



**WISH YOU  
A HAPPY AND PROSPEROUS  
NEW YEAR**

Dear Members,

The other Members of the Executive Committee and I take great pleasure in wishing all of you a happy and prosperous 2013

In continuation of our services this News Bulletin is being sent to you and it is our pleasure to invite you all to register for the dinner to commemorate the Indian Republic Day on 9th February 2013 (Please see further information at page 3). We have invited a distinguished personality from India to be our Guest Speaker at the function.

I request all of you to participate actively in all our activities and help us to take the Society forward

With best regards  
Yours sincerely

*Kandiah Neelakandan*  
President SLIS

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'We work closely .....

"Sri Lanka India Society is one of the oldest friendship societies in Sri Lanka and it is an organization with which we work very closely to advance a shared agenda of ever-closer partnership between our two countries".



- Our Patron

-His Excellency Ashok K Kantha  
High Commissioner for India in Sri Lanka

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"Democratic governments are always generous with their own people, and no polity can be stable without mutual trust between its various sections. This is the challenge Sri Lanka faces."

-His Excellency Ambassador  
(Dr.)Kanwal Sibal

at Dinner Commemorate Indian  
Independence

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"Our present leaders may wish to look to Gandhi and other such leaders on how we can establish a society based on mutual self respect in the aftermath of a terrible war. But my sense is that we are not there yet and that we have not learnt the bitter lessons of the past."



- Dr. Radhika Coomaraswamy  
in her Mahathma Gandhi oration

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Saathme 2012 - Members Fellowship acclaimed by SLIS



**Dinner to celebrate India's Republic Day**

Well known and distinguished editor arrives from India for Dinner to commemorate Indian Republic Day on 9th February 2013.

Please confirm your participation early and avoid disappointment.

For further details please see page 3

- Padma Bhushan Shekhar Gupta

**February  
09  
Saturday  
2013**

## Celebrating India's Independence on 28th September 2012



Guest of Honour is being Welcome Shrimathi Sibal  
in the Centre



Proposing Toast



Our Patron Addresses

Guest of Honour Addresses



Memento of Appreciation to  
the Guest of Honour



Celebrating the Birthday of Our Vice Patron  
Mr. Tilak de Zoysa



# The Sri Lanka India Society

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9<sup>th</sup> January 2013

Dear Member,

**DINNER TO CELEBRATE INDIA'S REPUBLIC DAY**

The Dinner to celebrate India's Republic Day will be held on Saturday, 9<sup>th</sup> February 2013 commencing at 6.45 p.m.

**Venue:** Taj Hotel, Colombo  
**Time:** 6.45 p.m.  
**Rate:** Rs. 5,500/- per person (Cocktails and Dinner)  
**Dress:** National/Lounge

The **Chief Guest** will be *His Excellency Ashok K. Kantha*, High Commissioner for India in Sri Lanka.

The **Guest of Honour** will be *Padma Bhushan Shri Shekhar Gupta* Editor-in-chief of *The Indian Express of India*. He will deliver the **Guest Lecture**.

We take pleasure in requesting you to participate at this function with your invitees.

You are welcome to bring your own liquor. Corkage will not be charged.

Please send us your confirmation together with your Cheque or Cash with the enclosed tear-off slip.

The **last date** to receive your confirmation is **3<sup>rd</sup> February 2013**. Please confirm **EARLY** to avoid disappointment. [We are compelled to limit the number of participants due to constraints in the seating availability in the Taj Ball Room.]

*Sampath Seresinhe*

Hony. Secretary

## OUR GUEST OF HONOUR-----

**Padma Bhushan Shekhar Gupta** is the editor-in-chief of *The Indian Express*. Shri Gupta has a weekly column called National Interest. It covers a range of issues and is the subject of his forthcoming book. He also hosts an interview-based programme Walk the Talk on NDTV 24x7. He was awarded the Padma Bhushan by the Govt., of India for the year 2009 for his contribution to the field of journalism. He was once a Director of ICES (International Centre for Ethnic Studies). He also (as a senior journalist) covered Sri Lanka for India Today in eighties and nineties.



Shri Gupta has received assorted awards: the 1985 Inlaks award for young journalist of the year, G K Reddy Award for Journalism, the Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed Memorial Award for National Integration.

Under his leadership, The Indian Express has won the Vienna-based International Press Institute's Award for Outstanding Journalism in the Public Interest thrice- the first time for its coverage of the Gujarat riots of 2002, the second time for uncovering the Bihar flood relief scam in 2005 and the third time for its sustained investigation into the Malegaon and Modasa blasts of 2008 and the alleged role of Hindu extremists and organisations.



# India's Independence Day Celebrated with a Gala Dinner

Elegance, festivities, fine dining and intellectual discourse were in order at the annual gala dinner, organized by the Sri Lanka India Society to celebrate India's Independence Day on Friday, 28th September, 2012 at Taj Samudra Hotel, Colombo. His Excellency Ashok K Kantha, High Commissioner of India to Sri Lanka graced the event as the Chief Guest while the Guest of Honour His Excellency Ambassador Dr Kanwal Sibal Former Foreign Secretary of India presented guests with food for thought as the Guest Speaker.

Speaking on the theme, 'India and its neighbours' Dr Kanwal Sibal gave an insightful description about India's political, economic and cultural relationships with its geographic and extended neighbouring countries. (Full text of his speech is being published in the next column onwards)

A veteran diplomat, Dr Kanwal Sibal is a savant in the field of international affairs with an in depth understanding of India's political, security and economic interests in the global context. Dr Kanwal Sibal's diplomatic career spans a phenomenal 41 years during which he reached the highest position in the Indian Foreign Service on his appointment as Foreign Secretary to the Government of India from July 2002 to November 2003. He is the First Grand Doctor of Philosophy in India. He received the title of Full Professor from the European Academy of Informatization and the World Information Distributed University-WIDU.

Chief Guest on the occasion His Excellency Ashok K Kantha, High Commissioner of India to Sri Lanka stated, **"Let me thank Sri Lanka India Society for carrying on with this admirable tradition of organizing these dinners twice a year to commemorate Republic Day and Independence Day of India. Sri Lanka India Society is one of the oldest friendship societies in Sri Lanka and it is an organization with which we work very closely to advance a shared agenda of ever-closer partnership between our two countries"**.

Thanking the Indian High Commission in Sri Lanka for its support, Kandiah Neelakandan, Attorney-at-Law and the President of The Sri Lanka India Society stated, "His Excellency Ashok K Kantha and his officials of the Indian High Commission are really our strength and support"

"With more than 600 members island-wide, The Sri Lanka India Society continually persists to strengthen the bond between the Sri Lankan and the Indian community. Activities such as 'Mahatma Gandhi Oration', 'Saathme Members Fellowship', 'T-20 cricket matches', 'Annual Family Day', 'Sthree Utsav 2012' and much more has already established the club as a dedicated society." as recently reported in the Media.

