlighted when Cicero states in his work on friendship that nature abhors solitude. In the same work, he says that “if a man should ascend alone into heaven and behold clearly the structure of the Universe and the beauty of the stars, there would be no pleasure for him in the awe-inspiring sight, which would have filled him with delight if he had had someone to whom he could describe what he had seen.”⁴ So humans are bonded just being human, but it’s our behaviour that makes us otherwise with in different social and political scenarios.

Political Havoc

Covid19 was unexpected and unprecedentedly hit the unprepared government systems, the health experts and more callously the vulnerable populations across the globe. Consequently, uncertainty, anxiety and apprehension became widespread among communities and

Nevertheless, we cannot forget that politics is a noble activity. It is noble because its purpose is the progress and wellbeing of the people.

yet continue in some world quarters even at this time of writing. The infected masses and their situations become aggravated in some locations with lack of rapid deployment of appropriate health and safety strategies due to dishonesty which is characteristic of the political order and its dysfunctionalities. The world’s hope for a humanely and socially amenable order depends on the political order. When the political order is corrupt, the chances for the human race to see better days become minimal. The world today is in need of politicians who love virtue, who love humanity, whose sole concern is the welfare and well-being of the people. These and, of course, the civil bodies motivated with the noble aim of championing the cause of the people will not allow their own interests to take precedence over the interests of the people.

For a country to benefit, ideally it must be ruled by the most competent people. No art or office should provide what is beneficial for itself – it provides and enjoys what is beneficial to its subject. In the same vein, those who hold political offices should be more concerned with their people and their progress and welfare. Why do people take to politics? What motivates them to be politicians? No one, unless he is genuinely committed to champion the cause of the people, on his own, will choose to hold rule and office and take other people’s troubles in hand to straighten them out. Everybody today expects pay either in the form of money or honour for their work. Politicians who are motivated by the desire for money, honour and power will never do what

is best for the subjects. All the endeavours of the politician who is not motivated by the noble aim of uplifting the lives of those who vote him to power will be to get the most in everything for himself. The politician should not seek power for himself. Once his mission is accomplished, he should leave it to somebody else to continue.

Most politicians today say little or nothing that is true. Nevertheless, we cannot forget that politics is a noble activity. It is noble because its purpose is the progress and the development of the people. Therefore, theoretically, a politician is someone who is interested in the people and their welfare. In practice, most politicians cannot be called politicians because their words and deeds do not reflect that they are engaged in a noble activity. Unfortunately, in the case of most politicians, their own advantage is their aim. Their primary concern is to come to power and to remain in power. They operate from a position of authority and resent the ideas and advice of others. In Sri Lanka, we have a brood of politicians who claim and pretend to know almost everything under the sky. Their arrogance is awkward. Obviously, this does not help the situation. Covid19 has created havoc in Sri Lanka as it has elsewhere mainly because of the political mechanism which has so focused on the political party and financial advantage of those in power.

Balkanized World

The epidemic grew into a pandemic and created havoc in this politically and economically already divided

world where every country strives and propels to realize its dreams and achieve its goals. Today we live in a world characterized by an incredible sense of greed and spirit of acquisitiveness with dehumanizing trend and fashion. Desire, greed and relentless competition are fast becoming structural and institutionalized. There is hardly any area of commerce that is devoid of this sense of greed and as a result the personal and social ego is expanded in all forms of selfishness. These divisive attitudes pave the way to social decay and even political unrest and we tend to live parallel lives of distinct social and cultural precipices seemingly unbridgeable.

One division that is noteworthy and is intrinsically connected with the spread of the virus is the pro-life and pro-choice distinction in the case of North American context which is where I live currently. Hence, I wish to provide it as an example of this stark dissension even with the religious tradition. The terms pro-life and pro-choice refer to the dominant ideologies concerning right to life and free choice in life and right to body. Those who support pro-life would argue the unborn is a human being with all rights just like any other human person. All human beings have human rights, which include the right not to be intentionally killed. Therefore, the unborn human being also has human rights. The pro-choice campaigners support keeping abortion legal and accessible as a personal choice of the woman, combining yet another highly politicized campaign of rights of women. This serious dissension in North America profoundly has

impacted on many other societies and their lives and practice.

Unfortunately, when it comes to the vaccine mandates, there is a good portion of the population who borrow the pro-choice stance of my body and my choice argument which has caused yet a new problem in the context of the health of all. This does not seem to help the situation with the Covid epidemic with its vicious spike rates. Divided we fall and united we stand is what crosses my mind. This maxim, intended to stir people up to greater unity, indicates that unity is strength and a value in every walk of life. We are much more powerful and likely to succeed when we work together towards a common purpose and public good.

Dawn of Hopelessness

Human hopelessness is inevitable in a divided and a world of conflict. It dawns like a canker in the body making life lethargic and worthless. We live in a world and at a time when there are numerous threats to life, through even medical experimentation which involves the use of embryonic stem cells, war, violence, abortion and so on. In this era of manipulation of life and violation of human rights, people consider many ephemeral things as valuable and important in life. But from an existential point of view what matters more than any other category is relationship. The factor that determines success or failure of any community, be it family, an organization, a society, or a club, is the personal relationship among the members of that specific group. Human beings pursue and desire social contacts. As we are surrounded by others, and we largely define

Havoc created by the pandemic paved way for hope which comes in the form of our understanding of our vulnerability and therefore the need to move in the direction of human interdependence and cooperation.





Human beings pursue and desire social contacts. As we are surrounded by others, and we largely define ourselves by our relationships. The quality of our relationships determines the quality of our life.

ourselves by our relationships. The quality of our relationships determines the quality of our life.

Covid19 pandemic and its global impact has made humans realize a great change is upon humanity, a change of attitude which is indicative of our helplessness and vulnerability but significantly directing to hopelessness. As a consequence, many people in the world today are deeply concerned what future holds for them, especially the young. Hence, we are confronted with serious existential questions. Where is humanity heading to? And why are people restless and uncertain? What is generating this anxiety, this concern and this excitement? The anxiety, concern and excitement seem to emanate from a certain sense of hopelessness. Even though we live in an age of great scientific and technological development and the onset of Covid19 confronts us with human limitation leading to profound inevitability of hopelessness.

Hope is possible

Pandemic has shown that our life on earth is fragile and can indeed be brief as we watched nearly five million people pass away within two years since the outbreak of Covid19. All this time we thought we could trust and rely on the economy, we could trust in science and technology, and that material comforts and scientific advancement would bring real happiness and fulfilment. From a Christian perspective, God wants us to see and understand that life is what happens to us while we make other plans. God is giving us an opportunity to prove our love and loyalty to Him and He wants to see

whether we will be the people he wants us to be: People who trust and people who rely on him, people of faith and people of generosity. This is a test for the world and the church. God is a God of love and generosity; He is a God of compassion and kindness. He is testing our generosity to see whether we will be people who reach out, who share. He is waiting to see whether we are his friends. If we are friends of God then obviously, we will respect, protect and take care of what belongs to God. What belongs to God are what he created, the universe and everything it contains. This idea of God as our friend paves the way for the emergence of community of which humans and flora and fauna are an integral part. The great challenge facing humanity is to prepare for its emergence into the Greater Community. It is time that the world learns to move from independence to interdependence. Then hope becomes a real possibility and worth pursuing. Interdependence recognizes the value of the individual, whether it is a person or agency, while at the same time recognizing that there is value in an integrated and a collaborative approach in which the net effect is much greater than the simple sum of its parts. Our ultimate survival is largely dependent on our ability to be interdependent and hope is a fundamental human calibre without which much of the future might be undesirable.

Conclusion

Life is unpredictable and we really do not know what awaits us the next moment. Hence, one can say that uncertainty and inevitability are

inextricably meshed with human existence. In that sense, we can say that we are on a rugged and slippery road. Those who are on a rugged and slippery road do need the support of another in order to walk safely. Even though in life we walk on a rugged and slippery road, yet we value our independence. This independence flows from our interdependence. Our relationships and our interdependence respond to the need to cope with the inevitable suffering and solitude that weigh on human existence, and hence is the conviction that one needs others. Life becomes beautiful when we are together. The willingness to be there for the 'other' is a sign of amiability. One is justified in saying that the helplessness and the human predicament have brought people to the realization that one needs the 'other'. Havoc created by the pandemic paved way for hope which comes in the form of our understanding of our vulnerability and therefore the need to move in the direction of human interdependence and cooperation. Interdependence becomes our strength when the other is a friend. A true friend is a home, a reliable shelter, and he stands by his friend's side both in good times and in bad. To be human in the fullest sense and to have friends is synonymous.

