

Launch of the Book
“Rajapakse the Sinhala Selfie”
authored by Kusal Perera

along with Sinhala Collections of Essays by him
“83 Daruwo” edited by Krishan Siriwardene

at the Sri Lanka Foundation Institute
100, Sri Lanka Foundation Avenue, Torrington
Colombo 07

at 4 pm on 12th September 2017

Guest speaker’s address

Guru Brahma.....

Mr.Kusal Perera, Mr.Krishan Siriwardene and my dear brothers and sisters!

It gives me immense pleasure to be involved in this book launch. Apart from Kusal being a friend of ours who was kind enough to accompany us to meet the Mahanayake Thero last weekend, the book launched by him is also about a friend of his who is Rajapakse the Sinhala Selfie. A selfie takes our own photograph. When Mahinda Rajapakse takes one he sees not Rajapakse but a Sinhala man. What sort of Sinhala man is he, is what Kusal talks about in his book.

In his Preface Kusal says as follows about Mahinda – “In Mahinda I thus found a very easy friend who agreed often and rarely disagreed. In fact he never disagreed possibly for its own convenience”

That is an apt description of Mahinda Rajapakse. Despite a lot of objections from my own quarters, I had taken Oaths before him on the 7th of October 2013 as

Chief Minister of Northern Province. He was so friendly. Then on 2nd of January 2014, I went and met him at his official residence. He was full of charm. I had about ten requests including the replacement of the Military Governor whose term was coming to an end. I said there was no necessity for a Military person to be the Governor and wanted him to replace the incumbent Governor with a Civilian. Mahinda was quite impressive. “Of course we must change” he said. “But let him wait till July this year when his period of office comes to an end. Thereafter I will appoint a Civilian” he said. In fact he had asked for the names of possible suitable replacements and I had given some names too.

When July came he gave a further extension to the selfsame Governor with the Military background conveniently forgetting his undertaking to me. I believe none of the ten requests made by me were fulfilled even though he studiously undertook to look into them favorably. Such is the Sinhala Selfie. He says something having another idea in his mind. Prevarication is his forte.

There is another important observation Kusal makes in his Preface, That is that the Tamil Diaspora never read right and failed to understand the political implications of the word “Terrorism”. There has been a serious shift in global politics after New York’s 9/11 tragedy during the time of George Bush Junior which made US Intelligence and State Officials to classify and label all armed politics as terrorism or equivalents of “Al Qaeda”. Rajapakse had capitalized on that calling the Tamil Militants as Terrorists equivalent to Al Qaeda. Incidentally yesterday was the 16th anniversary of the 2001 event.

Even now I find certain sections of the media refer to the Tamil Militants as Extremists and Terrorists. In the Global arena all acts of Militancy on the part of

the Tamil youth are referred to as Terrorist activities. To that extent Mahinda had transformed a local political military agitation into a global phenomenon.

It is about this Mahinda the Sinhala Selfie that today's Book is all about. There are questions being asked why Wigneswaran should lend his support to the launching of a Book on Mahinda Rajapakse. There is also a whispering conversation thus – “Sambandan is courting Mahinda – Is Wigneswaran providing the flowers?”

Frankly I first accepted the invitation of my friend Kusal Perera to be present at his Book Launch. It was thereafter that I tried to find out what the Book was about.

Having seen a paragraph at the tail end of the Book I thought why not.

Let me quote that paragraph verbatim –

“The brutality with which this whole war was waged by the Rajapaksa regime can never be underscored and can never be justified. Its brutality was not limited to the North –East only. Was never limited to persecuting the Tamil people only, though they were the most ruthlessly hounded. This war waged by the Rajapaksa regime dismantled the long standing democratic structures of the whole society and has overturned social values. It has totally violated democratic and human rights of the people. Has throttled media freedom and coerced all media to obey its dictates. It has paved the way for a politico military regime that no longer represents the elected government and is not responsible to the people. It has eroded the sovereignty of the people with an intimidating social psyche, in the name of eliminating Tamil “terrorism”.

