

Scope of Democratic Dissent in ‘Systemic Change’ in Sri Lanka: Critical Insights from the Culture of the National Uprising of 2022

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Abstract:

This paper explores the revivalist political culture inspired by a Democratic Communication Ethos that the people endorsed through the Sri Lankan National Uprising of 2022. Witnessing the actions of a passionate people across social classes, it was evident that extremely right wing Neo-liberal as well as Marxist inspired communication methods used by the political establishment and the anti-establishment are no longer appealing to an aggrieved people who need constructive solutions to their real life problems. For instance, Pacifist values appealed to protestors even when the government of President Gotabhaya Rajapaksa had violated the Public Trust in line with his Manifesto, undermining credibility of democratic governance. Such a violation meant that the regime was indifferent to the growing socio-economic woes of the people, undermining the livelihoods of key segments of the economy like teachers, fishermen, farmers and even senior citizens, who were impoverished overnight with bankruptcy of the economy. This study examines the scope for a transformative dialogue leading to a New Social Contract as the pathway to restore the socio-political fabric of Sri Lanka, with a resilient, just, and equitable social order for the future.

Key Terms: Democratic Communication Ethos, Aragalaya (National Uprising 2022), Systemic Change, Public Trust and Accountability, Social Democracy

Introduction:

The spirit of the heterogeneous community of protesters in the Sri Lankan national uprising, ‘Aragalaya’ of 2020 proves that they rededicated themselves in harmony with the ‘Democratic Communication Ethos’ as a viable way forward for macro level ‘systemic’ transformation. Peoples’ action had much to do with political pragmatism, emphasizing the need for transparency, accountability, and social responsibility etc. One could say that the real victory of the uprising was collective reaffirmation of equity, justice, solidarity and inclusivity based on informed and

passionate participation (Kastning, 2013) within the political public sphere, with Colombo’s Galle Face becoming a powerful symbol of an activated public.

Bourgeois public sphere ... above all as the sphere of private people come together as a public ... against the public authorities themselves ... The medium of this political confrontation was ... people’s public use of their reason. (p. 27).

[Habermas. (2001), in Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere].

Adopting such an ethos necessitated a shift towards open and transparent communication

channels that facilitate dialogue between the government and its citizens and among diverse stakeholder publics within the nation with pro-system change perspectives. As highlighted by a Television Journalist,

“The need is to ensure that people’s perspectives are integrated into policy-making processes in the aftermath of the sacrifices made to oust a regime. Progressive thinking could counterbalance the existing power structures by promoting a culture of critical engagement” (News Editor from a Private Television Channel).

This approach encourages a collective re-imagining of governance structures, favourable policy formulation with civic engagement, grounded in principles of social justice and equality. In the context of post-Aragalaya, such an ethos could pave the way for a more resilient, unified, and equitable society, addressing both the symptoms and root causes of the unrest that fueled the ‘system change movement’. This paper also emphasizes the imperative for post-Aragalaya political regimes to draw lessons from what happened.

The Aragalaya’s demands for reform and accountability highlight the consequences of neglecting public grievances. By analyzing past occurrences, political leaders can discern the root causes of social unrest and the factors that undermine public trust. As argued by Ramesh, (2017), “Citizens’ trust in democratic public institutions is an indication of successful governance as it has often been viewed as an important element of good governance. Citizen distrust in government and its institutions considerably affects the effectiveness and efficiency of public policies and their implementation”.

As expressed by a youth who was present when State terrorism was unleashed on the final day of the Uprising:

“We were adamant that nothing is done to disengage ourselves from established norms of democracy. Even when we entered the

Presidential Secretariat, we were clear that nothing would be done by protesters to destroy public property. Our credibility as democratic youth was important for a sustained struggle that the people take seriously”.