Endnotes

1. Aristotle. *NE I*, 7, 1097^b35-1098^a3
2. Aristotle. *NE I*, 7, 1098^a3.
3. Aristotle. *Politics*, 1253a1
4. Cicero, *Treatises on Friendship*, n. 88.

“ The emotional component encompasses pain, despair, helplessness, disturbed sense of integrity, vulnerability, guilt, fear, anxiety, and loneliness



RISING FROM *HAVOC* TO BUILD BACK BETTER

↔ Ruwan Palapathwala

Preamble

The world and its people as if have deleted the years 2020 & 2021 from their personal calendar cum the timeline. Disturbingly over the last two years none of the world's religious traditions have commented on the Covid19 crisis in way that could empower people to move beyond the crisis, I believe it is important to present *hope* and faith as two internal energies that human beings inherently possess to move forward in the face of any crisis they may experience. In this short essay, I will briefly draw on the Marxist philosopher Ernst Bloch's (1885 - 1977) 'principle of hope' and develop it with reference to the philosopher-theologian Paul Tillich's (1886-1965) existentialist interpretation of the concepts of *hope* and faith.

Bloch and Tillich were contemporaries. Many significant thinkers of the post-Enlightenment period, especially the German idealists, Georg Hegel (1770-1831) and Karl Marx (1818-1883), influenced the social thought of both Bloch and Tillich. The influence of

Hegel and Marx on Bloch and Tillich are evident in the way the two men understood history. They believed that humans and all organisms have purposes and goals that drive their future-oriented behaviour in attaining a better result. The idea of a better result at the end of history seems idealistic, both Bloch and Tillich have demonstrated that the anticipated attainment may be realised in the here and now through our 'right to hope' and 'have faith' while 'living in the present' in 'view of the future yet to come'. While Bloch viewed this anticipated attainment in the form of a socially and technologically improved future, Tillich viewed it as the realisation of the human person in the face of the existential crises a person experiences in life.

In essence, to put it broadly, the thought of both men suggests that *hope* propels the betterment of humanity in the unfolding future. Furthermore, Tillich claims that faith is the energy that gives us the 'courage to be' (*hope*) despite the existential crises we face in life. Therefore, our right to hope and have

faith is a matter of our fair treatment of our world and all who come in our contact in relationship.

Pandemic and its Crisis point

The current Covid pandemic has abruptly altered the world and established a 'new normal' defined by an unprecedented existential crisis for almost every human being. This crisis has been caused and expressed on two fronts. First, the existential crisis is experienced by individual human beings. As of the end of October 2021, there have been approximately 245 million Covid-19 cases and over 5 million deaths in the world since December 2019¹ and millions have lost their loved ones. I wish to present three areas of deeply affected (*havoc*) areas of human activity and the emotional costs caused across the board.

a) Social Impact

People's social lives have also been drastically affected. The pedagogy of online classes has emerged, and students have become more sedentary and asocial. The uncertain mode of the five-to-six-month lockdowns

have had a devastating impact on the psychosocial wellbeing of adults and children alike. Every government and private sector are now managed on a risk basis, increasing the number of unemployed people. We also need to add the mostly unseen psychological consequences to the litany of causes that have created this existential crisis (mental and pressures, anxiety, depression, mood, and psychotic disorders). Secondly, the pandemic has caused a collective existential crisis in human communities across the globe. The certain delayed responses of governments to the pandemic worldwide have raised serious questions about how politics works and the value of human life.

b) Economic Impact

The evidence is overwhelming that economic considerations and the financial interests of the powerful have been paramount. The lack of investment in national health services in developed and underdeveloped countries was apparent. It meant not only that essential lifesaving equipment was scarce at the break of the pandemic, but patients with potentially life-threatening conditions had their treatments postponed or cancelled. The question here is not simply who benefits and loses financially, but who lives and dies. Governments worldwide have taken measures to curb the spread of the virus, primarily by selectively curtailing freedom of movement, civil liberties, social interaction, and economic activity. In many instances, the pandemic had also been exploited to subvert and subjugate democratic institutions permanently.² At large, governments

around the world were unprepared for a pervasive pandemic of this scale and did not handle the outbreak well. Consequently, the handling of the early cases aggravated the conditions in which the virus spread around the world making the epidemic a pandemic which became endemic to societies and communities across the globe.

c) Psychological Impact

The psychological and psychotherapeutical understanding of the current health crisis includes the gamut of human experiences under emotional, cognitive, and behavioural categories. The emotional component encompasses pain, despair, helplessness, disturbed sense of integrity, vulnerability, guilt, fear, anxiety, and loneliness. The cognitive component consists of loss of meaning and goals, the realisation of own end, loss of personal values, decision-making. The behavioural component includes restraining actions, rituals, relationship loss, health problems, addictions, anti-social behaviour, and the need for therapy.³

Extensive research conducted in every aspect of life since the pandemic outbreak has demonstrated the stark increase of all the above expressions of the experience of existential crisis in children, youth, adults, the aged and societies throughout the world.⁴

Right to *Hope* and have Faith

Ernst Bloch's main contribution to social thought is found in his three-volume work titled *The Principle*

of Hope (1954, 1955, and 1959).⁵ In this voluminous work, Bloch focuses on an optimistic future of humanity and gives a detailed account of humanity's and nature's orientation towards a socially and technologically improved future dependent on the principle of *hope*.

In the introduction to his first volume, he writes: "Who are we? Where do we come from? Where are we going? What are we waiting for? What awaits us? Many only feel confused. The ground shakes, they do not know why and with what. Theirs is a state of anxiety; if it becomes more definite, then it is fear. ... It is a question of learning *hope*. Its work does not renounce, it is in love with success rather than failure. *Hope*, superior to fear, is neither passive like the latter, nor locked into nothingness.⁶ Essentially, Bloch contended that *hope* is a permanent force in every human being, and once we overcome anxiety and fear, we can harness that power to better ourselves.

Tillich also presents his idea of hope within a framework of an optimistic future of humanity. This optimistic future he calls "eternity".⁷ *Hope* is the principle which enables our participation in eternity now. Therefore, he calls eternity "the ground and aim of all beings."⁸ ... [N]obody can live without hope, even if it were only for the smallest things which give some satisfaction even under the worst of conditions, even in poverty, sickness, and social failure. Without hope, the tension of our life toward the future would vanish, and with it, life itself. ... Do we have a right to *hope* even, against *hope*? Even against the transitoriness

“ People's social lives have also been drastically affected. The pedagogy of online classes has emerged, and students have become more sedentary and asocial. The uncertain mode of the five-to-six-month lockdowns have had a devastating impact on the psychosocial wellbeing of adults and children alike.



“ we can see genuine *hope*, in the form of seed-like presence, being present in all living things. For example, in the seed of a tree, stem and leaves are already present, and this gives us the right to sow the seed in *hope* for the fruit



of everything that is? Even against the reality of death⁹

This means we have the right to *hope* because our lives are rooted in the divine ground of being as per Tillich. Therefore, we and all living things on earth have inherited the powers in creation. For this reason, we can see genuine *hope*, in the form of seed-like presence, being present in all living things. For example, in the seed of a tree, stem and leaves are already present, and this gives us the right to sow the seed in *hope* for the fruit.¹⁰

However, *hope* is no certainty, and therefore it implies waiting. Waiting means having patience and waiting hopefully enables and empowers us to allow the *hope* we have within ourselves to mature and fulfil what we essentially are and therefore ought to be.¹¹

Anxiety and Faith

How may we overcome the existential crises brought about by the pandemic? The first step is to identify and acknowledge the anxiety we may be experiencing. Because anxiety is the sign that we are faced with an existential crisis -- anxiety is our awareness of a threat of not-to-be.¹² It is the precursor to fear of facing a crisis. Anxiety leads us -- and even animals -- to experience helplessness in the face of a crisis.