## INDIA AND ITS NEIGHBOURS

**Lecture by His Excellency Ambassador (Dr) Kanwal Sibal (Former Foreign Secretary of India)**

I think it is apposite that in Sri Lanka, which is a neighbouring country, I should speak on India's relations with its neighbours. I will speak from a perspective you may not be familiar with. I will be giving the subject a hard, unsentimental look, recognizing that the commandment "Love thy neighbour as thyself" elicits no obedience from the chancelleries of the world.



Before we talk of India and its neighbours we should have a clearer idea of what, in India's eyes, constitutes its neighbourhood. Should we look at India's neighbourhood strategically or geographically? If the first, then a case can be made out that India's neighbourhood encompasses the entire region from the Straits of Hormuz to the Straits of Malacca. This is India's security parameter. Developments in this region have a major impact on India. On the western side, six million Indians are employed in the Gulf, sending back almost \$35 billion as remittances. This region is the largest supplier of oil and gas to India. This area is the heart of Islam and influences and ideologies emanating from there impact on our immediate external environment and indeed the domestic scene to some extent. In any case, if India had not been divided in 1947, its western frontier would have extended to the Persian Gulf.

In the east, India's possession of the Andaman and Nicobar islands stretches our frontiers to the other choke-point. The Bay of Bengal has Bangladesh, Myanmar and Thailand as littoral countries. This stretch of the sea is our link to Southeast Asia and beyond. For buttressing our Look East policy this area is of vital importance. Apart from India forging bilateral ties with these countries, the security of the sea lanes of communication in an area where the only regional blue water navy is Indian devolves some special responsibilities on India.



If geography alone were to determine who our neighbours are, then Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Maldives constitute the core of our neighbourhood. Myanmar is a contiguous neighbour, but as we have conditioned ourselves over the years to view essentially the SAARC countries as our neighbours, Myanmar is lost sight of, despite its critical geographical location adjacent to our north-eastern states. Myanmar has applied for full membership in May 2008, but this has not been realized yet. However, with the rapid changes in the country, its opening up and the progressive removal of sanctions it has been subject to, its profile as India's neighbour will keep rising.

Afghanistan may not be a direct geographic neighbour today, but given the fact that we consider Pakistan's occupation of the northern areas in Jammu and Kashmir as illegal, we can in a sense treat it as one. In any case, with the inclusion of Afghanistan as a full member of SAARC, the political case for treating Afghanistan as an integral part of our neighbourhood stands reinforced.

What about China? With China's occupation of Tibet, that country has become our direct neighbour. The outstanding border issue between India and China constitutes a major Indian foreign policy problem, colouring our relationship with the world's foremost rising power. Moreover, in India's perception, China has adversely influenced India's relations with its South Asian neighbours. China therefore qualifies as India's most formidable neighbour, affecting India's role not only in the South Asian region, but in Asia as a whole, and even at the global level.

It goes without saying that the first priority in the foreign policy of any country is the management of relations with its neighbours. A stable neighbourhood strengthens a country's foreign policy posture, whereas an unstable and troubled neighbourhood saps its ability to act fully effectively on the international stage. The credibility of a country's regional and global posture is also undermined if it is seen as embroiled in disputes and conflicts with neighbours. The time and energy spent in controlling events in the immediate neighbourhood is at the cost of pursuing wider interests at the regional and global level.

While in theory the need to have a peaceful, stable and friendly neighbourhood is quite clear, what would that mean in practical terms? Can one have good relations with neighbours simply because that would be desirable in itself? Can one build such relations unilaterally? To what extent should one be willing to make concessions? Should one look for reciprocity or not? How far is it the responsibility primarily of the bigger country to make the requisite effort in forging positive relationships? Is a smaller country always right in its demands? Can a country demand or plead for extra consideration simply because it is smaller? Should it on that basis be entitled to a more sensitive treatment of its fears, vulnerabilities and even paranoia?

These are not the only issues that arise in any examination of the conditions in which neighbouring countries relate to each other. What about the role of third parties, of external actors? During the Cold War period, the competing powers had an incentive to extend their political and ideological reach to all corners of the globe. In that process relations between neighbours, who were pulled at times in different ideological directions, were distorted, adding to already existing tensions or misunderstandings. Today, in the age of globalisation, different pulls and pressures operate, and these could be helpful or harmful depending on circumstances.

The short point is that countries cannot act in their neighbourhood as they please depending on local advantages in power equations. Outside forces will be there to provide a counterbalance, either because a particular country might want to bring an external power into the neighbourhood to reduce the weight of a perceived regional hegemon, or external powers themselves, pushed by balance of power considerations, or policies of containment, may intrude into the region on their own and manipulate their local partners for larger strategic purposes.

Sections of Indian public opinion are acutely conscious of India's failure to stabilize its own neighbourhood. It is argued that India as the biggest country in the region has the primary responsibility for managing the regional environment. Often India is criticized for not being sufficiently generous to its neighbours, of hesitating to make unilateral concessions to them, which it is believed it can well afford to do. Such concessions are advocated especially on the economic side, the argument being that India as a huge economy can easily absorb the limited sacrifice that is expected of it, and in the process can attach the neighbouring economies to itself in a mutually beneficial manner. The stakes which develop because of this interdependence would theoretically make it difficult for governments to pursue adversarial policies beyond a certain point. Poor border management, failure to create proper border posts and customs infrastructure is viewed as another example of insensitivity to the need to facilitate relations with neighbours.

Such criticism overlooks many complexities. For one, India's capacity to order its neighbourhood in a manner congenial to its requirements is exaggerated. India did intervene in Sri Lanka in agreement with its government, but the experience left it chastened to the point that it rejected an intrusive role in Sri Lanka later as the ethnic conflict grew, even when other countries prompted it to take greater responsibility for steering the course of events there in the right direction. It abdicated playing the central role in the developments leading to the defeat of the LTTE, and it is to be seen how much constructive influence it can bring to bear in ensuring that the present



opportunity to settle the Tamil question equitably is not lost. India's intervention in the Maldives at the request of its government was more successful, but this cannot be construed as an attempt by India to shape its immediate environment to suit its needs, or a model for future interventions.

