

EDITORIAL

Scrutinizing Institutional Values for a Progressive Future: The Need for Rational Reconstruction

The evolutionary process of development of Sri Lankan society, especially in the context of post-independence and post war national development indicates that we failed to be discerning in preventing political regimes from propagating destructive ideas with anti-democratic policies for narrow partisan gain. However, are we at present concerned about implications of past actions and prepared to learn lessons from the mistakes we made?

Rational reconstruction of what we should objectively stand becomes viable if a given community is politically ready for such a process. According to Saheed, J. (2021)¹, “Humans use rationales to show the logical relationships that underlie their reasoning. The process of revealing these rationales is called rational reconstruction. Contextually the work of Habermas as rooted in the cultural practices of different communities convey that over time people use their power of reasoning to settle down to a body of knowledge that is rational and therefore accommodative in spirit.

For Habermas social development is a learning process with rational self-criticism and self-transformation (Ewert, G: 1991)². It is through this process that indigenous and other local values can be progressively interpreted in ways that would benefit contemporary life. Consciously or unconsciously, humans subject their values, norms and ethos to the standard of reasonableness and with time modify or out rightly discard what they perceive as unworthy social and cultural beliefs and practices. Are we in such a process at least now?

Significance of Confession through Lessons Learnt

According to Kabwete (2021)³ concepts, such as justice, truth, confession, forgiveness, and reconciliation have been explored by social scientists for academic and social benefits. Of the issues that burden the Sri Lankan State, it

¹ Saheed, J. (2021). In search of a New Paradigm of Value Re-orientation through Rational Reconstruction of indigenous values, *Academia Letters*, Article 1169. <https://doi.org/10.20935/AL1169>.

² Review of Educational Research, Volume 61: No 3 (1991)

³ African Journal of Conflict Resolution, Volume 16: No.1 (2021)

is indeed a tragedy that we as a people with an ancient civilization that believed in human dignity and peaceful co-existence have in the post-independence period failed to make sense of our core foundational values that existed before colonization. Have we failed to understand that this has contributed towards accelerated poverty within the system at large bringing misery to all, both majoritarian as well as minoritarian? While this is the ground reality, we continue to boast that we are a people civilized through many religions and civilizations, ignoring in reality what they in fact represent in spirit. Such a scrutiny is a must, if we are to develop a collective ethos for natural and spiritual prosperity of our people even now.

As revealed in a contextually relevant manner, and providing a powerful reminder of the need for mutual respect for one another, Joseph Henrich, Professor of Human Evolutionary Biology at Harvard, states, in *Secret of our success: How culture is driving human evolution, domesticating our species, and making us smarter-* (2016), how ethical and cultural norms of people would help them to relate to one another much better, and develop their capacity to abide by their distinct values of human existence. This enables them to make sense of peaceful co-existence, which is the need of the hour for Sri Lankans in nation building. Henrich (2016)⁴ states with reference to religion that, “One answer is that religion can act as a kind of social technology that helped humans scale up and build large, complex societies”.

Paradoxically, according to Prof. C. Upendra Rao, Professor of Pali and Sanskrit, School of Sanskrit and Indic studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, “The 21st century witnessed intense human conflicts on a scale never seen before with more than three hundred million people losing their lives in wars. Most of these wars have occurred due to fundamentalist religious fanatic tendencies. Hence let us end this self and collective destruction with mutual respect for one another instead of pursuing with partisan competition with self righteousness.

To gain positively, Dalai Lama for instance believes in using religion to enhance education, as Education utilizes all potentials of the mind” (The Dalai Lama, *Secular Ethics, Human Values and Society*, public lecture and debate at the University of South California, March 5, 2011).

⁴ Henrich, J. (2016). *The secret of our success: How culture is driving human evolution, domesticating our species, and making us smarter*. Princeton University Press.

As for Sri Lanka, we should respect all inhabitants of the land at an equal level, without imposing the will of one down the throats of others. Prevailing authoritarian tendencies create in people an acute sense of insecurity and a fear psychosis in their routine lives. This reality is undoubtedly our collective experience, failing to find a common purpose to bring out the best in our own people, we allow ourselves to be at loggerheads with our own people in line with reactionary political intentions of a few who opt to sow the seeds of ethno-religious discord.

In moving forward from this flawed system for which we are collectively responsible, can we firmly resolve individually and collectively that we as a people cannot permit rhetoric to dominate our lives, and what is needed is spiritually enlightened political convictions with respect for diversity. Also, let us admit that post-independence constitution building processes by way of First and Second Republican Constitutions of Sri Lanka in 1972 and in 1977 achieved very little by way of “national integration” as against “disintegration”. They left adequate room for endless bloodshed, while the architects of these constitutions presided over collective destruction, bankrupting the nation in socio-economic, political and cultural frontiers of national development.

Contempt and indifference Towards Indigenous People: Is it a Reflection of Our Authentic Nature

It is obvious that the level of indifference that the political regimes have exercised towards our own indigenous people and their ethos relating to their existence, reflects who we are in reality. We have not only been indifferent towards their values, but also functioned like an invading force, considering them as uncivilized in all what they stood for and currently stand for. Hence in the name of national development we have behaved with the mindset of the colonizers, firmly believing that we could proselytize our own native people with an authoritarian mindset.

Put it simply we have believed in converting or attempting to convert them from their own religion, belief, or opinion to another. While this process is driven by malicious intentions, the proselytizers in our land have shamefully waged war on each other, constitutionally imposing one religion over others as the State religion.

Failure to Appreciate Secularism

In this process we have failed to understand the significance of the grand

concept of secularism that enabled the constitution makers of nearby India and far away United States of America to proclaim that all what they would ensure for the common good of the people is the “Right to Worship”, as against conferring special protection of the State to a specific religion over others”.

A progressive future with equal dignity for all, is what we sincerely yearn for today. We of the national university academia understand the urgency in establishing the right values in nation building inspired by freedom and responsibility. A rational reconstruction of values demand that we also adhere to highest standards of democracy as a way of life for the people. Values cannot be neutral in character and our commitment should be to ensure natural reconstruction of what we believe in, so that integration could be meaningfully realized during our life time.

Dr. Mahim Mendis
Editor in Chief
VISTAS Refereed Journal
Open University of Sri Lanka