Over two years, the Covid 19 pandemic has facilitated the global community in an unprecedented manner to be faced with anxiety-casing human experiences. They include the anxiety of death in the face of the pandemic, the anxiety of

meaninglessness, and the anxiety about the loss of what gives meaning to life or to the meaning of our lives. Today, the fear of becoming a “spreader” or “super-spreader” of the virus is in the minds of many people. With the prospect of being named such, many the anxiety of condemnation is also being experienced by many. This form of anxiety is experienced, it is said, because even our best deeds -- that may come in the form of us being vigilant of the risks involving the spread of the pandemic -- may have an element of not-to-be. That means even our best deeds are not perfect. Therefore, we suffer the relative anxiety of guilt and the absolute anxiety of self-rejection or condemnation.¹³

In his *Dynamics of Faith*, Tillich describes faith as “the state of being ultimately concerned: the dynamics of faith are the dynamics of man’s ultimate concern.”¹⁴ “Ultimate concern” is the only concern that gives life its meaning, direction and purpose. Therefore, it is also called the “religious concern” -- religious not because it is about any religion, but because it alone is the prime concern.¹⁵ All other concerns, such as fidelity to ideas, images of success and good life, nationalism, etc., are secondary. As he puts it, the religious/ultimate concern is “the dimension of depth” in all the functions of our lives.¹⁶ Therefore, faith, for Tillich, is the only thing capable of unifying human life among its disparate elements and concerns. Therefore, the faith dimension is a generic feature of all human beings. To this end, our ultimate concern, faith “contains

the answer to the questions of the meaning of our life.”¹⁷

The Courage-to-Be

The fear can be defined as being afraid of something, a pain, the rejection by a person or a group, the loss of something or somebody, and the moment of dying. The fear of death may manifest in the experiences of fear of being killed by illness or accident and experiencing great pain and the loss of everything and the unknown after death. For these reasons, anxiety is always the anxiety of not being able to preserve ourselves. Anxiety, therefore, “strives to become fear, because fear can be met by courage.”¹⁸

Courage can “meet every object of fear because it is an object which makes participation possible.”¹⁹ Moreover, courage is “the power of the mind to overcome fear.”²⁰ When courage is understood with reference to the notion of being, it could be seen as rooted in the whole breadth of human existence. Courage is the self-affirmation of being despite the experiences of not-to-be.²¹

In this respect, faith manifests in us in three ways. First, faith manifests in our experience of the power of being, which is present even in the most threatening situation of not-to-be.²² Second, even when we despair, faith manifests in the form of us having enough being to make despair possible.²³ Third, faith is displayed when we experience ourselves being accepted. It may be that there is nobody or anything that accepts us, but “there is the power of acceptance itself which is experienced.”²⁴ To



accept the power of acceptance is faith; it is “the source of the most paradoxical manifestation of the courage to be.”²⁵

Therefore, faith is not about affirming uncertain things, it is the inherent power we possess to accept something that transcends our ordinary experiences. That is the power of being-itself that accepts and gives (us) the courage to be²⁶ in the most desolate moments of the *havoc* we experience. *Havoc* itself drives us to rise from the ‘dungeon of hopelessness to *hope*’ for a better deal for us and all. This human imagination is sandwiched in faith-oriented-action which propels us to *hope* more, certainly more than we had *hoped* for last time.

Conclusion

Obviously, the pandemic has caused *havoc*. From this, the crisis has become a frontline real crisis. In the wake of the pandemic, the world we had known has crashed down, and we are left alone wondering about the very purpose of life. In this situation, the meaning of life is reduced to despair about the meaning of life.

Tillich’s existentialist interpretation of *hope* and faith challenges the world’s cynicism and pessimism and moves us to embrace our existence in order to come to our true persons and realise our potential in the historical moment we live in essence. *Hope* empowers us to accept our existence that we come to actualise our true essence, while faith gives us the courage to be in the face of all existential threats for us not-to-be. While the anxiety and despair may

linger, *hope* and faith will empower us to ‘rise from *havoc* to build back better’. That ‘people are re-wired’ with new enthusiasm to ‘build back better’ is our entitlement in life, and therefore, a matter of social justice seeking civility, pragmatism and to embrace the dynamism of *hope* that aspires change of attitudes and eventually change of direction as persons and communities.

End notes

1. World Covid19 tracker: Latest cases and deaths by country (cnn.com), <https://edition.cnn.com/interactive/2020/health/coronavirus-maps-and-cases/> (accessed on 31 Oct. 2021)
2. Eg. M. M. Ali, “Grim situation of the world due to Covid19 : economic perspective.” *Geopolitics under Globalization*, 2019-2020/ 3(1), 24-29; J.L. Pomeranz, A.R. Schwid, “Governmental actions to address Covid19 misinformation, *Journal of Public Health Policy* (2021) 42, 201–210; Liana W. Rosen, “Covid19 and Emerging Global Patterns of Financial Crime”, Congressional Research Service, September 2020; <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IN/IN11496> (accessed on 31 Oct. 2021)
3. J. Buténaité, J. Sondaité, A. Mockus, “Components of Existential Crisis: A Theoretical Analysis,” *International Journal of Psychology: Biopsychosocial Approach*, 2016 /18; pp.9-27.

4. Eg. K. Kontoangelos, M.

Economou, & C. Papageorgiou, “Mental Health Effects of Covid19 Pandemia: A Review of Clinical and Psychological Traits,” *Psychiatry Investigation*, 2020 Jun; 17(6): 491–505; S. Haleemunnissa, S. Didel, M. K. Swami, K. Singh, V. Vyas, “Children and Covid19 : Understanding Impact on the Growth Trajectory of an Evolving Generation, *Children and Youth Services Review*, Vol. 120, 2021; E. Crooke, “Communities, Change and the Covid 19 Crisis,” *Journal of Museum and Society*, 2021, 18/3: 305-310.

5. *Principle of Hope* (Vol 1,2, &3), N. Plaice, S. Plaice & P. Knight (trans.). Oxford, Blackwell. 1986.

6. *Principle of Hope* (Vol 1), p.1.

7. Tillich, *Systematic Theology – 3*. London: Nisbet & Co. Ltd., 1964, p. 430

8. Tillich, “The Right to Hope,” *Christian Century*, November 14, 1990, p. 1067.

9. *ibid.*, p.1064.

10. See *ibid.*

11. *ibid.*

12. *The Courage to Be*, Glasgow: Collins, 1952, p.44

13. *ibid.*, pp. 57-58.

14. *Dynamics of Faith*. New York: Harper, 1958, p.1.

15. See *Systematic Theology – 1*, p.

16. Tillich, *Theology of Culture*, R.C. Kimball (Ed), New York: Oxford University Press, 1959. pp.5-6.

17. Tillich, “The Present Situation (1963),” *Christianity and the Encounter of World Religions*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), p.3.

18. *ibid.*, p. 47.

19. *ibid.*, p.45.

20. *ibid.*, p.43.

21. *ibid.*, p.152.

22. *ibid.*, pp. 168 & 170.

23. *ibid.*, pp. 170-171.

24. *ibid.*, p, 171.

25. *ibid.*

Impact of Covid 19: *Havoc* on Women and their Future

↔ Nazia Khanum



Women require convincing evidence that the current *havoc* has been addressed and that they together with their male allies can hope for gender parity at every level of society.



Preamble

The impacts of pandemics, wars, conflicts, depressions and famines are not gender neutral. The world witnesses year on year appalling human rights violations of women and girls. Their physical and socio-economic vulnerability, compared to men's, make them disproportionately subjected to rape, domestic violence, forced marriage, underage marriage, human trafficking, modern slavery, displacement and abandonment.