The intervention in East Pakistan and the armed conflicts with Pakistan fall in a different category. Pakistan's unrelenting hostility towards India, the resort by it to subversion, infiltration and use of armed force to settle the Kashmir issue in its favour lie at the root of India-Pakistan differences. In the case of Bangladesh, India withdrew its forces from there as per its engagement, did not intervene when anti-Indian forces took over power there and for decades pursued unfriendly policies towards India. In Nepal, India has not tried to prevent the rise to power of forces traditionally hostile to it. Indeed it attempted to contribute to the development of a stable Nepalese polity by facilitating the entry of the Maoists into democratic politics. India has neither the will nor the capacity to micromanage Nepal's internal affairs even though developments there seriously impinge on India's own security. All in all, India would like to believe that it is a benign and non-interfering neighbour, with elastic red lines because of a disinclination to resort to intimidation or seek confrontation.

India has been sensitive in handling the issue of democracy in its neighbourhood. Even as western democracies seek to impose democratic values on others and use instruments of moral reprobation and boycotts to coerce select non-democratic countries to reform their political systems, India has abjured such thinking. Its basic approach is to do business with whichever government is in power. Even as there is awareness that a truly democratic system in Pakistan, that limits the power of both the armed forces and extremist groups, would be beneficial to India-Pakistan ties, India has not sought to interfere in Pakistan's internal politics. On the contrary, it has willingly done serious business with Pakistan's military regimes, especially that of General Musharraf. Likewise in Bangladesh, India has never rejected serious engagement with the military regimes there. In the case of Myanmar, even at the cost of earning some diplomatic flak, India has sought to build close ties with it irrespective of the country's regime for reasons of overriding national interest. India will of course abide by legalities and UN sanctions against any country for transgression of norms, but participating in a crusade for democracy because of a sense of superior political values is not part of India's thinking about its neighbourhood and beyond. For India this is practical politics, shorn of the hypocrisy of those who promote democracy selectively and at lowest political and business cost to themselves.

India, despite its size and power, is, ironically, the country most targeted by terrorism from its own neighbourhood.

Although terrorism is now considered a global threat and the consensus that it should be fought collectively by the international community has been largely forged, India is still threatened by this menace as Pakistan, where the epicenter of terrorism lies, has not yet been summoned by the international community, acting through the UN, to eradicate it. The US and its allies want Pakistan to control terrorist activity directed at them in Afghanistan, and deal as well with domestic terrorism that threatens to impair Pakistan's capacity to support them. Terrorism directed at India remains a secondary western concern. Even US pressure, however, has not compelled Pakistan to break its links with the Haqqani group. The rise of religious extremism within Pakistan and the surrounding Islamic world, extending now to North Africa, is creating conditions for more jihadi violence. Pakistan's failure to take any substantive step in the last four years to try those responsible for the Mumbai terrorist attack and the unwillingness of its leadership to accept that terrorism remains a crucial outstanding issue in India-Pakistan relations, indicates that the nexus between the jihadi groups and political and military power centres in Pakistan will not be easily broken. India by itself lacks the capacity to coerce Pakistan to abjure terrorism as an instrument of state policy, especially as Pakistan now has the nuclear cover for its lawless activities. Pakistan sees the extremist religious forces that resort to terrorism as allies against India and potentially in the takeover of Afghanistan after the western forces depart.

Within the SAARC region, apart from the recognition by the Karzai government of Pakistan's sponsorship of terror, the other countries keep their political distance from the problem. Each of them, barring Bhutan, has interest in maintaining good ties with Pakistan for a mixture of motives that include leveraging Pakistan's hostility towards India to their own advantage, combining forces against the threat of Indian domination, putting constraints on India's freedom of action within the region, not to mention the need to politically manage their own Muslim communities. Pakistan of course has always had interest in undermining India's leadership role in South Asia. SAARC conventions on combatting terrorism have little meaning given Pakistan's complicity with terrorist groups. Pakistan in fact uses Nepal and Bangladesh as bases for infiltrating terrorists into India, or in the case of Bangladesh, using local extremists for targeting India, though with Sheikh Hasina's government in Bangladesh this activity has been greatly curtailed.

In my view, India's own internal weaknesses prevent it from exerting its weight decisively in its neighbourhood in pursuit of its legitimate national interests. India's internal thinking is divided, and on many sensitive issues there is no internal consensus. If India's neighbours are conscious of its intimidating size and power, there is also amongst them a lack of fear of India based on observance of its behaviour in the face of provocation. This, I believe, is not



the case with China which inspires fear and is therefore viewed differently, with the result that it can make its will prevail more easily. Even where India could be expected to uphold its interests forcefully, it avoids hard decisions. It is loth to retaliate except in extreme circumstances. Its legal, political and administrative system hampers it from taking decisions that are clearly in its own interest. This applies to the proper management of its open or porous borders, the large scale illegal immigration from Bangladesh into India etc. India's federal structure accounts for some of the inefficiencies in border management. A coherent and well coordinated centre-state level effort to deal with countries that are contiguous with particular Indian states is yet absent. Political interplay on the ground between some neighbouring countries and adjoining Indian states is a factor that needs attention. India's democratic polity, influenced heavily by electoral considerations, our self-absorption in our own myriad problems, the task of managing our vast territory and domestic inter-state issues etc, are other reasons why shaping an effective policy towards neighbours either does not have the necessary clarity or is not accorded the requisite priority.

In my thinking, the debate about unilateral concessions versus reciprocity is a bit besides the point in international relations. A big country has no less responsibility than a small one to legitimately maximize its own interests. No country can sustain a policy of making unilateral concessions. If the logic is accepted that it is for the bigger country to make concessions, then it could be argued that the US should base its international policies on making unilateral concessions to all. And so should China. India has tried a policy of unilateral concessions in the late 1980s and the early 1990s, but the results have been meagre. It is ultimately a question of pragmatism. If making a concession in one area can yield a return in another area, it should be made. In any case, reciprocity need not be confined to balanced exchanges in specified areas. If Nepal, for instance, had been more sensitive to India's security interests because of the open border, India could have been generous in areas of Nepal's interest. If Bangladesh, as is the case now, is more cooperative in dealing with anti-Indian insurgents seeking shelter on its territory, it would certainly make India more receptive to some of its demands on the commercial side. In fact this has already happened. What does India do in a situation in which Nepal has for years blocked any progress in implementing joint water resources projects, or Bangladesh has until now even refused to talk about according transit rights through its territory to north-eastern India or make a joint effort to promote energy security along with Myanmar?

