

**NONVIOLENT TRANSFORMATIONAL
LEADERSHIP FOR NO-POVERTY DEVELOPMENT:
A.T. ARIYARATNE AND THE SARVODAYA SHRAMADANA MOVEMENT**

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The experience of A.T. Ariyaratne and the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement of Sri Lanka offers an example of transformational leadership for development toward “no-poverty” societies in a nonviolent world. This chapter seeks lessons that can be learned from it.

The significance of the Sarvodaya Sharmadana Movement can be appreciated in the historical context of the breakdown of the world colonial system after WWII, the violent competition between revolutionary communism and counterrevolutionary capitalism to demonstrate superior development capabilities during the Cold War era, and the present 21st century “globalizing” world confronted by five gigantic problems: violence, poverty, violations of human dignity, environmental despoliation, and the imperative need for global problem-solving cooperation.

The nonviolent revolutionary call in 1981 still rings true of 53 Nobel Prize laureates to end what they termed the “holocaust” of millions of preventable deaths from hunger, malnutrition, and underdevelopment. They declared: “All who denounce and combat this holocaust are unanimous in maintaining that the causes of this tragedy are political.” They explained:

Although the powerful of this earth bear the greatest responsibility, they are not alone. If the helpless take their fate into their own hands, if increasing numbers refuse to obey any law other than fundamental human rights the most basic of which is the right to life, if the weak organize themselves and use the few but powerful weapons available to them: nonviolent actions exemplified by Gandhi, adopting and imposing objectives which are limited and suitable: if these things happen it is certain that an end could be put to this catastrophe in our time.

They concluded: “Now is the time to act, now is the time to create, now is the time to live in a way that will give life to others.”¹

ORIGINS

The Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement began in a December 1958 two-week student work camp together with villagers to open up the “depressed and socially ostracized” village of Kanatoluwa about 100 km. north of Colombo. It was led by a 27-year-old biology and mathematics teacher, A.T. (Ahangamae Tudor) Ariyaratne of the Buddhist Nalanda College. The work camp had been carefully prepared by research on Kantoluwa’s needs and by four months of comprehensive training, including study of community development films from India and the writings of Gandhi and Vinoba Bhave.

The work force from Colombo consisted mainly of students of the Nalanda College Social Service League, joined by about 100 from Kuliypitiya Central College, plus trainees from Mahagarama Teacher’s Training College where activist Ariyaratne had studied and had organized a Social Service League. Some rural development officers, other government officials, and boy scouts participated. About 300 to 400 people each day were engaged with

villagers in digging wells, opening up roads, constructing playgrounds, and other services. Out of the camp came a Sarvodaya slogan, “We build the bridge--The bridge builds us.”

As recalled by Ariyaratne, “The Shramadana Camp was like a university on the one hand and on the other like a carnival, where hundreds of people came and watched how these young students were fighting caste and class inequalities and social discrimination....The Kantoluwa Camp was actually a revolution.”² Visitors to the camp suddenly brought national press and radio attention. Ariyaratne received hundreds of letters asking for details and with requests to explain the Nalanda College Shramadana Movement to schools and other institutions. He immediately followed the Kantoluwa camp by organizing four more, despite some disagreements with the rural development department bureaucracy.

Having demonstrated success in Sinahala areas, Ariyaratne moved quickly to organize a camp in the Tamil village of Panichchankeri in the eastern district of Batticaloa, where killing of a Tamil youth had ignited communal rioting. At first there was resistance to the camp, but the demonstration of Sinhalese and Tamil youth working peacefully together in useful projects overcame objections. The basis for subsequent Sarvodaya work in Tamil areas was established.

SARVODAYA NOW

Forty-eight years later, with founder Ariyaratne at age 75, the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement is serving in 15,000 of Sri Lanka’s 23,000 villages, reaching four million of Sri Lanka’s twenty million people. Four thousand villages are registered as legally independent Sarvodaya Shramadana Societies and are participating in programs of the Sarvodaya Economic Enterprise Services (SEEDS) division. There are 5,000 pre-schools with 8,000 pre-school teachers. A Shanthi Sena (Peace Brigade) with members aged 15 to 30, numbers over 100,000 volunteers in 9,000 units. Sarvodaya has 34 district centers, including eight in Tamil areas of the

northern and eastern provinces, and 345 divisional units. There are 12 development education institutes.

A full-time staff of 600 supports the work of 19 units devoted to the achievement of six empowerment goals: spiritual, social, economic, technological, and legal. Examples of services are:

Spiritual empowerment: meditation.

Social empowerment: community capacity-building, early childhood development; women's empowerment; development education; information technology; school for children with hearing disabilities; empowerment and social care for the orphaned, disabled, abused, elderly and victimized; and "5R" program for relief, rehabilitation, reconstruction, reconciliation, and reawakening.

Economic empowerment: banking division, enterprise division, training division, export division, woodwork unit, wheelchair unit, printing, and book publishing.

Technological empowerment: water supply and sanitation, alternate energy, low cost housing, and rural infrastructure.

Political empowerment: village self-governance; culture; people's policy dialogues; good governance; and ceasefire and peace process.