Societies have been male dominated from the beginning of our species. Deep-seated and disturbing levels of misogyny, gender inequality and economic disparity have been on the global agenda ever since the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* was adopted by the United Nations (hereafter UN) in 1948. All member states willingly signed and later the highly intended UN Millennium Goals and Sustainable

Development Goals provide a concrete framework for achieving equality in society including gender parity. Regrettably, progress remains unacceptably slow. Our world is in need of dire radical changes. If we rely on evolutionary processes to achieve gender equality it will according to the World Economic Forum take 170 years.¹

Covid Havoc

Global disasters like the Covid19 pandemic and existential threats like the Climate Emergency bring into sharper focus the staggering depth and spread of gender inequality. Although much global data on death and infection from Covid19 is unreliable UN assessments confirm higher death rates among vulnerable groups and communities. In the USA, Black and Latino people and in the UK Black and Asian communities have been the worst affected.² In all countries, pre-existing socio-

economic inequalities have been exposed and aggravated. Covid19 has destroyed substantially our hard-earned progress. Covid19 has impacted women more severely than men globally and the impact is worse in low to middle-income countries where patriarchy is strongest.³ Since women comprise 50% of the world's population, I wish to discuss here a few areas with a focus on the *havoc* that has impacted on women yet wanting to *hope* as a woman for a *better world for all*.

Women's Safety

Women's safety is one of the most visible vulnerabilities. When Covid19 struck the world early in 2020, one of the first impacts recorded by the UN was a rise in the reporting of domestic violence (DV) around the world - the 'shadow pandemic' as the Executive Director of UN Women described it. 1 in 3 women globally are expected to face domestic violence (hereafter

DV) in their lives and reporting is believed to be much lower than the actual incidence. Helpline calls rose by 33% in Singapore, 30% in Cyprus, 30% in France and 25% in Argentina.⁴ During lockdowns, victims and perpetrators are trapped together. A rise in DV was predictable. Many women do not challenge this abuse of human rights for fear of further jeopardising their own safety. 1 in 5 women in the world is living with a disability. An estimated 83% of them experience violence and sexual harassment. Their experience of sexual violence is 10 times higher than for women without disabilities and the pandemic increases their risk of facing violence and harassment.⁵

It is feared that the Covid19 pandemic has seen an increase in underage marriage - which should be called forced marriage (hereafter FM) and is illegal in most countries. UN sources indicate that 22 million forced marriages take place on average in Asia and Africa. Around 700 million women alive today were married before they were 15.⁶ Girls may be married off to reduce the economic burden on parents whose incomes have deteriorated during the pandemic.

In 2009, people were shocked when my and other research reports exposed the scale of FM in a developed country like Britain. In England alone, community organisations, social services and the police together were recording between 5,000 and 8,000 reported cases of FM annually. Nobody knows how many more went unreported. FM takes place in the shadows, behind closed doors. Only the bravest

children will ever report their parents and other family members to the Police, social services, teachers, or even to women's community organisations.⁷

Physical, psychological, sexual and economic exploitation are common. Brutality related to FM and honour-based violence (hereafter HBV) can kill. According to the UK Metropolitan Police, as many as 12 murders of women in the UK annually are linked to FM.⁸ The real figure could be much higher because the link is not always made – many suicides, suicide attempts and DV cases are suspected to have links with FM and HBV, and some murders are disguised as suicides.

Female Genital Mutilation (hereafter FGM) is also feared to have risen globally, especially in Africa and parts of the Middle East. Globally over 200 million women are living with the consequences. Many victims suffer complications and even die. It can also affect their reproductive health and lead to lifelong trauma and loss of self-esteem.⁹ In the UK, reporting has decreased during the pandemic - most probably because of lockdowns, travel restrictions and the reduction in facilities and services – and the pattern is likely to be repeated in other countries.

Health & Women

The pandemic has affected men and women across the world but data provided by UN Women (operational since 2011) indicates a disproportionate impact on women globally. Because of the lack of access to health care services during the lockdowns, and the reallocation of doctors and nurses from routine

healthcare facilities to deal with the demand for Covid19 emergencies, women's maternity services suffered and their reproductive health care needs were often neglected. It is predicted that post Covid19 data will reveal a shocking impact on women's reproductive health and most probably infant mortality as well.¹⁰ Women still die during and after child birth in many rural areas.¹¹ These are preventable deaths.

While the pandemic has affected all communities, UN data indicates that in developed countries women from minority ethnic communities were disproportionately adversely affected - e.g. Black and Latino communities in the USA and Black, Bangladeshi and Pakistani communities in the UK. Women, especially older and frail women and those working in care homes and in healthcare services such as hospitals as nurses, cleaners and other front-line jobs, were exposed to contamination initially in disproportionate numbers when the safety regulations were not properly understood or implemented. Ethnic minority doctors were also affected more than the white doctors in the UK. The *Black Lives Matter* campaign in the USA and Europe put a focus on racial discrimination as a factor behind the disproportionate adverse effect of Covid19 on specific minority ethnic groups.

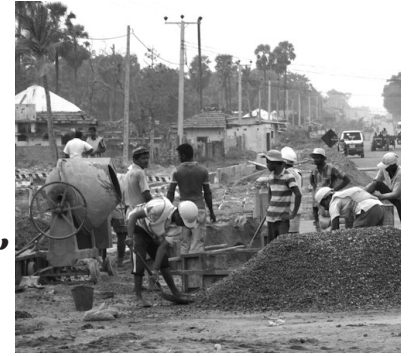
Cutting Edge Education

It is a fact that women's educational level globally is far below that of men. Covid19 pushed back the education of young people. In developing countries, there were few facilities for on-line teaching and learning. Most male students are



Gender parity can be vastly improved when faith leaders provide an open and united front for the common good so that religion becomes not just about a glorious past but concerned about the present havoc and the future while unlearning its patriarchy led interpretations of reality.

Like other great disruptors in the past, the pandemic is in the process of initiating long-term economic restructuring not purely on the instructions of the multinational financial institutions but opting for 'sovereign development' strategies involving people and their learning.



expected to return to education unless economic necessity pushes them into employment. There are not the same expectations for female students. Many girls and young women may not return to high schools, colleges and universities even when they are fully functioning. Many may be married off by their parents.

In the developed world, home schooling and online teaching-learning facilities were established during the lockdowns. Generally, it was mothers who took on the burden of responsibility for home education although many were not equipped to deliver it. Many working-class families did not have computers at home or had to share one computer between children and adults.

Women with part time jobs often had to give them up when teaching children at home became their responsibility. Starting and stopping school opening during lockdowns had a severe impact on the mental health of both children and adults. The education of children with special needs was effectively discontinued – leaving mothers to care for them at home in most cases.

Contagion and death from Covid19 could have been avoided in households with large accommodation where they could maintain distancing. In many parts of the world, and among ethnic minorities in developed countries, overcrowded families had to bear the brunt of Covid19 infections, death, unemployment, deterioration of mental health and children's education, and the rise of DV.

Economic Ladder

The global economic impact of Covid19 has been deep and could be long lasting. Many of the interim fiscal measures adopted by developed countries to mitigate the impact on workers have now been removed as their economic activities reopen. These measures were helpful but did not necessarily support all women workers - especially those on short-term contracts, in the hospitality sector, beauty salons, market vendors, domestic services etc. Many disappeared through the cracks of the government support schemes. This reflects the pattern seen in the Ebola outbreak in West Africa in 2014-16 when market traders lost their livelihoods - as many as 85% were women in Sierra Leone and Liberia.¹²

Globally, women are over represented in healthcare, education, part-time, casual, and self-employment, sectors that have been hard-hit during the lockdowns. During the summer of 2021, there was a sense in many countries of normality slowly returning. Shops and restaurants opened, but the flow of customers was thin and many closed their doors for ever. With them went the wages of women working part-time at the tills or as waiters in restaurants. Women were also represented disproportionately in accommodation – related jobs. There was hardly any movement in the housing market during the first year of the pandemic. But women do two thirds of the world's work, but earn only around 10% of the world's income and own just 1% of the world's property.

Like other great disruptors in the past, the pandemic is in the process

of initiating long-term economic restructuring. We do not yet know how economies will evolve, but some emerging trends could indicate more a favourable working environment for women.

There was a sharp increase in online shopping during the lockdowns and the habits formed over 18 months or so during 2020-2021 are likely to persist, accelerating the decline of retail shopping centres. But some high streets may be starting to reinvent themselves with greater emphasis on leisure, recreation and entertainment - sectors where women are highly represented.