Rather than look at such issues within the framework of bilateral relations between India and its neighbours, they should be looked at within the framework of SAARC. The problem of unilateralism or reciprocity disappears once the SAARC countries as a whole agree on terms of trade and economic exchanges. Unfortunately, Pakistan

right from the start worked to limit progress within SAARC so that its own policy of linking trade exchanges with India to a resolution of the Kashmir problem did not get undermined. For this reason, it did not adhere to its obligations to India under SAFTA. Indeed, because of Pakistan's obstructive policies economic integration in the SAARC area is poor. This situation is beginning to change with fruitful talks between India and Pakistan to enhance trade with each other. Pakistan has agreed in principle agreed to grant by the year-end MFN treatment that it has long denied to India. With the just concluded Commerce Secretary level talks substantive steps on the trade and investment front have been listed in the joint statement. This change in Pakistan's attitude has occurred not because of India's prodding but because of an internal assessment Pakistan has itself made on the advantages to it from expanded economic ties with India, given the dire economic straits Pakistan is in. Pakistan has not yet felt the same compulsions on terrorism and other differences with India and hence its negative political postures. Now that Afghanistan has joined SAARC, common sense would dictate that Pakistan accord transit rights through its territory to facilitate Afghanistan's trade with India as part of the process of stabilizing Afghanistan and giving its people economic opportunities so that they can, amongst other benefits, expand their legitimate economy and conditions are created for the reduction in size of the illegitimate drug based economy.

India, of course, physically dominates its neighbourhood. Most of its neighbours are very small in comparison, geographically, demographically and economically. Even Pakistan, the second largest country in South Asia, is less than 15% of India's size demographically and economically and is not too much more geographically. Beyond the disparity in size, India's neighbours share with it strong civilizational, cultural, linguistic and ethnic ties that are deeply rooted in history. Normally these bonds should have brought the countries of the India sub-continent closer together, being theoretically the building blocks of an enduring people to people relationship. But this has not happened for various reasons. For one, India's overwhelming civilizational influence makes the neighbouring countries feel insecure in their separate identities. As identity is a core constituent of a sense of nationhood, these countries want to foster it by consciously asserting their separate identity. A corollary of this is the projection of India as a threat and a hegemon. This serves the objective of the political classes in some of these countries to rally the people behind them, on a nationalistic basis, against India's "bullying" tactics.

The ethnic links, such as those of the Madhesis in the Terai in southern Nepal and the Sri Lankan Tamils with the Tamils in Tamilnadu, instead of being a human link between India and these countries, as is the case with the Indian diaspora abroad and their country of origin, is a source of tensions. These sections of the population



are not as yet fully integrated into the societies in which they live and suffer from disabilities. They are either suspected for their extra-territorial loyalties or are seen as instruments of Indian influence, or the sympathy and support they receive from groups in India create an atmosphere of distrust in bilateral relations.

From the viewpoint of India's South Asian neighbours real politic would demand that they try to balance India's weight by bringing into play external powers. This with the objective of giving themselves greater margin of manoeuvre vis-a-vis India, extorting more concessions from it than would be the case otherwise, not to mention making themselves more eligible for economic and military assistance from powers wanting to check-mate India's rise or imposing costs on India for not following policies congenial to their interests.

Pakistan has, of course, in its obsessive pursuit of "parity" with India and a pathological refusal to accept any status of inferiority vis-a-vis it, has been most instrumental in facilitating the entry of outside powers in the sub-continent. As against India's nonaligned choice during the Cold War, Pakistan chose to join all possible US-led military blocks against "communism". In the process it obtained massive amounts of military aid from the US, which then emboldened it to pursue its Kashmir agenda through use of force. After the 1962 India-China conflict, Pakistan saw an opportunity to use China to counter India, even as its relationship with the western block continued. Pakistan and China, in their common hostility against India, forged what is today "an all weather friendship" between them. From India's viewpoint, the Pakistan-China nexus has sought, with notable success, to permanently neutralize India strategically by transfers of nuclear weapon and missile technology to Pakistan. Significantly, this has been with US complaisance, as the US too has been intent to promote a strategic balance between India and Pakistan in the mistaken belief that this is needed to ensure peace and stability in South Asia. Today China is Pakistan's biggest defence supplier. The US too has not stopped supplying advanced arms to Pakistan as part of its policy to obtain the cooperation of the country's military to help combat the insurgency in Afghanistan. With the US more and more cognizant of Pakistan's duplicity on the terrorism front, tensions in US-Pakistan relations are palpable and Pakistan's support for the US in Afghanistan now a question mark.

The US policy of hyphenating India and Pakistan was decisively abandoned by the Bush Administration in its approach to the nuclear equation in South Asia, though the US thought it necessary to balance its leaning towards India by elevating Pakistan to the status of a "non-NATO ally". With the change of Administration in the US and the Afghanistan morass in which it is caught, Pakistan had found more room to leverage US dependence on it for its operations in Afghanistan to question the legitimacy of India's presence and policies in Afghanistan, not to

mention press it to extract some concessions from India on making progress on outstanding India-Pakistan issues without Pakistan being required to move credibly on the issue of terrorism directed against India from its soil. This has now changed, with the US openly supporting a stronger Indian political and economic role in Afghanistan, as well as in military training. India was the first country with which Afghanistan signed a Strategic Partnership Agreement. In Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, Indian and US policies have converged far more than was the case in the past, with the result that the governments of these countries are no longer able to leverage India-US differences as before to counter the Indian weight.

China, with its increased political, economic and military weight, continues its policies to counter what one of its commentators described as India's hegemonist policies vis-a-vis its neighbours. It continues to deepen its strategic relations with Pakistan, with current activity in the nuclear field, major road and power projects in POK and the development of Gwadar port. In Afghanistan China is investing heavily in the mineral sector. It might end up supporting an opening to the Taliban as part of its policy to strengthen Pakistan's strategic presence there as an insurance for the local stakes it is developing, though the latest developments indicate that China may now be less certain about relying on Pakistan to consolidate its interests in Afghanistan. Geopolitics, however, dictate close China-Pakistan cooperation in Afghanistan.