Legal empowerment: conflict mediation, awareness raising, legal advice and representation, and advocacy of reforms.³

SARVODAYA'S TSUNAMI RESPONSE

The December 26, 2004 Asian Tsunami brought Sri Lanka's largest natural disaster. Sarvodaya, as the country's largest voluntary social service organization, responded with what Ariyaratne called "waves of compassion" to counter "waves of destruction." Ariyaratne was the

first leader from the Sinhala Buddhist south accepted to assess disaster assistance needs in the separatist Tamil Hindu north. Sarvodaya was the first organization welcomed to assist recovery there. Full-time staff and thousands of volunteers worked around the clock in response to unprecedented conditions of 31,320 dead, 23,189 injured, 516,500 displaced people, and over one million affected people in twelve districts of the southern, eastern, and northern provinces including 226 Sarvodaya villages.

Confronting this enormous tragedy, Sarvodaya drew upon decades of experience in response to environmental and man-made disasters—including cyclones, floods, landslides, droughts, hunger, riots, massacres, assassinations, and relief of remote villages. Appealing to local and global supporters, Sarvodaya put into action its immediate, mid-term, and long-term “5R” disaster management action plan, coordinated by the Sarvodaya Disaster Management Division:

Relief: Supply of immediate assistance in the form of food, clothing, shelter and essential commodities of affected communities.

Rehabilitation: Involvement of those affected in the process of rebuilding their lives together with Sarvodaya and providing them with support to maintain their lives in dignity.

Reconstruction: Rebuilding of damaged and destroyed infrastructure and homes.

Reconciliation: Implementation of all programs while keeping in mind the need to integrate communities and help them work together to heal the wounds of conflict and trauma and build back their lives together.

Reawakening: The providing of affected communities with psychosocial and spiritual support which they need to assist them on the path to recovery. Sarvodaya believes this would enable them to be reintegrated into the mainstream of development.⁴

Demonstrating extraordinary growth in participation and services since 1958, Sarvodaya has become Sri Lanka's largest NGO and widely regarded as perhaps the world's most successful integrated rural development organization.

ROOTS OF TRANSFORMATIONAL PHILOSOPHY

Ariyaratne's leadership has been a major transformative factor in Sarvodaya's creation and success. His articulation of the Sarvodaya Shramadana philosophy has been a key contribution to evolution of the Movement. The philosophy has emerged out of a combination of profound thought, cultural tradition, and practical experience. The goal is a violence-free, poverty-free, egalitarian society with happiness for all. The path to realization is to engage individuals and social groups in an empowering process of sharing capabilities for community spiritual and material well-being. Sarvodaya Shramadana's transformational philosophy is rooted in Gandhian, Buddhist, traditional, historical, and critical socioeconomic and political analysis. The basic assumption is that poverty-free societies are possible.

The concepts of "Sarvodaya" and "Shramadana" are related to Gandhian experience in India. Ariyaratne first heard the concept of Sarvodaya analyzed by the great Gandhian rural educator Dr. G. Ramachandran at a conference in India in 1959. "He compared the awakening of Sarvodaya to the blossoming of a lotus flower. The ideas embedded in Sarvodaya he compared to petals which, when fully opened up, were tantamount to the blooming of the complete flower....Without much effort I was drawing a parallel between his idea and my own Buddhist philosophy."⁵ On the same visit Ariyaratne sought out Vinoba Bhave, the renowned

Gandhian leader of the Bhoodan (land gift) Movement and accompanied him on a five-mile walk to the Punjab village of Nirvan to request donations by rich landowners to the poor. Vinoba asked him to launch a similar movement in Sri Lanka. Ariyaratne, who had learned about Vinoba's work from literature acquired in Delhi on his first trip to India in 1957, replied, "I told him that I had already begun the Shramadana Movement that aims at reforming society."⁶

From a Buddhist perspective Ariyaratne reinterpreted the Gandhian term Sarvodaya ("well-being of all") to mean the "awakening of all." To the Buddhist concept of "dana" (compassionate sharing) he added "shrama" (labor) to mean a wide range of sharing capabilities such as spiritual wisdom, knowledge, time, labor, skills, wealth, land, and other contributions. The combined inspirational and practical concepts to guide the Sri Lankan no-poverty developmental movement thus became "Sarvodaya Shramadana," awakening of all to share capabilities for the well-being of all.

In envisioning practical measures to realize no-poverty futures, Ariyaratne drew upon traditions of the past as a contribution to transforming the present. For Ariyaratne, respect for human life and nature in the traditional agricultural village serves as a model for emulation. To illustrate this, he offers in translation from the Pali an ancient prayer recited daily in villages even today:

May there be seasonal rains

May there be agricultural prosperity

May the entire living world be rich

May the rulers be righteous.

May those who suffer physically overcome their suffering

May those who are in fear overcome their fear

May those who suffer mentally overcome their pain

May all living beings be well and happy.⁷

In historical analysis, Ariyaratne raises consciousness of the effects of colonialism that led to a European-oriented elite, decline of traditional values, and neglect of village welfare. The deleterious effects continue in the independent post-colonial period marked by party competition for power, ethnic conflict, urban-rural disparities, growing rich-poor gap, and ill-advised theories of economic development unresponsive to basic human needs. The result has been corruption, revolutionary violence of the left, counterrevolutionary violence of the right, terrorism, communal schism leading to separatist civil war, and continuing inequality and unhappiness growing out of greed, hatred, and failure to recognize the nonviolent transforming power of Sri Lana's combined spiritual traditions.