The office is also being reimagined as the enforced homeworking of lockdown becomes a permanent working pattern and lifestyle choice. Opportunities for a better work-life balance may especially benefit women who are disproportionately responsible for bringing up children and caring for relatives. If the pandemic stimulates greater appreciation of the importance of health and social services, that might result in the largely female workforces being more highly valued and paid.

Hope Springs Eternal

There are clear signs that there may be positive outcomes to the pandemic and we must never give way to despair. Hope is an abiding value. We have seen what humans can do in record time to develop vaccines against Covid19. The husband-and-wife team who developed the first effective Covid19 vaccine in Germany to save humanity are Muslim immigrants. We have also seen women from ethnic minority



DD *If we rely on evolutionary processes to achieve gender equality it will according to the World Economic Forum (WEF) take 170 years, and it's a long-haul struggle, we must begin now – that is hope.*

backgrounds at the forefront of research and inventions globally.¹³ The same spirit should be harnessed for immediate action to improve gender parity and justice.

Most world leaders agree that the Covid19 pandemic is a global threat which can only be resolved through global cooperation. Although vaccine nationalism is a severe obstacle to progress and poorer countries are still not getting enough vaccines, the UN Secretary General is keeping the pressure up. Similarly, UN Women should initiate a strong campaign for mitigating the impact of Covid19 on women and girls, involving non-governmental organisations and other women's support services, until member states rise to the occasion and become gender responsive in policies and actions.

We must achieve an environment where no women are threatened, stalked, bullied, attacked, raped or subjugated by men or infantilised as inadequate individuals fit only to be slaves to their family and second-class citizens in the country. Having been given true equal opportunities to access education, training and other facilities, it would be women's choice to marry or not, work or not, enter public life or not. Nothing should be forced on them. Once we achieve this, the rest will follow. Strong laws must improve safety for women, backed with effective training for the police and prosecution services. Women's support services should be adequately financed by local and/or central governments. Closing the gender poverty gap requires targeted opportunities for disadvantaged

groups to access education, skills training, employment, child care support, digital skills, cyber safety training. Women's representation should be improved on public bodies, in employment and governance.

Conclusion

It is my wish that countries and their relevant institutions must develop ways and means to collect quality and trustworthy data relating to gender, age and ethnicity and use the analyses to develop and implement robust and responsive policies. For example, we do not know how many women of what age groups have died or been affected by Covid19. Free and fair journalism and media reporting, especially in this context, can educate communities and create a global consensus to promote gender equality and other human rights. Social media should be deployed keep peoples' campaigns for social changes vibrant and alive.

Gender parity can be vastly improved when faith leaders provide an open and united front for the common good. No religions condone forced marriage, rape or other types of violence against women and the prophet of Islam banned forced marriage 1400 years ago. Faith leaders preaching an end to violence on women and advocating respect can put a stop to FM and DV among worshippers more effectively than any secular law.

Many countries have signed up to improve gender parity. 93 UN member states committed to the UN Women's Planet 50-50 campaign in 2014-15, pledging to work for

gender equality by 2030.¹⁴ As with the Climate Emergency, world leaders should make the UN Sustainable Development Goal for Gender Parity a priority for practical action. Covid19 may have caused serious setbacks, but there are strong grounds for hoping that it will not be an excuse for non-action, but a spur to greater improvement. A level playing field for men and women is the prerequisite for achieving subsequent gender parity. Women require convincing evidence that the current *havoc* has been addressed and that they together with their male allies can *hope* for gender parity at every level of society.

Endnotes

1. World Economic Forum (<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2017/01/gender-equality-is-170-years-away-we-cannot-wait-that-long/>). Retrieved 06 Nov. 2021
2. Health Foundation, United Kingdom, 'Emerging findings on the impact of covid-19 on black and minority ethnic people' (20 May 2020) See. (<https://www.health.org.uk/news-and-comment/charts-and-infographics/emerging-findings-on-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-black-and-min/>); The Commonwealth Fund, 'Beyond the Case Count: The Wide-Ranging Disparities of Covid19 in the United States' (10 September 2020) Also see. (<https://www.commonwealthfund.org/publications/2020/sep/beyond-case-count-disparities-covid-19-united-states>). Retrieved 06 No.2021
3. UN Women response to Covid19 crisis (<https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus-gender-equality-in-covid-19-response/un-women-response-to-covid-19-crisis>). Retrieved 10 Nov. 2021
4. UN Women, statement by Phumzile Mlumbo – Ngcuka, Executive Director,

'Violence against women and girls: Shadow Pandemic' (<https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/4/statement-ed-phumzile-violence-against-women-during-pandemic>); UN Women - UN Secretary General's Policy Brief, *From Insights to action: Gender Equality in wake of Covid-19*, (9 April 2020) See also. (<https://data.unwomen.org/publications/insights-action-gender-equality-wake-covid-19>) Retrieved 06. Nov. 2021

5. Humanity & Inclusion, 'Blog: Women with disabilities at higher risk of domestic and sexual violence with Covid-19 (10 June 2020). See. (<https://humanity-inclusion.org.uk/en/news/blog-women-with-disabilities-at-higher-risk-of-domestic-and-sexual-violence-with-covid-19>); UN Women: *From Insights to Action*. Retrieved 06 Nov. 2021

6. United Nations Association UK, *The 'F' Word* (December 2017) (<https://una.org.uk/news/f-word-una-uks-latest-magazine-looks-feminist-foreign-policy>) Retrieved 06 Nov.

2021

7. Nazia Khanum, *Forced marriage, family cohesion and community engagement: national learning from Luton as a case study* (2008); *Forced Marriage and Honour-based Violence in Oxford* (2009); National Centre for Social Research, *Forced Marriage - Prevalence and Service Response* (2009) (All available at: (<https://www.equalityindiversity.com/publications>) Retrieved 06 Nov. 2021

8. See. (https://www.met.police.uk/SysSiteAssets/foi-media/metropolitan-police/disclosure_2019/june_2019/information-rights-unit-incidents-of-honour-based-violenceforced-marriagesfgm-in-2018). Retrieved 06 Nov. 2021

9. Orchid Project - See. (<https://www.orchidproject.org/about-fgc/where-does-fgc-happen/>; <https://www.unicef.org/protection/female-genital-mutilation>). Retrieved 06

Nov. 2021

10. UN Women, *From Insights to Action*
11. United Nations Association UK, *The 'F' Word*
12. Clare Wenham, Julia Smith, Sara E. Davies, Huiyun Feng, Karen A Grepin, Sophie Harman, Asha Herten-Crabb, Rosemary Morgan, *Women are most affected by pandemics – lessons from the past outbreaks* (July 2020, Springer Nature Ltd.). See. (<https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-020-02006-z>) Retrieved 06 Nov. 2021
13. op.cit. UN Women, (*From Insights to Action*).
14. UN Women, See. (<https://www.unwomen.org/en/get-involved/step-it-up>). Retrieved 06 Nov. 2021



From Page 02 »»»

Publisher says: WE HAVE A BOUNDEN DUTY ...

sector with less or no social security and benefits, making workers vulnerable and without proper alternatives to face the economic downturn. However, this crisis is not felt by everyone in equal terms as much as the poorest of the poor who especially live on their daily or weekly earnings. As a result, this inequality and the gap between the haves and the have nots is expected to increase unless right fiscal measures are placed within the national budgetary system to support the economically weak and the marginalized. They say that the national budget arguably indicates the priorities of a government in power. The pandemic has embarrassed the governments, institutions, religious traditions, preachers, teachers, financiers, social planners and the ordinary parents with no answers to their children of their beliefs and even their highly held sublime values.

The pandemic did create real and raw havoc as if that it is left to us now because our archaic beliefs and systems have suddenly stopped – in real *havoc*. So, we have to re-

commence with *havoc* amidst us but a new start for which we need to 'buy hope' from within ourselves because humans must believe in the future. What else do they have I wonder in the middle of the *havoc*.