In Nepal, China is becoming more assertive in demanding that it be given equal treatment with India, one example of which is to ask for its Friendship Treaty with Nepal to match the one with India. With the Maoists now a powerful political force in Nepal, and given their ideological compulsion to be seen as drawing Nepal closer to China, coupled with their periodic criticism calculated to inflame public opinion against India, the political terrain has become more favourable for China to expand and deepen its presence and influence in Nepal. This can only make India's task in handling Nepal more difficult. Beyond this, the political and social turmoil in Nepal, with all its internal fractures becoming sharper, will continue to cause India serious political headaches. India cannot afford to be indifferent to developments in Nepal because of its common border with Tibet in the north, the open border with India, the need to prevent the development of links between the India Maoists and their ideological compatriots in Nepal, not to mention the utilization of Nepal by Pakistan as another base for the anti-Indian activities of the ISI. At the same time, India cannot be seen as openly interfering in Nepal's internal affairs. Anti-Indian elements in Nepal are ever ready to pick up and exaggerate any perceived interference with a view to distorting public perceptions of India's policy

China's position in Bangladesh is entrenched. Even the friendly government of Sheikh Hasina would see it in its



interest to maintain close ties with China for the many benefits it can derive from that, including giving India an incentive to woo Bangladesh more. China has earned the gratitude of the Sri Lankan government by supplying it arms that helped in defeating the LTTE militarily. Sri Lanka, along with Myanmar, Bangladesh and Maldives, are, in India's eyes, targets for the naval ambitions of China in the Indian Ocean area to protect its vital lines of communication through these waters. The so-called "string of pearls" strategy involving construction of new port facilities in these countries may have commercial goals in view in the short term but is likely to have military goals in the longer term perspective. To promote these objectives China is bound to step up further its engagement with these countries, especially with increasing material means at its disposal, posing further challenges to India's equities in its neighbourhood. India follows closely China's initiatives in Sri Lanka on the economic and military front, including the visit this month of the Chinese Defence Minister to Sri Lanka, the first such visit ever. He seems to have emphasized that the Chinese Army's efforts in conducting friendly exchanges and cooperation with its counterparts in the region are intended for maintaining regional security and stability and do not target any third party.

China has, of course, every right to take dispositions in the Indian Ocean area to protect its trade and energy flows. The countries with which China is cooperating are independent, sovereign countries and have economic and investment plans of their own to which China with its vast financial resources can contribute. Ultimately, for India's neighbours, it is a question of political judgment how far they should be cognizant of India's concerns and how to balance sometimes different pulls so that they do not become platforms for tensions because of the divergent interests of external partners.

One can broadly conclude that India will not be able to shape its immediate environment optimally for itself in the foreseeable future. Unless Pakistan is ready to genuinely end its politics of confrontation with India, an integral part of which is the over-assertion of its Islamic identity, its propagation of the jihadi mentality, its nurturing of extremist religious groups involved in terrorism, and the political domination of the military in the governance of the country, the SAARC region will remain under stress. An India-Pakistan reconciliation will of course change the dynamics internally in South Asia and of the region's engagement with the rest of the world. The role of external powers in the region will also get substantially modified. Pakistan remains a convenient instrument for others, especially China, to constrain India's rapid rise as a competing power.

Afghanistan presents potential problems of a grave nature. If the extremist religious forces ultimately win there, the strategic space for these obscurantist elements will expand

enormously, with the risk of a seriously adverse fall-out in the region that has either other Islamic countries or large populations of Muslim faith living in non-Muslim countries. A triumphant radical Islamic ideology can be destabilizing for the religiously composite societies of South Asia. Pressure on India from these forces would grow. The increasing Talibanisation of Pakistan would be most deleterious for the South Asian environment.

The prospects for a border settlement with China remain distant. China has, on the contrary, added to tensions by making aggressive claims on Arunachal Pradesh. India has been compelled to begin upgrading its military infrastructure in the north in the face of mounting Chinese intransigence on the border issue. It is ironical that the 1993 and the 1996 agreements on maintaining peace and CBMs are now compelling India to expend large resources to improve its defensive positions on the border because of China's rhetoric. With Chinese actions in the East China Sea and South China Sea, India has to be even more on the alert. China's hardened posture towards the Dalai Lama and Tibet cannot but retard a resolution of India-China issues. China, meanwhile, continues to build up Pakistan against India. It is quite likely that China's pressure on Arunachal Pradesh is intended to deter India from taking advantage of a Pakistan currently in disarray. The tactical alliance between India and China on climate change and WTO issues should not obscure the deeper sources of India-China problems. It must be said though that both sides have managed to prevent their differences from erupting into military confrontation. No bullet has actually been fired on the India-China border since 1967. China has become India's biggest trade partner in goods, which is a remarkable development.

The political drift in Nepal portends continuing instability therewith all its deleterious consequences for the economy. India has to play its role without getting embroiled in domestic controversies to the extent possible, though traditionally anti-Indian forces there would continue to propagate the canard of overbearing Indian interference in Nepal's internal affairs. The development of Nepal's energy resources can re-shape Nepal's economy and its relations with India, but the history of failed attempts to do so in the past suggests caution in expecting a breakthrough.

With the Sheikh Hasina government in power in Bangladesh India's relations with that country seem set to improve. Bangladesh is showing an unprecedented willingness to deny safe havens to anti-India insurgents and discuss transit issues. If it opens up doors for Indian investments in the country the economic issues in the bilateral relationship can be addressed to mutual advantage. Bangladesh can play a positive part in linking the eastern region of South Asia to Myanmar, Thailand and beyond. A solution has to be found, however, to the problem of illegal Bangladeshi migration into India.



The commencement of a dialogue between the US and the Myanmar junta validates India's policy towards that country. If the US has woken up to the danger of leaving China to consolidate its hold over Myanmar, it is all to the good. Here again, India cannot prevent Myanmar from developing close links with its neighbour China. How far it should move in that direction and lose its capacity to manoeuvre is for the Myanmar government to decide. So long as India-China relations are not normalized, India will always have concerns about strategic encirclement. In Myanmar, India needs to implement its assistance projects, especially the multi-modal transport ones, without further delay. We have to contend with China's much more purposeful approach in strengthening its strategic presence in our neighbourhood, including using Myanmar's ports for increasing its presence in the Indian Ocean area.

India's very cordial relations with the Maldives need to be nurtured, especially in view of the attention it is receiving from China at the highest level. The spreading piracy in the South Eastern Indian Ocean also makes Maldives more central in combatting this menace. Maldives is gripped with domestic political turmoil, placing India in a delicate position of being invited to intervene in favour of a duly elected government and hesitating to get embroiled in internal political rivalries. In Sri Lanka, the heady feeling of triumph at eliminating the LTTE needs tempering in the view of many partners of Sri Lanka and a permanent solution that the Tamils can live with needs to be encouraged by discreet external prodding.

Bhutan has been the only real success story in terms of India's relations with its neighbours. Bhutan has border differences with China. It has kept its distance from Pakistan and the great powers as well, giving them little scope for interfering in its relations with India. This underscores the point that good relations between India and its neighbours depend not only on wise policies on our side, but, equally, the pursuit of wise policies by our partners, with Pakistan and China and other external interests not allowed to upset the building of positive equations to mutual advantage.