Sarvodaya philosophy is reflected in 1972 legislation that incorporated the governing body of the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement. Included among 15 "objects" and 10 "general principles" governing the Movement is:

To accept the concept of Sarvodaya or welfare of all, found as the heart in the teachings of world-religious leaders such as Lord Buddha, Lord Jesus Christ, Prophet Mohammed and following the examples of such noble leaders as Emperor Asoka, Anagarika Dharmapala, Mahatma Gandhi, utilizing our traditional principles of the four Braham Viharas (sublime abodes) namely, metta (loving kindness), karuna (compassionate action), muditha (altruistic joy), upekkha (equanimity) and the four tenets of social conduct namely Dana (sharing), Privachana (pleasant speech), Artha

Chariya (constructive activity), Samanathmatha (equality in association) and choosing the middle path or the Noble Eightfold Path to achieve the said ideals of Sarvodaya and make this Island of Sri Lanka, once again a land of plenty and righteousness.⁸

Sarvodaya's economic theory arises out of Ariyaratne's critique of the gap between the unmet needs of poor villagers and the policies of professional economists employed in national and world economic management bodies. He observes:

The remedy these economists have for the sufferings, frustrations, and resentments of a substantial portion of humanity is to advocate poverty alleviation and increasingly poverty eradication. The utter inadequacy of their economic theorizing is evident from the fact that it is largely the practice of their own theories that has created poverty. There appears to be a very fundamental weakness in economic systems that are based on theories that lead to the gulf between extreme affluence of the few and extreme poverty of the many.⁹

In contrast to top-down theories of globalizing economic development, Ariyaratne affirms bottom-up, human-centered, localizing development based upon satisfaction of ten basic human needs. These are for "a clean and beautiful environment, a clean and adequate supply of water, a minimum of clothing requirements, an adequate supply of food, basic health care, a modest house, energy requirements, basic communication, total education, and spiritual and cultural needs." Ariyaratne explains that in responding to these needs, "It is not purely economic activities we are engaged in. It is a total, holistic and integrated approach to bring about a non-

violent but revolutionary social change.”¹⁰ Class struggle is rejected. The creation of wealth, in the Gandhian sense of “trusteeship,” is not denied. In Sarvodaya practice, a fusion of socialist and capitalist elements has emerged as illustrated by the banking, enterprise services, and income generating projects of its Social Empowerment Program. Also by creation of the Sarvodaya Endowment Fund.

In politics, Sarvodaya’s policy is to maintain strict independence from party competition for state power. Although individual members are free to participate in democratic electoral politics, Sarvodaya as an organization abstains. Sarvodaya does not seek to seize state power or to directly challenge the institutions of the state. Its goal is to bring about nonviolent political transformation of society by demonstrating the capabilities of self-reliant people to meet their own needs. Where goals coincide in the provision of social services, Sarvodaya cooperates with state and international agencies.

STAGES OF TRANSFORMATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Sarvodaya’s thought and actions exhibit stage-like developmental progress among overlapping interdependent elements. In Sarvodaya terms, there are six interdependent stages of “awakening” from individuals to the world.¹¹ *Individual awakening* evokes “loving kindness” toward all forms of life (metta), compassionate concern to remove all sources of suffering (karuna), sympathetic joy for compassionate actions (muditha), and equanimity in successes or failures (upekkha). It is expressed in compassionate action to share gifts of “labor, knowledge, skills, medical services, land, wealth, spiritual wisdom, and sacrificing one’s life in service of the whole world.”

Family awakening means sharing in response to needs of family members, use of pleasant language, creating healthy conditions to satisfy the ten basic human needs, and

“respecting the personality of every member of the family on the basis of equality.” *Village awakening* proceeds from recognizing causes of poverty, through affirmation of hopeful alternatives, to engagement in cooperative actions toward organizational, educational, health, cultural, and spiritual development. *Urban community awakening* follows the pattern of village awakening. *National awakening* calls for affirmation of spiritual, moral, and cultural values; satisfying basic human needs with emphasis on the most deprived; pursuing development education for leadership and community participation in all areas of national life; reorganizing the political power structure by developing participatory democratic institutions and decentralizing power to village and urban communities; and restructuring the national economy toward self-sufficient capacity to meet human needs without internal or external exploitation; and by adopting appropriate technologies that respect the environment and culture. *World awakening* seeks similar developments and peaceful sharing among all countries based upon their own historical and cultural realities toward universal removal of “psychological and economic impoverishment.”

Sarvodaya villages have increased in planned stages from one in 1958 to 100 in 1968, 1,000 in 1978, 4,900 in 1988, 6,000 in 1992, 8,000 in 1994, 10,000 in 1995, and to 15,000 in 2005. Within each village, five stages of development are pursued:

Stage 1: Villagers from the village itself and other Sarvodaya volunteers from neighbouring villages participate in Sarvodaya Shramadana Camps to provide the village with essential services such as roads, latrines, wells, tank bunds, irrigation canals, reforestation programmes etc., with the emphasis on the mutual benefit of the community.