The Structural Adjustment Programmes proposed by the global financial institutions and the UN led Millennium Development Goals too have been challenged by 'stunted planning' and 'delays in operations' with 'sluggish financing' of course. These anyway have not brought sense to the notion of 'sovereign development' as they have dented people's steady income patterns and shutting auxiliary income accesses opened to their related livelihoods into serious socio-economic jeopardy. It is in this context that people suspect the alleged plans to acquire land in urban and rural areas in the coastal belt in Sri Lanka for development projects displacing the traditional inhabitants of the land. Unchecked development, de facto has brought us havoc too, but learning quickly can make us hopeful for a humanized format of development processes.

Lastly the Glasgow's UN summit of COP26 in early November 2021 reiterated robustly that the 'fragile planet now demands' a major and quick attention of humanity, and it affirmed that 'people are part of nature' and with their 'rational insights' could preserve this 'sensitive balance' between what 'we produce and consume'. It is now known that what we 'produce in abundance' as well as what we 'consume recklessly' both can 'bring callous impact on the environment'. This ecological havoc is more than any other factor has devastating effects on the planet and its biodiversity as it's the 'home we live' (*Laudato Si*, Pope Francis, June 2015) that we have thoroughly neglected. So now that we are aware of it, and we have a bounden duty make this 'havocked home' back into a 'home of hope' even if we are late to rebuild it for ourselves, yet must opt to do so for the future generations. Failing which they will name us as a 'hopeless generation' that 'preferred to live in havoc'.



KEEPING THE HOPE ALIVE FOR RECONCILIATION IN OUR TIMES:

a PERSPECTIVE FROM SRI LANKA

↔ Jehan Perera

“

there is a growing apathy and displeasure among people but the alternative groups at different levels have to work hard demanding the mandated leadership in 2019 to deliver.



Preamble

Since the 1970s, when Sri Lanka began to noticeably fall behind other developing countries in the race to develop, the ambition of the country's leaders has been that Sri Lanka should emulate Singapore. This ought to have been a modest goal, because in 1948 at the time that the country obtained its independence, and even in the early 1960s, Sri Lanka was ahead of Singapore and second, it is said, only to Japan in the whole of Asia. Even the colonial rulers had great hope for the island. In 1938 when the British were

contemplating self-government for the colony and experimenting with different systems of government, Leonard Woolf who had been a British colonial administrator in the country, and who wrote the classic novel *Village in the Jungle* about life in Hambantota¹ argued that the country could become the Switzerland of the East.

In a memorandum to the colonial government in 1938, Woolf recommended a Swiss model federal system for Ceylon. He wrote "The Swiss federal canton system has proved extraordinarily successful

under circumstances very similar to those in Ceylon i.e. the co-existence in a single democratic state, of communities of very different size sharply distinguished from one another by race, language and religion. Thus, the German speaking Swiss with a population 2.75 million occupy the numerical position of the Sinhalese, the French speaking Swiss with 824,000 that of the Tamils and Italian speaking Swiss with 284,000 that of the Moor men. The democratic canton and federal system has safeguarded the legitimate interests of the minorities."²



Leonard Woolf who had been a British colonial administrator in the country, and who wrote the classic novel *Village in the Jungle* about life in Hambantota argued that the Ceylon he encountered could become the Switzerland of the East.



Woolf's proposal was that there should be five regions. "The indigenous Tamil minorities are concentrated in the extreme North and East of the island. The Kandyan Sinhalese who are in many ways very different from the Low country Sinhalese, form a homogeneous Sinhalese block in the Centre of the Island. At least four cantons on the Swiss model could be created – Low country Sinhalese province, the Kandyan Sinhalese province, the Tamil Northern province and the Tamil Eastern province; and it might even be possible to create a fifth canton out of the area where immigrant Indian Tamils form the majority of the population on Tea estates."²³ It is interesting that in his model, Woolf proposed two regions to be dominated by the Sinhalese and two or three to be dominated by the Tamils, which perhaps if given expression in an upper house such as a senate could have balanced the clear majority that the Sinhalese enjoyed in the parliament. I wish to specify a few areas where Sri Lanka's current situation can be read generating possible move from *havoc* to *hope* as a polity.

Interrelated Fears

Following the passage of the 13th Amendment in 1987⁴ the provincial council system has become a part of the Sri Lankan political system though it needs to be reformed to be truly a solution to our ethnic conflict. Therefore, at the current juncture the most important need is to protect the gains made in the past. The government has appointed a committee to draft a new constitution.

There are concerns that the new constitution will reflect the current political priorities of the government which lay emphasis on the centralization of power to achieve economic development. There are demands by sections of the religious and civil societies that the 13th Amendment and the provincial council system should be abolished. There is the possibility that the devolution of power available within the present constitutional framework will also be diluted to make it more symbolic than real.

The majority of Sinhala people in Sri Lanka have been conditioned to believe that the devolution of power is dangerous to national unity. This is the message that has been given to them by nationalist political leaders and accepted by most religious and civil society leaders too. The present government, which was elected in the shadow of the Easter bombings, was elected to power on the promise to strengthen the system of government though a centralization of power seems to be the reality. The 20th Amendment, which centralizes power in the executive presidency, and reduces the independence of state institutions including that of the judiciary, is a manifestation of the current political direction. It needs to be noted that the riots of July 1983 took place under a government that had a 5/6 majority in parliament. The mere fact of being a strong government did not guarantee peace.

The present government leadership is trusted by the majority of Sinhalese people as patriots who will not divide the country. The country may be

facing huge problems of economic indebtedness and mismanagement but the government leadership continues to remain trusted as those who will safeguard the people and the country. They also have the numbers in parliament to enact constitutional change. This gives them both the capacity to act decisively and the capacity to mobilize popular support to accomplish what they want to do. The executive presidency is armed with the powers of the 20th Amendment which has correspondingly weakened the other institutions of state that could act as a check on it. It can negate the devolution of power and the provincial council system in keeping with the government's election time promise to strengthen central authority. Hence, there is a growing apathy and displeasure among people but the alternative groups at different levels have to work hard demanding the mandated leadership in 2019 to deliver.

Hoping for Transitional Justice

Transitional justice refers to the ways countries emerging from periods of conflict and repression address large-scale or systematic human rights violations so numerous and so serious that the normal justice system will not be able to provide an adequate response. The concept of transitional justice as the path to reconciliation and sustainable peace is based on the four pillars of truth, accountability, reparations and institutional reform. These four pillars are part of a whole but can be implemented in a sequenced manner and not necessarily all at the same time. Truth is perhaps

the most important element of the Transitional Justice process because finding the truth is important to all the other elements of the model. It is like in a personal dispute. The truth is necessary to be known for a solution to the problem to be found. The following four areas stay challenging centre pieces towards reconciliation within the scope of transitional justice. It generates *hope* from a messy situation even though some of its interpretations are politicized by different quarters.

a) The most contested aspect of the transitional justice process is accountability. It is this concept that forms the centre piece of the UN intervention in Sri Lanka. It is also the focus of international human rights organisations. It was to ensure accountability that UNHRC resolution 30/1 of 2015 contained in its provision for a hybrid court in which foreign judges would participate. And it was this provision that was most opposed within Sri Lanka by political leaders and the Sinhalese people themselves. The government gave an amnesty to about 12,000 LTTE cadre, and so has it pardoned soldiers guilty of war time crimes and not permitted the trial of others. But due to the international pressure that comes from UNHRC resolution 46/1 and the possible consequences of disregarding it, the government will need to show positive movement in implementing its recommendations.

b) The resolution has two major consequences for Sri Lanka. First, the resolution specifies that Sri Lanka will be on the agenda of the

UNHRC for the next one and a half years. As this body meets three times a year, this means that Sri Lanka be under regular scrutiny by the international community. It is liable to suffer reputational damage if critical observations against it are being constantly made which can impact negatively on the country's attractiveness as a location for economic development projects. Second, the resolution gives the power to act and to be in charge also to the office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. The significance of the resolution is enhanced by the fact that it empowers the High Commissioner's office to look also at the present and ongoing situation in the country and not limit itself to the issue of war time violations and immediate post-war violations only. This resolution gives the High Commissioner's office the authority to set up a special unit to gather information and evidence on human rights violations taking place in Sri Lanka.

c) Truth is perhaps the most important element when hoping for Transitional Justice process because finding the truth is important to all the other elements of the model. It is like in a personal dispute. The truth is necessary to be known for a solution to the problem to be found. At the level of individuals, there are thousands of families who have members of their families still missing and whom they feel they cannot abandon. They need an acknowledgment of what happened to them which has not yet happened, though the war is over more than eleven years. They need to be able

to mourn and remember and not be refused access to cemeteries and to memorials.

d) A policy of reparation can be implemented by reviving the working of two transitional justice mechanisms that were established by the previous government. These are the Office on Missing Persons (OMP) and the Office for Reparations. The OMP has been issuing certificates of absence to those whose family members went missing and continue to be missing. These Certificates of Absence entitle families of the missing to claim a monthly payment of LKR 6000 which can be increased and systematized by the Office for Reparations. To the extent that the government or any entity provides more compensation or engages in more reform, the less will be the pressure for accountability.