I will conclude with a few remarks on India-Sri Lanka relations. Many of the complexities that I have mentioned earlier in my speech apply to Sri Lanka too, quite naturally. Unlike in the case of Pakistan and Bangladesh where our relations are only a few decades old as these countries did not exist in history, **our ties with Sri Lanka are age-old, with a rich historical legacy of intellectual, cultural, religious and linguistic intercourse.**

Our relationship has been burdened in recent years by the Tamilian issue. We have, I believe, handled it as well as we could from at our end. Despite the sensitivities in

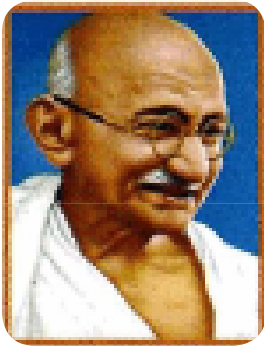
some quarters in Tamilnadu, we have supported Sri Lanka on the issue of terrorism. We have been both principled and practical. We did not oppose non-regional countries, whether Norway or Japan etc, to help resolve the conflict earlier through negotiations. By this we showed that **we did not consider countries in South Asia as part of our parish.**

**As a neighbouring country we cannot ignore what is happening in Sri Lanka if developments here have a political impact in India.** On the one hand, India must not intervene in Sri Lanka's internal affairs; on the other, if they impact on India's internal affairs, a case for a dialogue opens up with a view to helping find constructive solutions.

The nearly three-decade long armed conflict between Sri Lankan forces and the LTTE came to an end in May 2009. **While supporting the Sri Lankan government's right to act against terrorist forces, we did, however, as was necessary given the political considerations involved, conveyed our concern about the plight of the mostly Tamil civilian population, emphasizing that their rights and welfare should not get amalgamated with hostilities against the LTTE.** The armed conflict created a major humanitarian challenge, with nearly 300,000 Tamil civilians housed in camps for Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). With the cooperation of the Sri Lankan government, the Government of India put in place a robust programme of assistance to help these IDPs return to normal life as quickly as possible. This includes relief and rehabilitation as well as reconstruction and development, including housing requirements of the IDPs, revival of the local economy of the affected areas and renewal of infrastructure there.

**India does reiterate at the highest levels the need for national reconciliation through a political settlement of the ethnic issue.** We have always favoured a negotiated settlement acceptable to all communities within the framework of a united Sri Lanka which is consistent with democracy, pluralism and respect for human rights. The Sri Lankan government assures us that political proposals building on the 13th Amendment to the Constitution will be discussed with the Tamil leadership of the country.

**I think the element of time is important.** With three and a half years having elapsed since the military conflict issues got resolved, a solution to the political issues remains pending. Whether the level of statesmanship required to deal with complex issues in a longer term perspective will be forthcoming or whether shorter term calculations of political advantage will dictate policy remains to be seen. Democratic governments are always generous with their own people, and no polity can be stable without mutual trust between its various sections. This is the challenge Sri Lanka faces.



# MAHATHMA AND HIS RELEVANCE TODAY

Mahatma Gandhi Oration delivered under the auspices of the Society by Deshamanya Radhika Coomaraswamy (FORMER UNDER SECRETARY GENERAL OF UNITED NATIONS (UN) AND SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE OF THE UN SECRETARY GENERAL ON CHILDREN AND ARMED CONFLICT) on Tuesday 30<sup>th</sup> October 2012 at 5.30 p.m. at INDIAN CULTURAL CENTRE, Chief Guest was His Excellency Ashok. K. Kantha (HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR INDIA IN SRI LANKA)



In November last year the New York Metropolitan Opera showcased its production of Gandhi- an opera by Philip Glass on Mahatma Gandhi's struggle in South Africa. Though there were mixed reviews about Glass's western classical rendition of the Bhagavad Gita, the Met's opera production was quite extraordinary. Every time the opera was performed, there was a small group of protestors from the Occupy Wall Street movement seated outside the Opera House repeating Gandhian slogans that they felt had relevance to their struggle. Since they were denied the use of loudspeakers, they just repeated what the main speaker had to say in a loud chorus. Even in those cold autumn days in a weary New York City, hard hit by the financial crisis, the Mahatma was remembered. **His message will have a continuing relevance for all those who wish to change or transform society through the power of non violence.**

In recent years the Mahatma has been receiving a bad press. Biographies and films have revealed that perhaps the Mahatma had a more unusual private life and a more complex family life than earlier imagined. These stories must come out and Gandhi must be judged only after we know the whole truth about him but his message to the world will continue to thrive despite his own personal shortcomings. This message which exalts non violence as a means as well as an end and which asks that politics be based on Sat or truth is a universal message that has found resonance in diverse cultures. His belief that sacrifice and moral action releases the forces of good, enabling transformation of self and society is summed up in the term satyagraha, a foundational belief of his political movement. It questioned the practice among politicians and government officials alike that politics is about manipulation and realist preoccupation with a balance of power. His ideas of non violence, of not humiliating the enemy, of social justice and of self sacrifice have inspired successive generations. It is a philosophy that values human beings and bases human interaction in a bond of mutual self respect.

My childhood was full of stories of the Mahatma, whether it was from a grand uncle who spent time in

Shanthiniketan or a grandfather who was ambassador in India just after independence or from the countless intellectuals in India and Sri Lanka who were touched by the Indian National movement and came to dominate our national firmament. But it was only after I became Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women and the UN Special Representative on Children and Armed Conflict that the words of the Mahatma, especially his intolerance for violence, have a special resonance for me. Having been to some of the major centres of conflict in the world one often yearns for the healing presence of the old man in a loin cloth walking with his staff where abuse and violence remain unchallenged.

In reading the Sri Lankan newspapers I am often struck by the casual attitude with which our commentators deal with violence. The abstract theorizing, the focus on concepts over actual suffering, the debates over technical numbers over the pain of individuals, these are disturbing trends, symbolic of a community that may have lost its sensitivity to the suffering of people.

I have seen first hand what violence during war does to women and children. There was a young boy named Moi whom I met in Northern Uganda. He was playing with his friend when the Lords Resistance Army came into his village and kidnapped both of them, while making them carry looted goods on their heads. His friend tripped and fell and was shot on the spot. Moi was beaten into submission, given drugs, trained to kill and taken to attack the very villages where his family and friends lived. He finally escaped. He was a broken boy of fifteen when I met him, awaiting a father who was scared of a combatant son and was hesitant to bring him back home. He began his conversation with me like a hard warrior but at the end he looked down and wept like the child he was.

I can tell you about Eva, a young girl of thirteen whom I met in the Democratic Republic of Congo, who was walking to school when the FDLR kidnapped her. The Hutu warriors thought she was a Tutsi child. She was kept



in a state of forced nudity,, made to do to domestic work and be a sex slave to the combatants. She also escaped and was taken to the famous Panzi hospital by a kind truck driver. They found she was pregnant and when I met her she was carrying her baby who was nearly half her size. I will never forget her eyes.