Stage 2: Peer groups such as mothers' groups, children's groups, youth groups, farmers' groups and so on are formed. These groups are given training in leadership on child-care, health and sanitation etc. so that they can effectively participate in basic needs satisfaction programmes.

Stage 3: Through self-reliance and community participation basic needs in the village are satisfied and a village level Sarvodaya Shramadana Society (registered under government regulations) is formed to give organized leadership to all village level activities that lead to the improvement of living standards.

Stage 4: Sarvodaya Economic Enterprises Development Services are introduced to the village, progressively developing the capacity of the villagers to save, to borrow, to improve existing enterprises, to start new ones, to repay loans and to evolve their own village development bank.

Stage 5: Economic relationships with the neighbouring villages are built, strengthening their capacity in money, products and services so that development takes place in a cluster of villages. The clusters of villages throughout the country contribute to the building of an alternative approach to economic development which benefits the rural areas.¹²

A step toward the goal of completely self-governing villages is the organization of Village Sarvodaya Shramadana Societies. These are legally incorporated, fee-based membership societies with child members (7-14 years), youth members (14-25 years), ordinary members (over 25 years), life members (open), and invited members (no fees). There is a 25-member executive council composed of 18 executive members (3 children, 3 youths, 3 mothers, 9

ordinary) and 7 members of the elders council (selected from ordinary and life members). There are 6 sub-committees: spiritual, cultural, moral, social, economic, and political.

TRANSFORMATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AS CONTINUOUS LEARNING

Sarvodaya's engagement in continuous learning throughout all activities is remarkable. This may be related to the fact that the movement was begun by a college teacher and volunteer students. Early in life Ariyaratne awakened to a passion for learning. He recalls, "I used to think what an abundance of knowledge the world offers us through society and nature to master. And my thirst to master that knowledge never seems to get quenched."¹³ Prior to the 1958 Kantoluwa camp, eagerness to learn had taken him to study the miserable conditions of villages in the jungles of eastern Sri Lanka. In 1959 it took him to learn from Gandhian experience in India. In the same year he went to study the Kibbutz movement in Israel where he lived and worked for three weeks in a completely "communalized" village, one week in an "in-between" village, and two weeks in an "ordinary" village.¹⁴

The Shramadana concept of sharing implies continuous improvement by all of capabilities for sharing. The *Annual Report* for 2003-2004 reports a wide variety of learning activities throughout the movement from villages to the national headquarters. The word "training" appears more than 90 times in 142 pages. In addition, there are abundant references to "workshops," "skills development," "education," "courses," "programs," "orientations," and "providing information." Progress in stages of village development is termed "graduation."

A wide variety of training activities at village, district, and national levels are reported. Figures are provided on number and gender of participants and beneficiaries served. Women are well represented in externally funded projects at the village (46%), district (57%), and national (60%) levels. At the village level one finds training in Shramadana camps, leadership training,

training of pre-school teachers, and management training for Sarvodaya Shramadana Society council members. Among 42 programs at the district level are found workshops for volunteer workers, workshops on economic well-being for pre-school teachers, awareness training for health workers, vocational training for masons, vocational training in computers, advanced training in biodiversity, youth leadership training, programs in conflict resolution, and training for members of the Sarvodaya Shanthi Sena (Peace Corps). Among 19 national level activities are Shramadana camps, workshops on training of trainers, training of Telecenter staff, advanced training in library management, workshops on traditional medicine, peace dialogues, and peace meditations.

Each of Sarvodaya's sub-units has its own training programs. For example, the community capacity-building unit conducts training in organic farming, crop cultivation, appropriate technologies, gravity-fed water systems, and protection of biodiversity. The early childhood development program engages in training of teachers and parents in psychosocial development. The community health program provides training in the fields of reproductive health, AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria, and violence against women. Training was provided to engage 105 monks as spiritual and cultural advocates of community health.

Five aspects of Sarvodaya's commitment to continuous learning invite special attention. The first is providing opportunities for spiritual development such as in meditation programs for individuals, groups, expectant parents, persons with physical or mental disabilities, war-traumatized people, prisoners, and police. The second is a strong commitment to providing access to information needed for development. Beginning with programs to establish village libraries and to train librarians, the project now has been extended to provide village access to knowledge for development through advanced information technologies. Accompanied by staff

training, telecommunications centers are being established at national, district, and village levels to link and support activities. Talented village youth are being trained in computers to access resources useful for village development. A high technology multimedia mobile unit is carrying information capabilities to remote villages.

A third cluster of learning activities pursues adaptation of appropriate technologies for village well-being. Among them are training programs of the Rural Technical Services Division to develop gravity water systems, community rainwater catchment tanks, wells, housing, ferro-cement latrines, and micro hydroelectric and solar-powered systems for villages in remote areas. Training accompanies adaptation of technologies to establish “ecovillages” that use natural resources in the environment.

