

Realise That You Are One People



Dr Subramanian Swamy is a Member of Parliament from the National Democratic Alliance and President of the Janata Party in India. He is a man who stands for what he believes in and is known to be outspoken. He has vehemently opposed the LTTE and is a friend of the Sri Lankan people. He urges the government of Sri Lanka to bypass the TNA as he doubts their sincerity and go directly to the Tamil people.

Dr Swamy stresses that Sinhalese and Tamils should recognise that they are one people, where Aryan and Dravidian divides are mythical concepts that were perpetuated by colonial rulers in their campaign to divide and rule. “We may have differences, may have disagreements, but ultimately when the country’s future is at stake we should be one.” Wise words from a very wise man.

By Udeshi Amarasinghe | Photography Menaka Aravinda

What are your thoughts on the relationship between India and Sri Lanka?

It has gone through significant changes. The relationship between the two

countries should have been very good from the beginning but unfortunately there were misunderstandings about the nature of the relationship. India gained Independence in 1947 and Sri Lanka in 1948. India should have been looking into our own neighbourhood and Asia but Jawaharlal Nehru had a European centric infatuation and as a consequence all these other relationships were ignored.

In the meantime Sri Lanka wanted to undo what the British had done. And, they tried to do this in a hurry. The British co-opted the Tamil population who in turn became their collaborators and as such the Tamils had a disproportionate share in services, universities and so on. After Independence, Sri Lanka brought in amendments such as Sinhala only and standardisation without thinking ahead and that led to bad blood. The Tamils looked to India to support them. As a result Tamils immediately began to be looked upon as an extension of India, when in fact both communities had come from India.

India over time became an advocate for Tamils, when they should have been advocates for both, because both communities had been a part of India and that is an acknowledged fact. We failed to rectify the distorted history, which the British had forced on us – India and Sri Lanka. The idea of Aryans and Dravidians, where the Sinhalese thought themselves as Aryans from North India and the Tamils as Dravidians from the South is actually a non existing concept that has now been thrown out of the door by DNA studies.

Then Rajiv Gandhi tried to rectify the damage his mother had done by training militants. She had a personal grudge against J R Jayawardene who was seen as pro-western. She thought she could do a Bangladesh type of operation where she would become a hero of the Tamils and the southern Indians. Rajiv tried to rectify this by having the Indo-Sri Lanka agreement. Unfortunately Sri Lanka under the leadership of Ranasinghe Premadasa entered into a collaboration with the LTTE and that led to strained relations between the two countries. The LTTE assassinated Rajiv Gandhi and then of course it all boomeranged because the LTTE was a terrorist organisation and they betrayed the agreement, they in fact assassinated Ranasinghe Premadasa.

During the period of the conflict India had assisted Sri Lanka substantially. We should have built on that but we made this big mistake of supporting the US backed UNHCR resolution. The general opinion in India was that we should not support the resolution because this is a knife that can be used both ways. It can

be used against us too. And the Americans have no right to talk about Human Rights because of what they have done in Afghanistan with their drone where innocent civilians have been killed.

But, the new problem that has arisen in India is the affiliation of Sonia Gandhi to pro-LTTE forces. She has written to the President of India that the killers of Rajiv Gandhi should not be hanged, which I do not think any widow of this sub continent would consider doing. She was the one who was insistent that India should support the US backed UNHCR resolution. I feel that the European powers have influenced her. As such the relations between Sri Lanka and India hit rock bottom. We were shocked.

We are now trying to improve bilateral relations. The government in India will change in the next elections. The new government will start with a clean slate.

What can each country do to strengthen the ties?

India should now focus on the economic side and they must invest in the Northern region where there has been very poor investment. Sri Lankan banks have gone there and have started giving loans and other facilities and as a result there is an improvement. India must stop being an advocate of Tamils, India must be an advocate of both, Sinhala and Tamil. We are Indians first and then only Tamil. Therefore this has been going on too long. India feels guilty regarding the Indian Tamil plantation workers who were brought back to India and then rendered stateless creating misery for them. There was over compensation when it came to the conflict with the LTTE. India should now play a role in reconstruction especially economic reconstruction of Sri Lanka. Later this may translate into better relations and we will become more credible. Initially Sri Lanka approached India for assistance to develop Hambantota but India did not want to upset the Tamils. I want to ask what Tamils? I too am a Tamil. 99 percent of Tamils are against the LTTE. Therefore all problems are because of a few leaders and their greed for money.

Another step that Sri Lanka can take to improve relations is to give the data that they have acquired from the interrogation of LTTE members about the money that has been given by the LTTE to certain politicians in India. We can expose them to show that they are doing this for money.

