

The war, black cinema and morale of the soldier

By Rear Admiral Sarath Weerasekera

Everyone knows that war is destructive. In war people die, property is destroyed and the economy of the country is shattered. No further details are required for any decent person to understand the true nature of war.

Terrorism is the major national problem the country faces today. Although the present Cease Fire Agreement has stopped the war temporarily, the cease-fire has to culminate either in permanent peace or again in war. If the terrorists do not compromise, show flexibility in their demands and insist on a separate state, the government has to wage war to preserve the sovereignty and the territorial integrity of the country. For, if not, the terrorists would achieve their objective.

The decision to wage war is taken by the politician and the fighting is done by the soldier. The soldier is supposed to protect the nation and every citizen of the country, including artistes like Handagama & Mahadivulweva. Peace is desired by everyone and it is the soldier who treasures it most as he is the person who directly experiences the agony of war. If the soldier is well trained, properly equipped and has high morale it would deter the enemy from taking the initiative to wage war against the government. Hence in peace time the soldier prepares for war and deters the enemy and in war he fights the enemy to defeat him and bring back peace to the country. Therefore the soldier's contribution towards peace is comparatively greater than most of the different categories of men in society.

When the soldier fights to ensure security to the nation he does it by sacrificing his own life, causing immense pain and worry to his family. Under the circumstances the soldier deserves respect from the public.

What is implied by respecting the soldier is not that he should be saluted whenever you see him on the road, but to generate a feeling of regard by seeing him as a person who protects the nation / people. That type of feeling can be generated only in patriotic hearts who love the motherland. Such people, under any circumstances, do not insult the servicemen or engage in any work detrimental to the morale of the troops. Any patriotic citizen who is cognizant

of the threat the country is facing today with regards to national integrity, naturally behaves in such a manner.

Rabindranath Tagore, the world renowned writer and poet once said that in a national crisis, even artistes must show patriotism in their respective work. But what is the service rendered, specially by the cinema artistes, towards addressing this national problem? There have been a handful of films based on war and in all these films one could observe a deliberate attempt to tarnish the image of the soldier, his wife and Sinhalese culture as a whole. This is very surprising, especially when considering the role played by artistes in other countries, to boost the morale of the soldier during crucial times.

Well-known film critic Tissa Premasiri has written that, cinema should not be an attempt to show only the misery of life but be an aesthetic endeavour to bring out the much treasured human aspect too. In my opinion, films based on war, love and affection for the soldier should also be included in the said humanity aspect, so that a respectable or a dignified picture of a soldier is drawn in the mind of the spectator, at the end of the movie.

However, on the contrary, today what we see in the so called films on war is quite the opposite. "Me Mage Sandai" a film by Asoka Handagama begins with a scene of a morose looking Sinhalese soldier raping a Tamil woman inside a bunker. This film which received the Presidential award merely for winning an international award, throughout shows how the people in a village in Sri Lanka engage in sexual intercourse like cats and dogs, inside bushes and under the trees. It shows how a soldier lights a cigarette from the burning pyre of a dead soldier and how the widow of the dead soldier passionately embraces another man, even before the flames of her dead husband's pyre have died. Is this the reality?

This film, which also shows how a Buddhist monk throws away his robes and elopes with the Tamil girl, can be considered a despicable exercise to disgrace the soldier, soldier's wife, Sinhala culture and the Buddhist monk. What is the impression the international community gets about our motherland when seeing this film? Isn't it supporting the diabolical false propaganda campaign being carried out by the terrorists



A scene from Me Mage Sandai

against the Sinhalese? By showing an indiscipline Sinhalese soldier raping an innocent Tamil girl in a bunker and Sinhalese society as people with no moral values, doesn't it help the terrorist propaganda and indirectly justify taking up arms by the so called freedom fighters, in the eyes of the world?

In Mahadivulweva's film "Sudu, Kalu Saha Alu" it shows how the soldier's wife sleeps with a ruffian because the soldier cannot take leave to come home. It is unfortunate to note that the very first thing that comes to the mind of these directors whenever the subject of war comes up is the soldier's wife, and she as a nymphomaniac who always tries to entice the man next door to have sex with her whilst her husband is away on duty. This film too has let down the soldier very badly. Mahadivulweva also tries to show that, any hardcore criminal can become a monk merely by shaving his head and putting on a robe and that the villagers are an illiterate bunch of riff-raffs who accept any person as a monk.