Sarvodaya’s shift from donor dependency toward self-reliance in all its activities has produced a wide range of learning needs related to what might be termed “village capitalism.” This requires learning to adapt some institutions and practices characteristic of capitalist society. It means developing a Banking Division that in 2003 celebrated district managers for their excellent record in loan disbursements, savings mobilization, repayment rates, portfolio at risk, and the performance of Sarvodaya Development Banks.¹⁵ The Training Division assists the Banking and Enterprise Services Divisions “to deliver their services more effectively to their client members.” By training village Sarvodaya Shramadana Society officials and managers to function independently it “facilitates the transformation of a community-based organization unit capable of rendering a range of services to the community.” Training is provided for “rising young village entrepreneurs.” The Enterprise Services Division promotes learning new skills to develop micro enterprises as viable business ventures. It conducts training in entrepreneurship, marketing, and related matters while assessing the impact of services provided by 12 district

Enterprise Promotion Centers. Overall the effect is to add skills in entrepreneurship for wealth creation to the Shramadana tradition of sharing.

One of Sarvodaya's most moving activities might be termed "compassionate learning." Both for teachers and the taught. All benefit from the love and care of Mrs. Neetha Ariyaratne who since 1960 as the wife of the founder has gifted her life in Shramadana action. Her "office" is a little table with a telephone in the kitchen of their modest Moratua home. Among programs is care for abandoned babies (imagine 30 of them sleeping on their stomachs in little cribs at nap time with women caregivers attentively standing by). They are not abandoned again but are nurtured to enter the educational system. Another learning program is for teenage mothers with their babies, some victims of incest and rape, protected in a high-fenced little house. Handicapped women are assisted to learn vocational skills from sewing to computer competence. Another acclaimed program offers learning opportunities for drug and alcohol addicts to awaken themselves and develop vocational skills to pursue happy lives for themselves and others. Another gem among Sarvodaya's compassionate learning institutions is the Dr. Reijntjes School for the Deaf with students aged 6 to 18 mainly from rural poor villages who have been identified by Sarvodaya workers. On leaving the School at age 18 students are provided vocational training. The School is proud that all graduates have found employment.

Thus the entire Sarvodaya Movement, from the villages to the headquarters, is characterized by a continuing progress of developmental learning, reflecting educator Ariyaratne's passion for knowledge.

SUPPORT AND OPPOSITION

The "lotus" of Sarvodaya's transforming contribution continues to open amidst life-giving and life-threatening factors in the Sri Lankan and global environments. Inside Sri Lanka

success can be attributed to Sarvodaya's responsiveness to village needs. How else could it spread from one to 15,000 villages? The contributions of Buddhist culture to awakening, sharing, and openness to others are apparent. Shramadana camps engage Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, Muslims, Sinhalese, and Tamils in common "bridge-building" projects. Beginning with self-sacrificing Ariyaratne and his family, the contributions of early supporters kept the Movement moving forward. For the first decade, until discovered by international donors, it was virtually self-reliant. The early recognition of its merit by respected members of the Buddhist Sangha and some presidents and prime ministers brought national attention.

Transnational discovery of the Shramadana Movement brought moral and material validation and support from the globalizing humanitarian development aid community. Prime ministers in Colombo hosted receptions to honor Ariyaratne as the youngest recipient of the Ramon Magsaysay Award for Community Leadership in 1962 and for the Belgian King Baudoin Award for International Development in 1982. Among twenty validating commendations have been the Buddhist Niwano Peace Prize (1992), the Hubert H. Humphrey Award for Alleviating Poverty and Economic Inequality (1996), the Jannalal Bajaj Award for Promoting Gandhian Values Outside India (1990), and the Indian Government's Gandhi Peace Prize (1996). Ariyaratne has contributed his monetary awards to Sarvodaya.

Early on, Ariyaratne began to be invited overseas to explain the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement in inspiring talks to international contributors to community development such as to the UN agencies, the World Bank, religious bodies, and universities. Sarvodaya became a teacher in the globalization movement for rural development as well as a recipient of technical and material assistance. Researchers and volunteers responded by coming to Sri Lanka to learn from and participate in Sarvodaya's innovations.

Over time, public and private foreign assistance began to flow to complement Sri Lankan resources. In its 2003-2004 *Annual Report*, “Sarvodaya acknowledges the support and cooperation extended by...state agencies, local and international organizations and foundations, private companies, nongovernmental organizations, United Nations agencies, multilateral organizations and many others, for their unstinted support to carry on our work without interruption.”¹⁶ The report lists 48 “resource partners” including 21 organizations from seven countries (Canada, Denmark, Japan, Netherlands, Switzerland, United Kingdom and United States); three Sarvodaya International affiliates (Japan, Netherlands, and the United States); three diplomatic missions (Japan, Netherlands, and Sweden); four UN agencies (ILO, UNICEF, UNHCR, and UNFPA); six bilateral and humanitarian aid agencies (SIDE-Sweden, Aris AID-Australia, CIDA-Canada, USAID, Danish Refugee Council, and CARE-Sri Lanka); and 11 Sri Lankan government agencies and NGOs. Sarvodaya’s credibility as a provider of humanitarian relief made it a natural recipient of overseas support in the wake of the 2004 Asian Tsunami.

Despite favorable domestic and international support, Sarvodaya has encountered serious opposition. Among sources have been religious and nationalist extremists, landlords, bureaucrats, jealous politicians, and media. Ariyaratne’s radical critique of the injustices of Sri Lankan society and efforts to seek peace among combatants have brought recurring threats of death. Threats began from the first Kantoluwa camp when outraged members of the elite hired a gangster to kill him for taking upper caste students to work in an outcaste village. Warned the night before about the assassination plan, Ariyaratne sought out and confronted the intended murderer, the Colombo ganglord “Choppe.” He explained the purpose of the Kantoluwa camp and offered himself to be killed. “Choppe” refused and became a Sarvodaya supporter.

