

## From Loss to Lesson Learnt



by Gajalakshmi Paramasivam

*Identifying with what happened through our Truth, could either mean that we accept that reality and forego in our mind the benefits we expect from the other and share our right with them as one group or devolve ourselves and govern ourselves without needing the other.*

( October 28, 2012, Melbourne, Sri Lanka Guardian) I write in response to the Sri Lanka Guardian article ‘Is the Government serious about Reconciliation?’ by Shanie.

As a Tamil who has been deeply researching within the community as part of the community, I ask myself ‘what does reconciliation mean to me?’ When I ask myself that question, all those

who are a part of me also ask that question. We are a part of each other due to common faith – even though we may not expressly know each other. Our outer structures facilitate us to develop that common faith and through such, Oneness as a group.

We are born as part of families – some small and others big. Likewise countries; systems and structures could lead us to become One only if we regulate ourselves through its common principles and values – the highest of which is Truth. Tamils of Sri Lanka are now all over the world. In addition to remaining connected to our origins, we need to also lay the foundation for our global life – so our children do not suffer as minorities in other countries. It will be difficult for the ordinary member of a majority group to appreciate the challenges faced by members of a minority group. We could make ourselves minorities in another environment and then identify with those difficulties or we could develop ourselves through structured systems using appropriate common principles and values. If the common values we use in the system are greater than the unpracticed common principles then the system functions more or less naturally on its own. Conscious Reconciliation is needed when the values are less than the unpracticed principles. We do have many of them in the Sri Lankan Constitution – starting with those in relation to the Provincial Councils; and some here in Australia especially in relation to Equal Opportunity) .

Shanie states ‘It will take a long time to heal the wounds and to change attitudes. It is not easy for a woman in the Vanni to forgive and forget that she has lost her husband and some children who have simply disappeared after surrendering to the security forces or killed due to shelling. It is not easy for a woman in Dehiwala to forgive and forget when the family’s breadwinner has been killed following a senseless LTTE bomb attack. It is not easy for a woman in Kattankudy to forgive and forget that the LTTE killed her husband inside a mosque. Nor is it easy for a family in Sampoor or Myliddy to forgive when their only house and land have been permanently lost because the Army needs it for their use citing security reasons. But the process of genuine reconciliation requires the government and the reconcilers to be patient and give a sensitive hearing to the stories of deprivation and to heal the wounds, wherever possible in a practical way.’

Missing in the above is the pain and loss felt by the woman in Homebush, New South Wales, Australia who not only lost her son in the crossfire but is also not able to share her loss and pain with those with whom she grew up, made families and whose comfort and support is no longer there for her. It’s worse for the man from Jaffna who no longer seems to enjoy the higher position he enjoyed through the practitioners of the Customary Laws of Tamils – especially the Laws of Thesawalamai.

I felt this when I read Shanie’s quote of Laurie Lee ‘death’s family likeness in each face must show, at last, our brotherhood’. The Tamil Diaspora is strong due to this sharing but it does not have the natural feelings of Mother’s embrace that comes when one is in Homeland. In addition, children and grandchildren born in Australia have their own challenges to meet – so they could call Australia their home. Most Sri Lankans residing in Sri Lanka, seem to want the money from these folks but not their partnership. This was observed by me even at the University of Jaffna. We must seek and find that Oneness in each other to heal within. Towards this, Common Structures are essential in a system driven more by maya and less by Truth. Families that are committed to strong common structures and systems - would merge through

those structures and systems. Others would at best cohabit as in the animal kingdom - but would not enjoy common life at the higher and/or wider level. If we are to enjoy the higher values of life – we need to develop common structures and systems to suit our current needs and commit ourselves to the new systems which ideally would be based on the Lessons Learnt from our previous experiences.

Loss transforms into Lesson Learnt – when we look within and ask ourselves ‘where did I go wrong?’ . Once we find a wrong in us and see the opposition that seemed to cause us the loss through such a wrong in us – we would relate to their Truth. Otherwise it is the seen v the seen and the heard v the heard. At the moment there is active production at this level. Once we identify through our wrong – the wrong in the other – we would be able to protect ourselves from the other. That is the commonness. Without this what happens is mere accident.

Identifying through our Truth, could either mean that we accept that reality and forego in our mind the benefits we expect from the other and share our right with them as one group or devolve ourselves and govern ourselves without needing the other. If the other is in power, such self-devolution needs to be at mind level. We do this all the time with various parts of our families. If we separate/leave without the ability to self govern we would contribute to scattering – resulting in Statelessness. We would then assimilate with those who seem more comfortable than us.

At individual level, Reconciliation is necessary for those who consider themselves to be Sri Lankan. It is not for those seeking to remain close to their ethnic origins. This includes politicians on both sides who are dependent on the ‘ethnic’ vote. They should stay away from Administration and the Judiciary. If they actively participate in these – they would pollute law and order and therefore the common systems that would bring us together.

I am part of the Sri Lankan Reconciliation Forum, Sydney. Our meetings are regulated strongly through Chatham House rules and even though as a Tamil, I am in the minority physically – I do not feel a minority within the forum. I am able to share freely and so long as I adhere to the rules – I am able to participate actively in discussions. I feel that this is possible due to most of the core members governing themselves in their everyday life. I felt this also with the Friday Forum when I had the opportunity to participate in one of their sessions. That spirit of independence is communicated quietly to comfort and support each other within. Others who seek to reconcile would likewise be successful if they accept others’ wrongs as part of theirs in common. If we are squeaky clean in one aspect and keep it to ourselves – the problem is not ours at all. Hence we cannot find the solution from within. It’s when we pool our goodness / rights that we become common.

At the individual level we can ‘tell’ from top – as happens to me often here in Australia – but unless we are able to place ourselves in the shoes of the one being ‘told’ we are merely preaching. The easier way to tell is through pooling of our strengths and drawing on others’ to cure our weaknesses. This is the basis of families – the most natural institution known to man. Top down preaching is needed by academics/politicians/judiciary for their own living but beyond a certain point – it isolates the academic from the practitioner. This natural separation happens even if we are not conscious of it. In fact it happens faster when we are not conscious of it but are driven by the subconscious – including through habit and blind following. We need to

do something – anything we can in our current environments and so long as we genuinely seek togetherness – Reconciliation will happen one way or the other.