

features

Terrorism, local cinema and treason

POINT OF VIEW

By Rear Admiral Sarath Weerasekera

"Terrorism" is generally defined as "unleashing violence on civilians/destroying public property, to achieve a political objective". The terrorists in our country, categorised as the "most ruthless terrorist organisation in the world", have resorted to terrorism to separate the motherland. They "justify" their acts in the eyes of the international community by painting a black image of the "Sinhalese state" implying that they cannot expect any redress from a nation which doesn't have any moral values and whose soldiers are a bunch of thugs with no discipline. The only objective of this heinous propaganda is to inform the world that there is no alternative other than a "Separate state" to address their grievances. They portray themselves as "freedom fighters" trying to "free" the Tamils from the "clutches" of the "barbaric" Sinhalese.

The terrorists who justify their cause as above, in order to establish Eelam, brutally massacre the innocent in unguarded villages and cause immense destruction to public property. Another section engage in a heinous campaign to tarnish the image of the "Sinhalese" nation, culture, Sinhalese soldier, the soldier's wife and the Buddhist monk and support the deplorable terrorists international propaganda launched against the Sinhalese.

The people, after more than two decades of experiencing terrorism, are not "infants" not to understand the above. If any citizen pretends not to know this "reality", he is an ignominious cynic/nihilist. If someone is not aware of the reality even after two decades, he is a moron. If anyone, knowing this reality, supports the terrorists to achieve its objective wittingly, he/she definitely is a contemptuous traitor.

The terrorists are aware of the great advantage of utilizing a "Sinhalese" to tarnish the image of "Sinhalese nation" in the eyes of the international community. Some Sinhalese who fall prey to terrorists either willingly to through sheer ignorance, write articles critical of the Sinhalese in international magazines/papers, speak in favour of the terrorists at

international seminars/conferences, and others produce films based on the theme of "War in Sri Lanka" depicting the "Sinhalese soldier" as an undisciplined moron. When screened in international forums, it helps to create some sort of sympathy towards the so called "freedom fighters" who fight against such a "nasty" people. The terrorists make thousands of copies of such films, produced by "Sinhalese", and distribute worldwide.

In Asoka Handagama's *Me Mage Sandai* film, the Sinhalese soldier is depicted as an indisciplined, untrained stupid who rapes a Tamil girl coming into his bunker seeking refuge. A soldier's wife sleeps with another man whilst her dead husband's pyre is still burning! Here the village culture has been totally distorted, and the Buddhist monk is also depicted as an indisciplined morose who copulates with the same destitute Tamil girl.

What would the international community, watching this film carrying English sub titles, think of our Arya Sanga, specially when the film is created by a person who pretends to be a "Sinhalese Buddhist"? Would not, this type of scenes tend to create sympathy in the mind of the viewers towards the "freedom fighters" who fight to rescue the Tamils from the clutches of such "barbaric soldiers/monks"? The question is whether Handagama, who is an accomplished artist, was actually aware of this aspect of his film.

The above film won an award at the Delhi film festival. Tears came to my eyes when I read an Indian newspaper on the following day which carried a caption on the festival as follows. "All the films submitted to this festival were of very high standard. Through these films one can easily get a thorough understanding about the geographical settings, the culture, and the type of people living in the respective countries." Was the culture depicted in this film actually true? Definitely not. There are no women in Sinhalese culture who copulate with other men whilst her husband's body is still in the house! Those women live only in someone's mind and not in any "civilised" society. The "theme" of the film is "war in Sri



A scene from *Sulanga Enu Pinisa*

Lanka", it goes berserk to disgrace the Sinhalese soldier and his wife but there is deadly absence of at least one scene/event which is detrimental to the terrorists cause.

Vimukthi Jayasundara's *Sulanga Enu Pinisa* was also of the same category. Most of the local film critics have confirmed that the geographical settings of the film is far from reality and mostly a blatant distortion of the real situation that exists in a so called "border" village in Sri Lanka. Vimukthi has depicted the innocent Sinhalese village woman as a sex starved prostitute and ironically not spared even the pregnant woman in the process. He has portrayed the Sinhalese soldiers as an undisciplined bunch of ruffians with no code of conduct. The army detachment receives portrayal as a drunken party using cannabis, resorting to adultery and torture. The personal lives of the villagers as a whole has been highly denigrated. A pregnant woman is ravished for sensation before the audience on the low bough of a tree. A young actress (soldier's wife) is also ravished against a tree. A tiny little girl, 8 years, unwittingly savours semen below a wall graffiti. A grey haired elder takes a mid-night bath with frontal nudity. It can be a cinematic master piece technically but what is the message it conveys?