Ariyaratne has explained:

Many were such incidents in my life...threats of bomb, murder. But unarmed we went to these people and explained what was truth and untruth, what was bad and what was good, and once convinced they assisted us.”¹⁷

The most serious attacks to discredit Ariyaratne and undermine Sarvodaya took place during the presidency of Ranasinghe Premadasa (1989-1993). They came during a time of rebellion in the south by Sinhala Marxist revolutionaries and fighting in the north against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). The government-sponsored attacks on Sarvodaya ceased after the assassination of Premadasa by an LTTE suicide bomber on May 1, 1993.

For Ariyaratne, the political hostility behind governmental attacks upon him was inexplicable. Repeated requests for an interview with the President, earlier as prime minister and ally in projects for the poor, were rejected. When lower level officials were asked for explanation of the offensive the reply was “orders from above.” Unprecedented governmental repression and harassment preceded and followed proclamation of a Presidential Commission of Inquiry into Non-Governmental Organizations on December 17, 1990. The Commission was charged, among other things, to report:

Whether any funds received from foreign sources and/or generated locally have been misappropriated and/or are being used for activities prejudicial to national security, public order and/or economic interest and for activities detrimental to the maintenance of ethnic, religious and cultural harmony among the people of Sri Lanka, by any such organization or by any person or persons.¹⁸

In February 1991 the Commission gave Sarvodaya three weeks to reply to a detailed questionnaire with over 100 items. Subsequent attacks by government agencies, the government-controlled press, and clandestine sources were virulent and multifaceted. They included attempts at character assassination, charges of participation in opposition political activity, misuse for political purposes of humanitarian funds received from foreign governments and aid agencies, violation of financial regulations, and sale of Sri Lankan children to foreigners. Government funds were withheld from Sarvodaya projects, the government radio refused to report on them, and the Foreign Ministry warned all diplomatic delegations that “Dr. Ariyaratne and the Sarvodaya Movement are utilising resources provided by foreign governments and donor agencies for purposes other than the original objectives of the Sarvodaya Movement.”¹⁹

Criminal Investigation Division agents questioned Ariyaratne and others. Unknown persons followed his movements and those of his family. Anonymous death threats increased. On April 29, 1992 Ariyaratne wrote to the Inspector General of Police that he had received four telephone calls the previous evening “from an unidentified caller who threatened to kill me if I did not keep silent against the state sponsored vilifications.”²⁰ The next day Ariyaratne’s six children wrote to President Premadasa to inform him of the brutal death threats they themselves had been asked to convey to their father amidst “shockingly malicious and false coverage in the [government] Lake House press.”²¹ The children simultaneously appealed to the international community for support:

At a time we feel so helpless we appeal to the international community to strengthen us even from afar by showing your concern to the Government of Sri Lanka or in some other way you think best. Our country has become one in which people are afraid to speak up for their

own rights, let alone the rights of others. Too many people have been killed or have disappeared for doing so. We are now experiencing at first hand the anguish that thousands of our fellow citizens must have felt during this past decade.²²

In response President Premadasa's secretary assured the children that "I have given instructions to the Inspector General of Police to provide you [daughter Charika, the first signer] and your family with such security as you may require."²³ The international appeal brought expressions of concern and solidarity for Ariyaratne and Sarvodaya from throughout the world. In November 1991 the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ), citing press and police harassment of Sarvodaya, called upon the Sri Lankan Government to "re-examine the mandate and operations" of its Presidential Commission." It noted "suspicion" in the NGO community "that the Sri Lanka Government has little interest in the regulation of NGOs, and its actual interest lies in merely frightening and intimidating them."²⁴

Ariyaratne did not keep silent. On December 28, 1991 in his presidential speech to the 35th annual meeting of the parent Sarvodaya Shramadana corporation, he defended himself, his family, Sarvodaya, and its service to the poor from an "unprecedented smear campaign in the government-controlled press....Day and night my family and I received many death threats." He spoke of "innumerable others who have similarly fallen victim to a tide of intolerance and injustice that is now emanating from the power political domain. Perhaps the voice I raise is theirs as well."²⁵ The speech, delivered at age 60, at a time of crisis, constituted a succinct statement of Sarvodaya's origins, philosophy, tasks, recognition, repression, defense of the NGO role, moral code, gratitude, and commitment to continue the mission of service with the

“understanding, support, and blessings” of all. It is reminiscent of Martin Luther King, Jr.’s “Letter from Birmingham Jail.”

Ariyaratne incisively critiqued Sri Lanka’s ills:

Especially in these last few years, Sri Lankan society has rapidly lost its shared values. We have lost even the very basic value pertaining to the sanctity of life. More than 60 percent of our people, especially those living in the rural areas, struggle to live in extreme poverty. On the other hand a minority of 10 percent enjoy more than one half of the national income. A small group of the super rich together with a small group of politicians have joined hands to shamelessly exploit our country.

Personal and structural violence are their main instruments. They have wrecked our religious traditions, value systems and environment.

Resources that are obtained from the World Bank, IMF, and international donor agencies are spent indiscriminately to satisfy their private agendas while the aspirations of our people and their freedoms are sacrificed.