It is also observed that these directors who only show the miserable aspects of war often deviate from the "reality" in trying to prove their point of view. I wish to challenge Asoka Handagama to try and light a cigar from the burning pyre of a soldier who has made the supreme sacrifice for the motherland.

In Indian cinema, it can be considered reality if it shows how a widow of an dead Indian soldier jumps into the husband's pyre and commits suicide, because "Sati" had been a custom in India. But I am sure, the type of widows who copulate with other men whilst their husband's pyre is still alight, live only in Handagama's mind. However, the grave insult Handagama has cast upon the entire community of soldier wives cannot be simply ignored and it is up to those ladies to do the needful in that regard.

It is worthwhile to ask Mahadivulweva, who is of the opinion that even a moron who looks after buffaloes can join the present day army, whether he is aware of wives who have lost their soldier husbands just after marriage? These noble ladies, knowing that their husbands would never return, still live a dignified life, preserving chastity and dignity of the family and engaging in meritorious activities.

I do not know whether Vimukthi Jayasundara knows that there are distinguished young Sinhalese girls who willingly marry the soldiers wounded in action and disabled, and even sacrifice their entire youth looking after their husbands? I would like to ask Prasanna Vithanage whether he has ever thought of the state of mind of the officer who goes to break the news to the parents, of a sailor son who has been blown up at

sea. It would be interesting to ask all these four directors as to why the Indian directors, in their films on war, always try to promote national pride, and depict the bravery of soldiers and never to date have tried to show how a Indian soldier's wife sleeps with a lecher in Bombay whilst her husband fights for the nation in Kashmir? Is it because none of the wives of the million strong Indian Army goes astray, or that these directors lack the professional ability to reveal the reality of war, or that they do not possess the required artistic instinct to comprehend the sexual frustration experienced by Indian soldiers' wives or is it because of the devotion and respect they have for their brothers who sacrifice their entire life, including family life, to protect their motherland?

Today the war is a national problem and hence in my opinion, anyone who makes a film on war must exercise utmost care. Everyone knows the destructive nature of war. Any individual can make any number of films on war showing direct/indirect impact on the society, social life etc. But through such films, if the services of the troops, are condemned or if the soldier and his wife are scoffed at, and if the potential youth in the country are discouraged from joining the services, then it is time to raise objections.

There had been a few weak protests in the past regarding these kinds of films but the relevant directors have been adamant that no one should attempt to lay down "conditions" on them. However, the funny thing is that all those who are ever ready to show the collapse of the social fabric due to war have'todate not attempted to create anything showing the agony of the Tamil society, under the hand of the terrorists.

One must try to find out the reason why these great humanists haven't created a single film so far showing how Tamil fathers get brutally assaulted when they try to prevent their children being snatched away from their homes or the lamenting Tamil mothers who peep into all the vehicles passing through Muhamalai roadblock to find out whether their children, abducted the previous day are being taken or about the innocent boutique owners who unable to pay taxes to the terrorists commit suicide.

There have been many films/ tele dramas on the massacre of innocent Tamils during July 83. But nothing has been done on the subsequent cold blooded massacres perpetrated by the terrorists at Aranthalawa, Dollar and Kent farm, Kitual, Othuwa Aluth oya, Sri Maha Bodi, Kaththankudi etc.

Today the soldier contributes immensely towards peace.

Therefore the main aim of the terrorists, specially during this period, is to engage in various nefarious activities to lower the morale of the troops, in order to break the ceasefire with an added advantage.

Hence if there is a film on war and it scoffs at the soldier, insults his wife and tends to demoralize the soldier, such films indirectly contribute towards fulfilling the terrorists' objectives. If someone does it wilfully, then it amounts to treason and should be dealt with severely. If done through ignorance, we ask them not to repeat it and request them to handle the soldier and his wife at least with a little respect and also engage in an aesthetic attempt to appreciate the services of the soldier in order to generate a feeling of respect towards him.

That is the least they could do as patriotic citizens.