With the contents of that paragraph one cannot disagree. Under the guise of eliminating Tamil terrorism Mahinda Rajapakse paved the way for a politico Military regime. While Mahinda was politically elected a petrol bunk worker in the

US was called in to provide and lead the Military regime which was not responsible to the people. No doubt such action eroded the sovereignty of the people.

Far from providing the flowers to Mr.Sambandan to woo Mahinda, I am trying to arm myself with the brickbats needed at the appropriate time. It is a trite saying that the villain gains popularity sooner than the hero. But it is not popularity; it is notoriousness.

It is the notoriety of Mahinda that is for sale today authored by Kusal Perera not an eulogy. Hence I am not on the same wave length as Mr.Sambandan.

One of the positive observations about the LTTE mentioned by Kusal in his book should not go unreported. This was something that used to perplex me. He gives his remarks which make sense. Let me refer to the relevant paragraph.

“The story that made rounds and the UNP stalwarts kept saying is that former Parliamentarian Tiran Alles negotiated a deal on behalf of Rajapaksa for the boycott of elections. One Emil Kanthan of the LTTE, it is said, was the contact. I tend to believe that, that may have been a different business deal Tiran Alles negotiated with Kanthan that was for political reasons tinkered into the LTTE boycott”.

He goes on to say this – **“Personally I don't believe a person like Emil Kanthan can be profiled as a capable and a valid "contact" to play middleman for any "agreement" with Prabhakaran and the LTTE leadership on an election boycott. There were better and more capable men if need be, who frequented Colombo meeting diverse people to solicit support for their own relief and livelihood projects. The LTTE political wing and peace secretariat head Pulidevan was one among such few. He could have been a more trustworthy**

contact for a political compromise with the LTTE if the Rajapakses wanted any. Yet I doubt very much, Prabhakaran would have gambled on his politico military future, on bundles of money sent from Colombo by one whose fate depended on how people vote”.

Kusal states elsewhere that “Tamil Diaspora's stubborn incapacity to read global politics after 9/11, allowed them to assume, their international campaign could have UN intervention in establishing an autonomous "Thamil State" in the North-East. For which they thought, they needed a hard line Sinhala Buddhist leader as President in Colombo, who would not agree to anything more than the presently dwarfed 13th Amendment. That was the reason why the LTTE went on a boycott. The popular reading even before the presidential election was declared said the Tamil people, at least the larger majority of them would vote for Wickramasinghe, at least to continue with the cease fire”.

In other words the LTTE wanted Mahinda Rajapakse at the helm of affairs for what might have been to their benefit.

Kusal was close to the Rajapakse family. More so to Mahinda himself. Yet he wrote an open letter on the eve of the election on 13th November 2015 to Mahinda concluding *“I therefore will not vote for you as that would amount to hanging the fate of this country by a shawl”*

He observes **“Huge corruption amounting to plunder, nepotism and constitutional authoritarianism with the war winning military projected as “War Heroes” was the hallmark of his rule”**. He said **“I have thus called his rule a kleptocracy”**. What that meant was Mahinda used his power to steal our Country’s resources.

Kusal's book which I had little time to read in full has a few plus points. He knew personally the central character of his book. He was and is in the midst of the growth of Sinhala populism around this man Mahinda Rajapakse whom he knew so well. But what he regrets in this book is that Mahinda's populism extended into extreme and violent ethno religious presence in Sri Lankan politics.

In this book Kusal traces Mahinda's ancestry, his absorption into the orbit of Sinhala Nationalism, his entry into SLFP politics and so on. Then he discusses the steps already taken before Mahinda took over the reins of power to discriminate against the Tamils more specially the Tamil students in the form of standardization to neutralize the superior performance of Tamil medium students in Science Subjects.

He goes on to state **“Thus the consolidation of the Sinhala Buddhist State was achieved through numerous, complex and politically manipulated means over almost 03 decades. Every such intervention in turn strengthened the Sinhala social psyche and made the two leading political parties compete for Sinhala votes in gaining political power at every election. (Unquote)** This is a major reason why the Tamil problem has not been solved by any party so far. Actually it is so simple to solve the problems of the Northern Province and Eastern Province Tamil speaking people. Recognize their individuality and draft constitutional provisions accordingly and this country could immediately take off towards peace, reconciliation and economic regeneration.