The truth is hidden while untruth masquerades as truth in the government-controlled mass media. Many in the civil service have been helplessly reduced to being servants of the ruling politicians and even as slaves under a few select bureaucrats....Most of our intellectuals have been reduced to silence. Indeed how many of our religious leaders have managed to stand upright at this time? [He continued by pointing out that elite failings had brought social degeneration, violence, ethnic rivalries, and civil war].²⁶

To overcome political repression Ariyaratne prescribed a five-stage program of nonviolent direct action: “patience,” “awareness creation,” “seek justice from the courts,” “non-violent direct action within the law by which the power of the people is awakened to reject the unjust laws,” and, finally, if other measures fail, to “join together with all other non-violent and democratic forces to change the power political system.”²⁷ With respect to relations with persons who had harmed Sarvodaya from within or helped to attack it from without, Ariyaratne advised “to bear injustice with patience” and “to educate and uplift the awareness of those who wronged us without bearing enmity towards them.” He recalled that most of them in the past had “ended up by becoming our friends.”²⁸

The force of personal integrity and the validity of the Sarvodaya Movement, confirmed by international support, overcame the political attack. Strengthened organizationally and in financial management, Ariyaratne and Sarvodaya emerged to continue work toward a peaceful no-poverty society.

TRANSFORMATIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR PEACE

From the beginning, Sarvodaya has sought to realize holistic conditions for permanent peace. The nonviolent path has been followed through bloody “fields” of military, political, ethnic, cultural, caste, and spiritual conflict. Sarvodaya has persevered despite armed revolution, communal riots and civil war, terrorism, bombings, assassinations, and massacres. It has persisted across broken ceasefires between the government and the LTTE in 1985, 1990, and 1995.

Sri Lanka has been called an “island of victims,” with a traumatized population whose violent extremes are animated by atrocity stories evocative of hatred and revenge.²⁹ Amid

conditions of psychic, structural, and physical violence, Sarvodaya has gained respect as a nonviolent force for peace and justice. As Ariyaratne explained in response to the government attacks of the 1990s:

Sarvodaya is founded on the principles of Truth and Non-violence.

While we worked to organize the battered and bruised, the poorest of the poor, in the rural and urban areas on the basis of these principles we often encountered very dangerous individuals. Always we were able to win them over with love and compassion. For instance, the armed and insurgent youth knew that we were totally opposed to violence. But because we respected justice in the same way as we opposed violence, they did not harass us. Likewise the officers of the police and armed forces accepted that we were a movement that neither supported violence nor provided information. They considered us to be a service dedicated to rooting out the sources of injustice in society and gave us every assistance. They realized that if a society based on Sarvodaya principles could be brought into being, then there would be no more need for violence and weapons.³⁰

While Sarvodaya's entire program is conceived as a holistic peace seeking and peace building project, some activities are specifically peace-focused. Shramadana camps engage youth in cooperative labor across lines of traumatized division. Peace marches raise peace consciousness and demonstrate solidarity. Mass peace meditations convene tens and hundreds of thousands of people to send waves of thought to transform their blood-stained island and world.

On March 15, 2002, following the ceasefire agreement between the government and the LTTE on February 22, Ariyaratne led a peace meditation by an estimated 650,000 people in the sacred city of Anuradhpura. The scale was unprecedented in Sri Lankan history. This followed a similar mass meditation by 170,000 people in Colombo in 2000. Meditators at Anuradhpura came from all parts of the country, including some Tamils who had never met Sinhalese. Two days earlier on March 13 a hand grenade had been tossed into the Sarvodaya headquarters compound near Ariyaratne's house with a note, "traitor."

Ariyaratne's opening remarks were followed by profound silence in the immense gathering, exemplifying the power of transforming leadership and followership for peace. He began by noting convergence among ancient spiritual teachings, quantum physics, and modern consciousness research that every atom in the universe is related to every other atom. Therefore the power of combined consciousness could "move mountains." He continued:

Our purpose here today is not to move mountains but to move human hearts. Our purpose is to shift the field of human consciousness so that we can see all of us, every Sinhalese, every Tamil, every Muslim, every Christian, every Buddhist, every Hindu—are all one people. That all violence is self-violence. As the reward of violence is more violence, the reward of peace is more peace. Our purpose today is to make war unthinkable and peace inevitable.

You are part of a great undertaking today. Today, our combined meditation will shift the field of consciousness. Our combined energies will reach into the hearts of every man, woman and child on this Island and the world

.

We come to this sacred place not only for worship, not out of religious duty, not to perform ritual. We come here, not as Buddhists or Hindus or Muslims or Christians, but as Sri Lankans, as Global-citizens, as one humanity, sharing common faith with many names.

We come here to amplify our psychic energy to transform the field of consciousness so that peace spreads from each of our hearts to the entire city, to the entire island, and to the entire world.³¹

Sarvodaya members are prepared for peace actions. Many have risked their lives in rescue and rehabilitation work in areas of terrorist attacks, bombings, and communal riots. The Sarvodaya Shanti Sena (Peace Brigade) is a specially trained organization for preventive and crisis-coping.service. With roots in Gandhi’s call for a disciplined peace force,³² the Sarvodaya Shanthi Sena was organized following a talk on the concept given by Mrs. Asha Devi Ariyanayagam, wife of a close educational associate of Gandhi, at Ariyaratne’s house in 1962.³³ Later, amidst communal violence in 1978, Ariyaratne called for organization of Shanthi Senas to protect life and property in all villages and towns.