We don't have to go to Africa- here in Asia- I met Aisha in Afghanistan- a young girl whose house was bombed as part of aerial bombardment- the so called collateral damage we read about- where she lost family members. After that her school was attacked by the Taliban and some of her teachers were killed. But like Malala, from Pakistan this young girl was not giving up. She was determined to go back to school and become a teacher. I can also tell stories of young boys in internally displaced camps in Dafur who at the age of ten or twelve are recruited to be child soldiers because they are hungry and have nothing to do, or the countless numbers of children I have met who have lost an arm or a leg because they have stepped on or picked up landmines. When nations, groups and politicians decide to go to war, this is the kind of suffering that may be unleashed on the most vulnerable. These are the faces behind collateral damage, the victims of the end justifies the means, and the sticking point for the argument that we should focus on the greater good.

These stories of war make abstract theorizing about violence very difficult. When one focuses on the victim, there is almost a moral absolutism. But not everyone agrees. There have been many who feel that violence is often important and necessary. Gandhi himself was killed by one such individual. Nathiruman Godse who assassinated Gandhi was not a mad man. Ashis Nandy has written extensively on this. Godse had a different vision of India to Gandhi, a vision of an imperial India as a virile, powerful, masculine nation that would not hesitate to use force when needed or perhaps even when not needed. . Gandhi was subverting his ideal with what Asihs Nandy called his effeminate version of a non violent India. Gandhi's model of the Indian ascetic, gentle, simple and righteous clashed with the warrior version of Godse's India. The world is full of ideologies and individuals like Godse who value militarized societies and authoritarian leaders, who see repression as a necessary tool of governance.; who value a country's worth by the size of its military arsenal and its people by the nature of their obedience. These states and leaders may use violence as a first resort even against their own population. Their actions are based on an image of masculinity that is at ease with the use of violence and a vision of a nation state that maximizes political and military power.

Besides ultra nationalists like Godse, there have been other leading theorists who have celebrated the use of violence. For Frantz Fanon one of Africa's leading anti colonial thinkers, violence was an act of empowerment, of expiation and a rite of passage. In the struggle against an oppressor he felt violence was the only way to gain self respect and to fight psychological repression. Violence as a character building exercise is present in many warrior epics. The notion that violence is a rite of passage, that which makes children into adults, is present in the rituals and practices of many of our societies. These ideas may have served us well in the era of dynastic and warring societies and some may argue in early colonial struggles but do they have any relevance for building modern democracies in the age of the internet. These left over values that bring suffering to civilian populations everywhere still condition our responses to many situations. Fanon is particularly attractive to the type of young men in Sri Lanka who waged an insurrection in the north as well as two insurrections in the South of the country. They found resonance in his teachings about self respect. Yet the theorists who celebrate violence rarely think of the consequences. They often believe that violence used according to their theory will be a surgical strike. Violence never is. It is messy, often killing and destroying the most unintended victims. Those who implement these theories quickly become immune to the brutality.

When you speak to civilian victims of violence the first thing you notice is that they prefer silence. I have encountered this often- they are speechless and even if they speak they usually only narrate the before and the after. As Valentine Daniel has written in Charred Lullabies the experience of violence can never really be communicated. It is so intense that no matter how you write it up the survivor is never satisfied. The silence is also the reason why there is such a high suicide rate among some victims of violence. Veena Das' touching portrayal of Shanthi who took her life after the Delhi riots gives you a sense of the pain that civilian victims of violence suffer.

Harvard University has also done a lot of research in post war Sierra Leone among women and children including child soldiers. Ten years after the war, there is a great deal of resilience and many people are getting on with their lives. But those who were victims of terrible violence or those who have had to perpetrate terrible acts of violence still suffer crippling symptoms and many continue to need medical intervention.

It is not only the victim who is transformed by violence it is also the perpetrator. Valentine Daniel quotes a trainer in one of the Tamil militant camps, "you can tell a new



recruit from his eyes. Once he kills his eyes change. There is an innocence that is gone. They become, focused, intense, like in a trance." That trance like state often leads to excess and if not strictly controlled by military discipline can lead to terrible acts of violence against the civilian population especially women.

These studies on violence that I have spoken about focusing on the victims make the use of force seem like an unthinkable option. But we also live in a morally complex world. There is one argument that even the greatest defenders of non violence find difficult to answer. What do you do about Adolph Hitler.? If a monster appears on the horizon, is bullying and killing those around you and is refusing to compromise- what do you do? Gandhi's initial response would have been to deal with the root causes that created the monster in the first place. He always listened to find the reason for the violence. He would have tried to begin a dialogue, make moral appeals through fasts and other acts of civil disobedience. But what if all these attempts fail?

It is interesting to note that Gandhi never went against the British war effort in World War II. He did not support it but he did not vehemently oppose it like Subhas Chandra Bose and others. Gandhi may have argued that there is never a case for war but he did highlight Yuddhishtira's words in the Mahabharata. After losing game after game because of loaded dice Yuddhishtira replied to the entreaties from his brothers by saying- before I put my people through a terrible war I must make sure that I have exhausted every opportunity to make peace.

I had occasion to contemplate the moral dilemmas associated with the legitimate use of force recently. Joseph Kony of the Lords Resistance Army was the one who abducted Moi and countless other children. He kidnapped children, beat them, gang raped the girls, terrorized them, injected them with drugs and sent them to kill family and friends. I was asked if I would join a campaign to request military action by the African Union against him and his commanders in Oboe in the jungles of the Central African Republic. All attempts of bringing him to a negotiating table had failed and all moral appeals had fallen on deaf ears. I was disturbed because I did not want to support military action and many of the soldiers of the LRA were children. I was also aware that countless more children in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo and South Sudan would be abducted and raped unless action was taken. Grace a young girl who was abducted from her high school in Northern Uganda, who had been gang raped by the LRA commanders and made to fight but who escaped, went back to school and graduated from university had become one of my closest advisors.

She urged the UN to support such action to spare the children and save her friends.

Finally after hours of discussion with Ugandan military leaders who were spearheading this pan African effort we agreed to support military action. I had to compromise my Gandhian principles but the priority seemed the need to save the children. We agreed that any military action must have as its centerpiece the protection of civilians and the rescue of children. Was this a slippery slope- once we agree to military action is there no turning back? I hope not. Kony was so horrendous and so uncompromising that there was no option. Perhaps we cannot be Gandhian absolutists in practice but his spirit should guide us and I felt the emphasis on the protection of civilians could be a compromise with the Gandhian legacy. Such an emphasis would minimize the costs so evocatively portrayed by those who work with victims of violence.