Then he refers to a statement by my colleague at Royal College and friend Dr.Nihal Jayawickreme in a speech by him at the birth centenary of Dr. Colvin R de Silva on 1/3/2008 which is enlightening regarding the 1972 and 1978 constitutions, which were constitutions that the then political parties wanted for

their politics and not constitutions which looked into the problems and grievances of the people. It runs thus **“If I may sum up, I do not think there was any philosophy underlying either of the republican constitutions. They merely reflected the policies of the political parties under whose auspices they were drafted; or perhaps more accurately, the imperatives of the two leaders whose personalities dominated the drafting processes. Dr Colvin R. de Silva and the Lanka Sama Samaja Party probably saw in the overwhelming majority which the United Front received in the 1970 general election, the opportunity to introduce and implement his and its long held political beliefs, and wished to do so without obstruction from any quarter, whether it be the public service, the judiciary, or the more moderate-minded prime minister. The tragedy was that in doing so, the constituent assembly failed to hear or recognize the voice of the North, expressed so clearly at the same general election”**. (unquote) The other drafter Nihal mentioned was **Dr.H.W.Jayewardena** who was responsible for the 1978 constitution.

Referring to the 1972 constitution Dr.Jayawickreme was quoted as saying **“the basic Resolutions upon which the 1972 Constitution was drafted, rested “completely in accord with the United Front and Government policy”, and not on public accord, as acceded by Dr. Colvin R de Silva, the architect of that constitution”**. Thus Dr. Jayawickrama says, it took away (1) the second chamber, which was intended to serve the minorities (2) independent Public Service Commission, intended to guarantee strict impartiality in all matters affecting public service appointments (3) Judicial Service Commission, intended to guarantee the independence and integrity of the judiciary (4) nominated members in the legislature, intended to represent unrepresented interests (5) judicial review of legislation and (6) prohibition on

discriminatory legislation contained in section 29, which the Privy Council had described as representing “the solemn balance of rights between the citizens of Ceylon: the fundamental conditions on which inter se the Tamil leaders accepted the Constitution”, and are therefore politically unalterable under the Constitution”.

I like to refer to a four point note submitted by the Federal Party to the Constituent Assembly which is referred to by the author next. **It runs thus “A four point note submitted to the Constituent Assembly by the FP led Tamil representation requesting the new constitution to (1) provide equal constitutional status for Tamil language as Sinhala language (2) establish a secular State (3) decentralise governing structures and (4) grant citizenship without discrimination to all Tamil plantation sector workers, was also rejected by the UF representation in the Constituent Assembly including LSSP and CP leaderships. Therefore, the new Constitution that turned Ceylon into a “sovereign and independent Republic” called Sri Lanka, firmly centralised the State as a unitary Sinhala Buddhist State, beneath the words, “sovereign and independent”. And, far worse was their negation of ethnic identities and that by a leading Leftist minister, a one time Marxist scholar who stood for “two languages and a single country”, to lump every one together as Sri Lankan “citizens”. Politics of this UF government therefore laid the basis for the radicalising of Tamil youth, but also made the most democratic, decent and peace loving of all Tamil leaders loved by the Tamil people to seek an alternative to his most cherished dream of living in a single united country. He, "Thanthai" Chelva sought political refuge in a separate "Thamil State" and resigned from his parliamentary seat, Kankasanthurai (KKS) in 1972 October. Chelvanayagam, "SJV" in popular politics, said he would challenge**

the '72 Republican Constitution at a by election to prove the Tamil people did not accept it. The UF government led by Madam Bandaranayake kept postponing the bye -election. This led to more frustration among Tamil people and for the first time in 1973 at ITAK's 12th convention held in Mallakam, serious discussions ensued on the feasibility of a "Separate Thamil State".