The "objective" of the terrorists

international propaganda is to demean the Sinhalese and the Sinhalese soldier and it perfectly matches with the scenes Vimukthi unfolds on the screen. The question is whether the above mentioned divorce from reality in the film was due to the director's genuine unfamiliarity with the real ground situation or due to his enthusiasm to display his cinematic eloquence forgetting everything else or, whether it is a part of a diabolical propaganda campaign against the Sinhalese by the terrorists?

The "New York Times", about the film, says "here the men and women drift through life as if they were ghosts and the casualties of the civil war hangs over them like a curse". So this is how Vimukthi has portrayed the motherland which fights terrorists; "a forsaken land", "a land of frantic coupling", and when the people in Sri Lanka rejected it (I know many parents/couples who watched the film walked out of the hall in the interval) Vimukthi says the Sri Lankan audience is immature and has a poor understanding of art!

The film may be a work of sophistication and cinematic eloquence but what is the message it gives to the world? Or is the message or the theme not important?, of course it is. The "theme" of the film is "War in Sri Lanka" and Vimukthi says most of the Sri Lankan viewers judge complex

art on a superficial level and unable to comprehend its deep meaning. The mistake Vimukthi has done was that he has judged the "war" on a superficial level because the war in our country is not a conventional one or a hostile conflict between two nations but a war against terrorism.

War has to be condemned but not the war against underworld, rapists, killers and terrorists. Our war is war against terrorism and that too is destructive but if it is stopped it brings victory for terrorists.

What was the hidden message in Vimukthi's film? The war is uncalled for, people suffer, moral degradation, etc. and the Sinhalese soldier is a moron and the Sinhalese have no values. What has he implied? Justification of terrorists acts and war should be stopped at any cost, even when the terrorists are on the rampage killing not only Sinhalese but also Muslims and Tamils! The terrorists continue to kill and if the war is stopped it is a silk road to Eelam and is it what Vimukthi wants? I am sure Vimukthi, being only 27 years, did not know "that" deep meaning/message he unwittingly convey to the world through his film, which, as per the reports, is now been featured at more than 800 hundred film festivals with thousand copies in circulation worldwide!

A director must be careful when he selects a "theme" con-

cerning an important national problem. "Freedom in art" is not a licence can be used as a bed-sheet to cover the ignominious aspects revealing from such has creation.

If people leave the cinema hall with contemptuous feeling after seeing a film, no matter what the deep meaning it has, it is not an "artistic creation" but a garbage dump. People do not dig into garbage dumps to find whether there are any valuables inside, unless they are beggars.

An artist should respect the human and moral values in the society. An accomplished artist, always engages in an aesthetic attempt to bring out the humaneness/humility etc even whilst presenting the most unpleasant. The true artist always exercises great restraint/caution when it comes to the breach of accepted social moral values to when it has implications on national security in a time of national crisis. A patriotic artist does not consider them as imposing restrictions on his creativity. That is the morality of the artist.

As citizens of the country we are all duty bound to protect the motherland. If the final outcome of the war against the terrorists (who try to divide the country) has an impact on the entire nation, everyone except the terrorists and their sympathizers must contribute towards the success of the war. Soldiers contribute directly by fighting the enemy. The majority of the people in the country work hard, increase production, pay taxes and indirectly contribute towards the success of the war by supporting the economy of the country.

How should the cinema artistes contribute? In other countries, under similar situations, the artistes contribute by creating films boosting the morale of the troops and lifting the national image.

But in our country, under the circumstances, if someone makes a film where the soldier and his wife are scoffed at, the Sinhalese culture is disgraced and the nation as a whole is denigrated, is he a patriot or a traitor? We appeal to Vimukthi, who is a young talented artist, to consider above when he create his next "master piece".