Dove's Whisper

Over 20 years ago, I visited the north of the country and stayed at the residence of the late bishop of Mannar (a Catholic diocese of the Northern Province), Rayappu Joseph. One evening I came across a book that gave me a new hope and the resolve to look for openings for change. This book was a long letter to the people of the United States by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops of the United States of America titled *The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response, A Pastoral Letter on War and Peace*, (May 1983)⁵. As we know, the 1980s were a time of great division and tension in the world.



Those who are tasked with leading a process of reform should have credentials that match their mandates or else the whole exercise can be discredited and could easily get stuck in chaos and conflict for a long time to come.

“ With their learning, experience and all-encompassing vision, the advice of this multi-religious group of religious leaders can be President Gotabaya Rajapaksa’s moral compass in his quest for revolutionary change and could be a stepping stone from the current *havoc* to *hope*.



The cold war was continuing and there was the ever-present threat of nuclear war. The Catholic Bishops of the United States were fully aware of the nature of the Soviet Union, the threat it posed to the United States, and the antipathies it aroused in the American people. In fact, President Ronald Reagan had just described the Soviet Union as the "Evil Empire."⁶

As Bishops they wrote, "we are concerned with issues which go beyond diplomatic requirements. It is of some value to keep raising in the realm of the political debate, truths which ground our involvement in the affairs of nations and peoples. Diplomatic dialogue usually sees the other as a potential or real adversary. Soviet behaviour in some cases merits the adjective reprehensible, but the Soviet people and their leaders are human beings created in the image and likeness of God."

"To believe we are condemned in the future only to what has been the past of US-Soviet relations is to underestimate both our human potential for creative diplomacy and God's action in our midst which can open the way to changes we could barely imagine. We do not intend to foster illusory ideas that the road ahead in superpower relations will be devoid of tension or that peace will be easily achieved. But we do warn against "hardness of heart" which can close us or others to the changes needed to make the future different from the past." Not even five years after the US bishops wrote this pastoral letter, their predictions began to come true. Change began to occur within the Soviet Union.

In Sri Lanka too we need to shed that

hardness of heart that the Catholic Bishops of the United States warned their people against. We need to be unwavering in our commitment to equal rights for all citizens and equal dignity for all communities. We need to work with the faith that what was possible in other parts of the world, where protracted conflicts came to an end, is also possible in our country. A bold step is needed to move from havoc to hope.

Primacy of Democratic Commitment

President Gotabaya Rajapaksa has reaffirmed that the polity he presides over is a democracy. He has recommitted himself not to resort to military rule. This is being put into practice. The state of emergency that was declared in September this year to prevent hoarding of foodstuffs was permitted to lapse a month after it came into effect. There was no request to parliament to extend it. With the lapsing of the emergency, the post of Commissioner General of Essential Services has also been terminated. The lapsing of the emergency without renewal may be due to the observation that the high-profile raids that were carried out failed to bring down the price of the hoarded commodities. This would be a salutary lesson that economic problems cannot be resolved by the military or the use of force.

Another matter of concern has been the appointment of a presidential task force to recommend ways and means to become one country with one law. The slogan "One country, One law" was a winning formula in November 2019, just six months after the Easter bombing. There was a sense among

the ethnic and religious majority community at that time that the ethnic and religious minorities had too much space to hide and engage in anti-national actions, and for which the government received the overwhelming mandate of the ethnic and religious majority community. The president explained his choice of the bhikkhu Ven. Galagoda Atte Gnanasara as chairman of the presidential task force on the grounds that he had been campaigning for 'one country, one law' for the past five years.

The concept of "one country, one law" has been, in the main, promoted as a means of eliminating various exceptional personal laws that have traditionally applied to specific religious and ethnic groups in Sri Lanka, and been preserved by the constitution. This reflects a double assertion that minorities should not be provided "undue space" to be different – hence "one law", and power sharing campaigns of the Sri Lankan Tamil community should be rejected because they can lead to separatism – hence "one country".

A Hopeful Meeting

In conclusion some of us at a recent meeting of the *Collective for Ethnic and Religious Harmony* these matters were discussed by the highest level of Buddhist and other clergy including the president of the Catholic Bishops Conference, Rt. Rev. Dr. Winston Fernando and Rev. Fr Reid Shelton Fernando. They agreed that priority should be to ensure the equality of all citizens and to build amity between the ethnic and religious communities. The one country, one



The president's vision of change ought to be to bridge the gap between the ethnic and religious communities that has led to years of strife from the time of Independence down to the present day.



law concept implies that the law should be equal to all. The second is that it can impact upon the personal laws of the ethnic and religious communities. Those who are tasked with leading a process of reform should have credentials that match their mandates or else the whole exercise can be discredited and could easily get stuck in chaos and conflict for a long time to come.

President Gotabhaya Rajapaksa has pledged that the revolutionary change promised in the 'Vision of Prosperity' policy statement will definitely be made and requested the young people to come forward with confidence in the government. The president's vision of change ought to be to bridge the gap between the ethnic and religious communities that has led to years of strife from the time of Independence down to the present day. At the meeting of the *Collective for Ethnic and Religious Harmony*, the religious clergy present and the civil society leaders invited by former speaker Karu Jayasuriya, the convenor of the *Collective for Ethnic and Religious Harmony*, were non-partisan and non-political. With their learning, experience and all-encompassing vision, the advice of this multi-religious group of religious leaders can be President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's moral compass in his quest for revolutionary change and could be a stepping stone from the current *havoc to hope*.

District of Hambantota. Woolf returned to England in May 1911 for a year's leave but he resigned in early 1912. He even though was fascinated with the native life in places like Jaffna (North), Kandy (Central) Hambantota (South) where he worked but was frustrated by the administration particularly as the AGA. The novel itself has been written skillfully as a 'subtle critique' of the colonial regime that failed the people and the polity.

2 . Woolf takes specific position after he returned to England, became active in the Labour Party and played a significant role as one of its key advisors. He was said to be one of those who recommended immediate independence for Ceylon soon after the WW I. In his memorandum to the colonial regime in 1938 Woolf recommended a Swiss model federal system for Ceylon. He anticipated those opposed to such a solution would come out with the argument that Ceylon was too small to have a federal system. See article (*The Government Agent in Hambantota for a number of years proposed a federal system on the Swiss model for Sri Lanka the 1930s*) by Veeragathy Thanabalasingham who refers to this statement by Woolf but also does not provide the original reference. See. <http://tamildiplomat.com/federal-solution-leonard-woolf-suggested/> retrieved 24 Nov. 2021.

3 . *ibid*.

4 . The Indo-Sri Lanka Peace Accord was an accord signed in Colombo on 29 July 1987, between Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and Sri Lankan President J. R. Jayewardene. The Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution of Sri Lanka (13A) is

amendment to the Constitution of Sri Lanka, ratified 1987, which created Provincial Councils in Sri Lanka. Interestingly this same amendment (13th) also made Sinhala and Tamil as the official languages of the country and English as the link language.

5 . In 1983, the American Catholic bishops released this pastoral letter. The drafting process of this pastoral letter, revealed a complex relationship between President Ronald Reagan, Pope John Paul II, and the U.S. bishops. These bishops were becoming increasingly critical of the president and his policies in a way not previously seen from the Catholic hierarchy and between the Vatican and Washington. At this point, some even caricatured this 'new relationship' of the 'new world order' between Regan-Thatcher and John Paul II as an 'Unholy alliance'.