Tamil Nadu has exerted significant pressure on the central government of

India which has resulted in decisions that are detrimental to Sri Lanka, what are your thoughts on this?

Well the primary influence is of Sonia Gandhi. I feel that her family has some connection with the LTTE, which needs to be probed. She has consistently come out in favour of the LTTE. Even in May 2009, she sent a letter to Prabakaran through a person by the name of Father Jasper to sign and she said then India will intervene openly in the LTTE's favour. But that man was a terrorist and had no brains. He consulted Nedumaran and Vaiko who said that the government in India will change and a new coalition would be formed. Prabakaran believed them, but then on May 16 the same government was elected and it was too late for him to change his mind.

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At times it seems like the Tamils in India are more concerned about the Tamils in Sri Lanka, than the Tamils in this country. Why is that?

No, not at all. The Tamils in India are not at all concerned about the Tamils in Sri Lanka or any Tamils anywhere. It is the money factor that is making these people behave this way.

What is the agenda of the Tamil Nadu politicians? Why are they focusing on Sri Lanka?

It is not that they have an agenda per se but if we take Karunanidhi after I caught him on corruption and his daughter was taken to prison, there is nothing that he can go to the public with. He is thinking this is the only way. He thinks that Jayalalitha will be defensive on that. On everything else she is offensive but on the subject of Tamils she is defensive. But he will come to grief on what he is doing.

The media in India too, propagate this negative image? why?

Well the problem is that the people who are against Sri Lanka are very well organised, large sums of money are circulated and journalists generally do not have the patience to do research. Most people do not know that Sinhalese come from India too. They do not know that there is high percentage of sanskrit words in the Sinhala language.

What are your thoughts on the current Tamil leadership in Sri Lanka, how can we encourage more moderate parties to enter politics?

There are Tamil leaders such as Chandrachud and Douglas Devananda. Sri Lanka needs to create and bypass the TNA. The TNA is too tied up with LTTE history. I mean the TNAs hypocrisy is clearly seen in 2010, during the Presidential elections. In 2009-2010 they were going on about Human Rights violations and genocide conducted by the Sri Lankan Army. And then they end up accepting the Commander of the Army, Fonseka as their leader and candidate at the Presidential elections. The Tamils cannot rely on the TNA as many of them are compromised. Therefore we need alternative parties so that the people will have a choice.

During the conflict they surrendered to the LTTE and won elections with the support of the LTTE.

What is your message to them?

I am not going to give any message to the TNA. I'm asking the government to go straight to the public. The public has been talking to me and corresponding with me, and they tell me that they are very happy that their children are safe and they do not have to be worried about their children being forcibly recruited. That they do not have to give a portion of their salary to the LTTE. The people are happy because they are able to lead a normal life.

What are your thoughts on the progress achieved by the Sri Lankan government?

As far as reconstruction and resettlement they have done a first class job. But they need to go a step further on reconciliation. The government must devolve some power. They should not worry about whether the power is misused because the constitution should have a safeguard clause. If the chief minister misuses his power, use the central police as we do in India. At the time I was a minister Karunanidhi misbehaved by assisting the LTTE. I dismissed the government in 1991. When the next elections were held Karunanidhi won only two seats from a total of 234.

You are very outspoken, that is very rare in a politician.

Yes it is because it hurts your career but for me in the long run I always win. There may be problems but in the long run it is always important to stand for what you believe in. I have been elected to parliament five times. I have been a minister twice. There are times when I say things which are very unpopular but people soon realise that I was right. Earlier, people used to think that I was too blunt. Now people say 'he is honest that is why he is so blunt.' Today honesty has become an issue. People say the others are cowards and this man speaks.

In Sri Lanka The People Should Realise That They Are One People. That Your Loss Is My Loss.

So at the next elections?

I am part of a coalition - the National Democratic Alliance. We will be in government and hopefully we will not have to wait till 2014. We will try to have the elections next year.

Final thoughts?

In the minds of both the Tamils and Sinhalese it should be that they are one people - Sri Lankans. You can say that the Tamil speaking people are a minority and the Sinhala speaking are the majority but they must agree that they are both one people. Stop living in purely Tamil areas and purely Sinhala areas. The government should give people incentives to intermingle. In India whatever differences we may have at the end of the day we are Indians first. In Sri Lanka the people should realise that they are one people. That your loss is my loss. Your gain is also my gain. We swim together or sink together. Sri Lanka has to get out of this Aryan-Dravidian mentality, which we in India have fought on and now it is finally out of our text books. Now there is DNA evidence. Your language is not different, you have a distinct language but not different. You have sanskrit words and the script is Brahmi, so there is this oneness that has to be fostered.