“The UF leadership finally decided to have the KKS by election in February 1974. Chelvanayagam romped home with a massive voter support that topped 72.55 per cent of the total polled. Highest ever in post independent parliamentary elections to date. The UF government fielded the CP leader in Jaffna, V. Ponnambalam and he polled 26.46 per cent only. This election was just 02 years before Thanthai Chelva, the "father figure" in Tamil Nationalist politics bade farewell to the world after 33 years of very active, democratic politics. Three years before that and 30 years after active and hectic but democratic Tamil politics, he was compelled by the Sinhala leaders to accept a "Separate Thamil State" as the only answer to the political grievances of the Tamil people to live with dignity”.

"I wish to announce to my people and to the country that I consider the verdict at this election as a mandate that the Tamil Eelam nation should exercise the sovereignty already vested in the Tamil people and become free" he said in a public statement accepting victory at the bye - election.

This clearly explains what happened. Coming from a Sinhalese Journalist though he does not consider himself a Sinhalese but a humane being, the reference to what took place in an impartial manner should be taken note of by our die hard Sinhala so called nationalists. Many matters which I would have wanted to bring to your notice, Kusal has referred to in his book. If I refer to them I might be called an

extremist or a rabble rouser. I doubt such epithets being used against Kusal. But what both of us are trying to say is the truth and nothing but the truth.

It is not my intention to take you through the whole book which I have not finished reading. But it is useful for the general public to remember the political antics of the past which gave rise to the present impasse in this country which matters I have cursorily referred to from Kusal's Book.

It is a timely publication. Though it refers to Mahinda the Sinhala Selfie, the book is full of historical facts of the recent past which traces the steps that led to the armed rebellion. The call for a free Tamil Nation came not from Prabakaran but Chevanayagam first.

In this scenario Mahinda's part is aptly referred to in the last paragraph of the Book.

Thus two and a half years without Mahinda remains as much 'Rajapaksa' as it was before. And that for me is the most that can be written here on how the Sinhala factor with Mahinda remains unchallenged yet. And it would remain so with no alternatives discussed for a plural and a secular society, democracy remaining procedural and not functional.

Eric Metaxas, the American Author, Speaker and Radio Host said "With the tools of democracy, democracy was murdered and lawlessness made 'legal'. Raw power ruled, and its only real goal was to destroy all other powers besides itself."

Most appropriate quote by Kusal to what happened during Mahinda Rajapakse's reign.

Before I conclude let me refer to the meetings with the High Priests of Malwatte and Asgiriya last weekend. The two High Priests are personifications of contrary characteristics. I am sure Mahinda would find himself closer in spirit to Asgiriya rather than Malwatte.

The latter welcomed us cordially. The former was officious. One is not sure whether the Karaka Sabha constricts the Venerable Asgiriya Prelate's freedom.

The Malwatte Priest was humane and interested in alleviating the sufferings of the people. The Asgiriya Karaka Sabha members who would not allow me personal audience with the High Priest but made sure all of them sat at a higher pedestal while I and my group sat at cushions placed in lower positions, were interested in projecting their Sinhala Buddhist sentiments. They appeared conceited and almost offensively self assertive.

They had made up their mind that federalism is separation. I did point out to them that a recent Supreme Court judgment had confirmed that federalism is not separation and it is a way to bring disparate units together. I pointed out it was the Kandyan elite who first opted for federalism before the British Commissioners in 1930-1940. The Kandyans had said that they wished to protect their individuality by opting for federalism. The Asgiriya Priest did not appear convinced. If we could get past the veil of hardline arrogance of the Asgiriya Priests I am sure we could solve the political problems of this Country soon. They seem to be a very powerful section among the Sinhala Buddhists. To that extent ours was a useful fact finding visit.

I have always said that I like to meet the so called hardliners among the Sinhala Buddhists. In the Members of the Karaka Sabha I found some of them. I have

confidence that we could if given time, wean them from their hardline stance to transform them to become humanes like the Matwatte Priest,

After all their arrogance is artificial. It is based on false beliefs, wrong presumptions and distorted perceptions. Once the truth is stated or is recognized they would return to their real fundamental Buddhistic base which is understanding and love, not hatred and suspiration

I thank you for your patient hearing. I thank Kusal for inviting me to be with all of you today. Thanks.

Justice C.V.Wigneswaran
Chief Minister
Northern Province