6 . Speaking to a convention of the National Association of the Evangelicals in Florida in March 1983, Ronald Regan publicly refers to the Soviet Union as an 'evil empire' for the second time in his two-term career. He used the phrased in his Westminster address at the House of Commons in 1982 when his counterpart Margreat Thatcher was the premier.



Endnotes

1 . In August 1908 he was appointed as the assistant government agent (AGA) in the Southern Province, where he administered the

CONTRIBUTORS & EDITORS

Dr. Nazia Khanum OBE. DL, BA MA (University of Dhaka), PhD (SOAS, University of London). Former lecturer (University of Dhaka) and Head of Equalities in several local authorities, UK. Currently the Director of Equality in Diversity and in research management, training and community empowerment consultancy. Human Rights activist engaged in community empowering voluntary organizations alongside several women organizations. External specialist advisor British Bangladeshi Chamber of Women Entrepreneurs, works and lives in Luton, Bedfordshire, UK.

Rev. Dr. Ajith Wellington OMI is an alumnus of the National Seminary of Our Lady of Lanka, Kandy, Sri Lanka (B.Ph. & B.Th. Urbaniana) He holds a L.Ph. and a Ph.D. (Gregorian, Rome, Italy) and P.grad. Dip. cum a Ph.D. (University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka). He has been a lecturer St. Charles Lwanga Major Seminary, Windhoek, Namibia (2001-2003) and National Seminary, Kandy, Sri Lanka (2004-2019). A visiting lecturer (University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka) and at the Sister Formation Programme (Aquinas College, Colombo, Sri Lanka). Currently is the Administrator, St. Peter's Parish, (Poughkeepsie, NY).

Dr. Jehan Perera is a founder member and presently the Executive Director of the National Peace Council of Sri Lanka (NPC 1995) and works across the provinces and networks of partner NGOs and inter-religious groups. He is also on the board of the People's Action for Free and Fair Elections and the Centre for Communication Training. He is a frequent writer to regular weekly political columns for the national media. Despite criticisms from different quarters within Sri Lanka he has been consistent for years with his stand on peace building and reconciliation processes in his native country.

Rev. Dr. Ruwan Palapathwala is a scholar in religion, a Research Associate of the University of Divinity, and an episcopal priest of the Archdiocese of Melbourne, Australia. He had taught religious traditions of South and Southeast Asia (Victoria University, Wellington) and (United Faculty of Theology of the Melbourne College of Divinity). He has published widely on subjects ranging from the intertextuality, Buddhist-Christian Dialogue, globalisation, pastoral and practical theology, spirituality in later-life and near-death-experiences and the afterlife.

Editorial Board:

Dr. Joe William is a founding Director and currently Chairman, National Peace Council of Sri Lanka, and Executive Director, Centre for Communication Training. He is the Course Director for Nonviolent Communication offered by the Department of Social Studies, Open

University of Sri Lanka and an Academic Instructor, Oblate Institute of Higher Learning (OHIL). He holds an MA (Peace Studies, 2000) Pg. Dip (Research Methods for Social Sciences, 2007) and a PhD (University of Bradford 2012), UK for his Thesis: Systemic Conflict Transformation and its Application to the Peace Process in Sri Lanka.

Crystal Baines is reading for her PhD in English Literature, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, USA. Her current research focuses on narratives of secularism and secularization in Sri Lankan and Indian literature. Her other research interests include Development Studies, Translation Studies, and Digital Humanities. Currently she is on study leave and working on the final submission of her PhD dissertation. The editorial colleagues wish her well in her deliberation towards the completion of her terminal degree.

Shanthikumar Hettiarachchi teaches history of religious thought and practice, and the origin of religion at the School of Religion and Philosophy, Minhaj University Lahore (MUL), Pakistan. He is part of the editorial team of the South Asian Journal of Religion and Philosophy (SAJRP, Minhaj ul Qur'an Publications). He continues to teach at the Universities of Colombo and Kelaniya as their visiting lecturer (contextual theology MA), (Christianity, Hindu Dharma and Islam) for their undergraduates. Also teaches at the Theological College of Lanka (TCL), Kandy as its tutor in theology.

Guest Poet:


Dr. Dilantha Gunawardana, a molecular biologist by training, is a freelance poet. He moves between science and poetry, is a senior lecturer at the University of Sri Jayewardenepura. Dilantha has published his poems in many reputed journals and magazines, including Canary Literary Magazine, Cordite Poetry Review, Boston Accent Lit, Forage, Kitaab and a few more. He also has produced two anthologies of poetry, Kite Dreams (2016) and Driftwood (2017), both by Sarasavi Publishers (Colombo), and is currently working on three poetry anthologies.

Another Poet:

Wishmi Katugampala is currently preparing for her A/L in February 2022. A student of Devi Balika Vidyalaya, Colombo with trilingual (Sinhala, English and French) skills, and writing poetry has been her hobby developed alongside her interest in languages. *Social Justice* wishes her best at her exams and an illustrious future in her literary pursuits.



Endeavoring



A kilo of Mysore dhal and some Bombay Onions
Seem to be in everyone's lips
And samba is an Indica rice. Still, we are more
Chinese than ever before. Hope is now the
Size of the bank checks that are actually
Long term loans, and havoc is the number of
Comments on columns that are hammering
Away everything Sino-centric.
To be sentimental: DS Senanayake was the
Best Prime Minister Sri Lanka had and JR was
A tactician of the highest measure.
What is Chinese in Sri Lanka you wonder?
The Mono Sodium Glutamate packed Chinese fried rice,
Every lawn mover and grass cutter that you buy, or
The car engines from Zoyte.

Havoc means anarchy or no order.
Still, we see the long lines at vaccination drives,
At Sathosa stores, at petrol stations and it makes
You think: we are back in the 70s.
Mohammed Gadaffi, Palpath Kadawi is remembered.
The new government is known for slum cleansing
To give a facelift to the city. There are no more
Slums on the corner of Rosmead Street !!!
Wonder where all of them went? aligawaththe
Or Grandpass perhaps?

The reality is that inventories have changed.
Hope in the new normal is the first shot of the vaccine
Then the second jab and perhaps the booster shot.
A vaccine that can be made of RNA or protein
The postman and the plumber.
A vaccine that immunizes the one who feels
A pinch, as a needle perforates a muscle in the arm.
Hope is that in modernity. A vaccine that is simple
In that it sends troops of antibodies to the
Front lines of defense – immunity – and somehow
Battles on in pyrrhic victories.

Hope was never a lottery or a genie, nor was it
Simple God or fate, only it is the residue of design as
A famous man said once.
We should now be doing the surveillance
On fruit bats to see what the next virus coming our way is.
Hope is about Nostradamus, about Jeremiah and
Every prophet whose clairvoyance was
Underestimated. They say prophetic Nostradamus
Saw the 1666 fire of London, and if it never happened
We would never know Christopher Wren.
The greatest *havoc* calls for the greatest *hope*,
There is no one without the other.

Everyone suffered: bands, event planners, priests,
Rentals, restaurants and so forth. The havoc was
Real for them. Anxiety was the palpating heartbeat.
Melancholy stood as the darkest blue.
Hope was I guess locking your doors and windows
Until the vaccines graced the scene.
An old man looks at the queue next to a hospital,
Ones waiting for the booster shot; how he
Is drawn back to the 1970s when there
Were a shortage of funds and queues were seen
To buy a loaf of bread, while we become
Sino-friendly: like a man who is trying for the first time
A pair of chopsticks at a Chinese diner but
Has never gone to a Perahera to
See a stilt dancer - boru kakkul karaya.

We are not how obese our granaries are,
We are not just the muscle of our central bank,
All that glory can be rerouted to peace and equality.
We are all at the end of the day a plate of rice
Symbolizing who we are, and the accompaniments,
Our social striata, the staple that befriends
From all corners economic liberties.

They say money talks and money walks.

Soon the rupee will be walking,
On a pair of stilts, that gains altitudes,
Just another Zimbabwe in the making.
The havoc of our purse and bourse,
Has no silver linings of hope.

Our own mother Lanka,
Divorcing from our colonial ways,
Dressing in the finest silk, for
A date with a sugar daddy,

That old man of 5000 years, China.



Dilantha Gunawardana