I think, as more fanatical leaders emerge in different parts of the world preying on vulnerable populations, the work of the International Committee of the Red Cross, the Geneva Conventions and the ICC acquire more and more significance. Any military action no matter how justified must respect the principle of distinction- civilians must be protected and only combatants attacked and civilian objects especially schools and hospitals must be spared- and we must respect the principle of proportionality- only proportional, reasonable force should be used. We can debate the how when and why of individual cases but these principles must remain cast in stone,. If non violence is not an option, then the protection of civilians must be our guide.

**With all this talk of violence and non violence - what is the relevance of the Gandhian message for us today in South Asia and Sri Lanka..** Let me begin with Indian foreign policy- now that I have the ear of the High Commissioner. For years on the global stage India has followed a low key foreign policy keeping in line with non alignment. However, I realized in recent years, that as India emerges as a global power there are great expectations. The time is opportune for India to rethink its global role, to accept its new found prominence and define a vision of the world as it would like to see the future. In crafting this vision, its Gandhian antecedents should play a prominent part. India like South Africa is well placed to combine a struggle for global equality and fair play with a struggle for human rights. At the moment we have a division of the world between the west who, despite a colonial past, see themselves as custodians of human rights even though it often smacks of double standards and others who try to combine fierce anti colonial rhetoric with the most Machiavellian of global



strategies. The triumph of Gandhi was that he combined anti colonialism with a honest critique of Indian rituals and practices that debased his religion whether it was caste or child widows. The world is waiting for a leader of opinion from the third world to fight against global inequalities but who will also not tolerate human rights abuses within the third world. India, along with South Africa, is well placed to be that leader. South Block must reinvent itself and go back to reading Gandhi. It will result in the true transformation of the global polity if India is true to the vision of its founding father.

For us Sri Lankans, after a protracted north east war and two southern insurrections the words of Gandhi may seem faint and even irrelevant. All the more important that we relearn his message. Both those insurrections as violent as they were had root causes and the Sri Lankan state has to take some responsibility for not dealing with these causes and for the direct and indirect violence that resulted. During the 1990s I was a member of the Youth Commission that went around the country interviewing young people during the second JVP insurrection. The word we kept hearing was "Asardhanaya" loosely translated as unfairness, discrimination or abuse. Northern youth spoke similarly though their perceptions of what constituted injustice was different and based on their experience. And yet, those presently in control of the state do not seem to have learnt the lesson- that discrimination, abuse of power, arbitrary use of force and blatant thuggery have consequences, that violence begets violence- as Gandhi would have said. If rulers ruled in an inclusive way, stating they will govern in a manner so that no-one would feel so excluded as to want to take up arms, then we may indeed escape the cycle of violence. That would be the real path way to reconciliation. A situation where everyone feels ownership of the state that represents them. A lack of respect for diversity, impunity for grave crimes, tolerance of violence and triumphantalism will only polarize an already deeply divided polity. Generosity toward minorities and dedication to the rule of law is the need of the hour. **Our present leaders may wish to look to Gandhi and other such leaders on how we can establish a society based on mutual self respect in the aftermath of a terrible war. But my sense is that we are not there yet and that we have not learnt the bitter lessons of the past.**

It is not only the state that must turn inward. Even if there is discrimination, repression and abuse in a society, the nature of the resistance is often as important as the cause itself. When violence began to dominate Sri Lankan Tamil politics, we lost our way and the path to Mullaivaikkal was inevitable. And what did we gain? Jaffna that once had the highest physical quality of life

index after Colombo now has one of the worst. More than half the population has fled to other parts of the country or gone overseas. A large part of the population is psychologically traumatized by what they have seen over the period of the war. Large plots of land have been occupied by the state or the military. I hope at least the leaders of the Tamil community and Tamil politicians have learnt this lesson. When they turned their backs on Gandhi, they brought untold suffering to their people. Tamil grievances are still to be addressed but the politics of gaining recognition must be inspired by leaders such as Gandhi. Tamil political leaders often used non violence to generate support in their areas but when it came to the Sinhalese they only dealt with the main politicians. The time may be ripe for them to reach out to the Sinhalese people themselves as well as their social and religious leaders to forge an inclusive politics that is based on a moral vision of what is right and just. **I have great faith in the young people of Sri Lanka who have been spared the baggage that many of us carry. It is time to reach out to them and hope that they will lead the way to a better future.**

Finally I will confess that supporting the Mahatma at all times is not easy. I went to Gaza right after Operation Cast Lead by the Israeli Defense Forces. The destruction was monumental. Children kept drawing helicopters and tanks attacking houses and people. I was with a Palestinian youth group where with rhetorical flourish after rhetorical flourish they spoke of vengeance, of becoming martyrs for the cause of vindicating what was done to them. I asked them whether they ever thought of non violence. They were incredulous. I told them the story of Mahatma Gandhi. They shouted me down. They would have none of it. Some even left the room saying I was insulting the martyrs that had died for the cause. In a post September 11<sup>th</sup> world the teachings of the Mahatma sometime seem quaint and out of place.

Then I think of the old monk I met at the Schwedegon Buddhist Pagoda in Myanmar some years ago. Being Sri Lankan he took me into a special private room to worship the emerald Buddha. I was honoured by that privilege. He told me that he was brought up in India and that he was a follower of Mahatma Gandhi and that he often took part in civil disobedience and protests against the government at great risk to himself and his fellow priests. He then complained that the UN was doing nothing for Myanmar. I gave him a bureaucratic response not knowing what to say. Then he said "even if you do not help us we will be free, Burma will be free... non violence will prevail..." I thought he was a dreamer then but now often wonder what he must be doing and feeling. Thank you.

(Please see pages 15 and 16 also)

## Saathme 2012 - Members Fellowship on 25. 11. 2012

Several members have appreciated and acclaimed this event and thanked the organising committee for a wonderful evening



H. E High Commissioner being felicitated



Shri Kumaran (Deputy High Commissioner) and Mrs. Kumaran being felicitated



Raffle draw in progress

## Mahatma Gandhi Oration on 30.10.2012



Prayers in Silence



Dr. Radhika Coomaraswamy lighting the Lamp

## Mahatma Gandhi Oration (Cont.)



H.E. High Commissioner garlanding the Statue of Mahatma Gandhi.



President SLIS is making his welcome address



Dr. Radhika Coomaraswamy addresses



Cultural Programme



Secretary SLIS proposes Vote of Thanks



Children of Sakthi Illam sing



Miss. Divya Sivanesan being felicitated by H.E. High Commissioner

To make the next issue more colourful and informative we welcome your comments and suggestions for inclusion

- Editor