

South Asia Analysis Group

Published on *South Asia Analysis Group* (<http://www.southasiaanalysis.org>)

[Home](#) > Book Review: Sri Lanka: Paradise Lost? By Charles Sarvan

Book Review: Sri Lanka: Paradise Lost? By Charles Sarvan

Submitted by asiaadmin2 on Thu, 05/28/2015 - 09:58

(*Cinnamon Teal Publishing-Plot No. 16, Housing Board Colony, Gogol, Margao, Goa 403601.E mail- contactus@cinnamonteal.in^[1]*)

Paper No. 5942

Dated 28-May-2015

By Dr. S. Chandrasekharan

The month of May brings one memories of the brutal war that took place in what was once described as a paradise (Sri Lanka). It was in those final days of the war (May 2009) in the Paradise that one saw horrific tales of prisoners being “stripped, humiliated, tortured” before being executed. It was in the same paradise that in the last days, more than 40 thousand innocent civilians, almost 8 percent of the Tamil population in the north was eliminated! The world is yet to come to terms with this tragedy.

For Indians too, it was an irony that what started as a benign intervention to prevent a military solution of the ethnic crisis ended up in the Indian security establishment supporting a military solution. In the process, India lost one of its finest and promising leaders in the meaningless assassination of Rajiv Gandhi by the LTTE. On that day, the LTTE lost whatever chances it had to have an “Eelam”.

The book- Sri Lanka: a Paradise lost-is a collection of various articles and reviews of books and films of events in the Sri Lankan context and as said by the author “dedicated to those few Sri Lankans, women and men, who have publicly and persistently stood up for values to make the island a happier place . . .”

One of the cases cited by the author was Adman Wijemanne whose dedication was essentially to justice and righteousness and not to any group. The author rightly argues that there were many Wijaymannes who were not pro Tamil but pro humanity. The author ends his article with a telling statement -that there were no pro Tamil Sinhalese as such but only “some Sinhalese who never forget that every “you” is also an “I.”

Another article by the author, debunks the statements of some of the Sinhalese in the present context after the elimination of the LTTE, that the “Tamils are happy now.” He points out that it is for the Tamils not Sinhalese to come forward and assert that all is well for the Tamils. This he says is more out of ignorance of some of the Sinhalese and also by those who consciously or unconsciously subscribe to the belief of Sinhalese hegemony.

In a related article the author mentions about the Sinhala psychosis and the growth of the Bodu Bala Sena that sounds the alarm of the imminent and mortal peril of the Sinhalese race. It is here that he makes a telling statement of many writers that **Sri Lanka has an overwhelming majority with a minority complex** (emphasis mine) – and with the sense of insecurity and fear the latter breeds. This is also my view that this explains many complexities and the behaviour of the majority community in Sri Lanka on the ethnic question.

An interesting comparison of the experience of Jews and the Tamils has been made in the article “Alienated at home: Jewish & Tamil Experience” and carried earlier by the South Asia Analysis Group. He cites the case of one Duleep Kumar who had many Sinhalese friends and perhaps thought that he was among those fully integrated with the majority community. But he was not to be deceived. In another case a friend of his lamented that the Sinhalese friends when it came to a crunch were either indifferent or succumbed to the prevailing “hegemonic ideas.” A similar situation occurred in Germany where the Jews before the World War had considered themselves fully integrated only to be deceived and let down by the majority community. A fine distinction is made by the author on integration as different from assimilation. To me it looks that most of the ethnic conflicts arise when the majority community would look for assimilation while the minority community would seek integration and yet retain its own cultural and linguistic identity. It is a pity that the “Tamils were forced to see themselves not as Sri Lankans who by accident of birth were Tamil but as second class citizens.” (Author)

Professor Sarvan has not spared the Tigers either for bringing enormous misery to the Tamils by their acts. In the article on “Tragedy: Letter to a friend- he says that while one could understand ‘resorting to force’ after exhausting all other means, he cannot excuse them for the nature of the force used. To quote him- “Their conduct was politically foolish, a crime against humanity . . . a sin against gods.... a war that was waged unjustly and unwisely.” What an irony to quote the author again- “ it had brought down upon Tamils the very fate the Tigers predicted and claimed to prevent... their last act of cruelty was against trapped and terrified Tamil civilians.

The second part of the book consists mostly of review of books mostly on the Sri Lankan situation and also on two documentaries. While one is likely to skip them for being “review of reviews,” I would urge the readers to read them carefully- the reviews are exciting, interesting

and intellectually challenging.

I had not read the book by Paul Moorcraft on “Total Destruction of the Tigers” which the author has kindly reviewed in this book. All one could say was that this was an ugly war where the Sri Lankan Government and the Army functioned like a steam roller flattening everything before it, a luxury the IPKF could not have indulged in. Places of worship were bombed though earlier the civilians were asked to seek shelter in such places of worship. I would repeat the question- Was it deliberate or accidental? A “Go to hell” attitude was adopted towards internal and international humanitarian concerns. The result was the tragedy at Nandikadal in the final stages of the war. A massacre of this magnitude is neither forgettable nor forgivable.

Professor Sarvan’s book should be read by all those like me who were involved in some time or other with the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka as well as by scholars, analysts, researchers, students as well as decision makers who in their line of duty grapple with the problem of conflict resolution almost daily.

The book is not meant for bed side reading- every article, every paragraph and every reference mentioned need to be studied in detail. The price of this book is not too high for a book of this nature and is not one that can be thrown away after one reading!

Tags:

[Sri Lanka](#) [2]

[Nandikadal tragedy](#) [3]

[LTTE](#) [4]

[Prof. Sarvan](#) [5]

Category:

[Papers](#) [6]

Countries:

[Sri Lanka](#) [7]

Topics:

[Political](#) [8]

[Human Rights](#) [9]

Source URL: <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/node/1785>

Links

[1] <mailto:contactus@cinnamontea.in>

[2] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/taxonomy/term/61>

[3] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/taxonomy/term/1100>

[4] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/taxonomy/term/64>

[5] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/taxonomy/term/1101>

[6] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/papers>

[7] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/sri-lanka>

[8] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/political>

[9] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/human-rights>