The white-uniformed Shanthi Sena now numbers over 100,000 young men and women between the ages of 15 and 30, organized in 9,000 units. Members are pledged to follow nonviolence; seek moderation in life styles; transcend all divisions of “caste, race, nationality, class, colour, religion or such classifications;” and remain independent of party politics. They

pledge to “sacrifice my life to maintain national peace and world peace” and to engage in community service activities.³⁴

The Shanthi Sena operates as an autonomous unit with a network and activities paralleling those of the parent Sarvodaya body. Training seeks to promote skills useful for each member and for the community, including skills in nonviolent conflict resolution, first aid, and disaster relief. Among activities are “peace and amity camps” for Sinhalese, Tamil, and Muslim youth; peace marches; establishment of village health centers; and environmental protection projects. The Shanthi Sena was quickly mobilized to respond to the Asian Tsunami and continues to serve recovery as well as to drill for future tsunami evacuations.

Perhaps unique to the Sarvodaya movement is its comprehensive *Sarvodaya Peace Action Plan*.³⁵ Authored by Dr. Vinya Ariyaratne, executive director, physician son of the founder, it systematically elaborates and extends ideas of a “People’s Peace Plan” presented by A.T. Ariyaratne in 2000. The plan is intended to guide thousands of Sarvodaya workers, volunteers, and all Sri Lanka peace-seekers. The plan contrasts with the global war-fighting strategy of the world’s present dominant military power to dismantle incompatible regimes and establish competitive elections and competitive economic systems.

Sarvodaya’s goal is “TO MAKE WAR UNTHINKABLE” not only in Sri Lanka but throughout the world. Locally it departs from the assumption that the civil war between the government and the LTTE cannot be “won” by either side. It proceeds to outline a “500 Year Peace Plan” with practical steps beginning from the present, through five months, one, five, ten, fifty, and one hundred years to 500 years. Recognizing that at first such a plan may be considered “laughable,” it cautions that present local and global violent conditions are the legacy of at least five centuries and will require long-range commitment to transform them.

The plan presents an analysis of the causes of Sri Lanka's conflicts. It prescribes transforming actions appropriate for different conditions in five areas of the country. It specifies basic requisites for a ceasefire. It presents steps to progressively transform three overlapping rings of violent causation—political, economic, and cultural—from local to global conditions of peace. Forecasting global futures, it envisages “eternal war,” a “bad peace” (with combatants prepared to resume killing), and a “Sarvodaya peace” where transforming development “removes the root causes for the use of violence to solve problems.”³⁶

ARIYARATNE AND SARVODAYA AS TRANSFORMING LEADERS

A.T. Ariyaratne and the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement offer an example of what James MacGregor Burns has termed “transforming leadership” in which “leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality.”³⁷ They also provide a case in which “this biggest, boldest kind of leadership confronts the largest, most intractable problem facing humanity in the twenty-first century: the basic wants of the world's poor.”³⁸

Interpretations of transforming leadership tend to focus upon the qualities and skills of individual leaders in evoking follower responsiveness. The example of Sarvodaya, however, suggests a tripartite combination of the interdependent qualities of leader, philosophy, and movement. They are all transforming contributors to nonviolent, no-poverty development for Sri Lanka and the world. Ariyaratne is clearly an inspirational transforming leader. The Sarvodaya philosophy articulated by him makes its own transforming contribution. And the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement itself contributes to transforming its participants as well as to transforming Sri Lankan society. All three, reminiscent of buddha, dharma, and sangha, possess potential for evoking transformational no-poverty development throughout the world.

Some salient lessons from Sarvodaya's experience are the importance of: a courageous and compassionate creative personality; direct transformative actions in shared work camps; a culturally rooted yet universal philosophy of practical developmental sharing to benefit all; readiness to learn across cultures; maintaining independent nonviolent integrity without alienation amid contending violent forces; transnational moral support and assistance; pursuing development as a continuing process of education and learning; articulation of local to global developmental vision; and emphasizing nonviolent respect for life across all endeavors.

Ariyaratne has become Sri Lanka's most widely respected figure, locally and globally. Sarvodaya members call him "Loku Sir," meaning elder or leader with an affectionate connotation as for a family member. He addresses others in family terms. Sri Lankans respectfully refer to him as "Dr. Ari." For foreigners he is simply "Ari." He refers to himself simply as a "voluntary community teacher." An extensive study of Sarvodaya leaders concluded with a composite judgment of his qualities as "a humble, kind-hearted, compassionate, religious, and honest man."⁴⁰

Ariyaratne's personality blends with the extraordinary people's movement that he founded. As expressed by biographer Premil Ratnayake, "Ariyaratne and Sarvodaya, though two different physical entities, remain ideologically identical. You cannot talk of one without talking of the other."⁴¹ That is why Ariyaratne and the Sarvodaya Sharmadana Movement merit co-recognition as transforming leaders for a nonviolent, no-poverty, globalizing world.

NOTES

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