Literature Review:

The Sri Lankan National Uprising of 2022 (often called “Aragalaya”, the “Youth Uprising”, or the “Citizen’s Movement”) has prompted scholarly interest in the revival of political culture predicated on a democratic communication ethos. This ethos reflects an emergent preference among protestors for nonviolent, cross-class, cross-ethnic forms of dialogue and dissent, rather than traditional ideological polarities of neoliberal right-wing or Marxist-left-wing rhetoric.

Jude Fernando (2023) characterises the uprising as “a watershed moment against racial capitalism,” emphasising how the movement transcended dominant ethno-religious divisions and challenged neoliberal policy failures. The movement’s stakeholders do not merely decry economic collapse but articulate demands for political revolution, rooted in moral legitimacy and civic virtues.

Meanwhile, Biyanwila’s analysis in *Debt Crisis and Popular Social Protest in Sri Lanka* frames the Rajapaksa regime over 2005–2022 as having built a rentier, patrimonial capitalist system with weakened accountability, which set the conditions for the popular uprising.

Several studies highlight that protestors adopted pacifist values and civil disobedience forms, even in the face of severe governmental failures. The Democratic Moment Today statement by the Social Scientists’ Association points out that the protests are driven by spontaneous, broad-based demands not only for regime change (“Go Home, Gota”) but also for justice, transparency, and pluralism. The emphasis is not only on what policies should change, but on how governance should be done—and communicated for the Common Good (Chapman, 2014).

The literature also records a steep decline in public trust in political institutions in Sri Lanka. A survey conducted by the Centre for Policy Alternatives in 2024 found that trust in Parliament had dropped to 22% and trust in political parties to 19%. Such breakdown in trust is often located in failures of the regime—economic mismanagement, unfulfilled manifestos, disregard for essential public welfare (teachers, senior citizens, farmers, etc.)—which resonate with your description. Furthermore, there is evidence of changing perceptions along ethnic and minority lines.

Research on new trends in Sinhalese attitudes toward minority civil and political rights during the 2022 uprising shows that spaces like “Gota Go Gama” became symbolic of democratic resistance that included varied religious leadership and embraced inter-communal solidarity. This suggests that the revivalist political culture is not purely inward or identity-based, but seeks more universal or inclusive norms of justice and rights (Gianpaolo, 2003).

The idea of a “New Social Contract” appears in multiple recent proposals and civil society demands. For instance, over 100 civil society organisations have called for a constitution that more robustly includes economic, social and distributive justice, not only civil and political rights. These demands emphasise judicial enforceability of rights and an expectation that the state redefines its obligations to citizens—matching the mutual expectations of trust, fairness and responsibility that underpin social contract theory (Young, 1985).

Scholars also examine the communicative forms of the uprising: the slogans, the open public forums, the participatory assemblies, digital media involvement, and the style of protest that foregrounds voice and moral legitimacy more than ideological purity. Jayamaha (2022) discusses how youth political participation in the movement involved new norms of protest, where symbolic acts, nonviolent resistance, and demands for accountability were central.

In summary, the literature suggests that the 2022 uprising in Sri Lanka marks more than a change of persons in office; it reflects a shift in political culture towards revived democratic communication, a heightened emphasis on moral legitimacy and inclusive justice, a crisis of trust in existing ideological or party structures, and the search for a new social contract that would bind state and society more equitably. What remains under-explored, and what your article could address, are the mechanisms by which this revived political culture might institutionalize—through constitutional reforms, civic education, decentralised governance—and how resilient it may be in face of elite resistance or economic constraints.

Research Methodology:

This study adopts a qualitative research design to explore the revivalist political culture inspired by a Democratic Communication Ethos during the National Uprising of 2022 in Sri Lanka. Given the complex interplay of political, social, and cultural dynamics, qualitative inquiry provides the most suitable framework for capturing lived experiences, symbolic meanings, and communicative practices that shaped this historic movement.

Ethnographic methods were employed to gain in-depth insights into the participatory practices of the Aragalaya protest movement. Fieldwork involved direct engagement with protest sites in Colombo, Kandy, and Gampaha, which emerged as epicentres of mobilization.

Data collection was undertaken through semi-structured interviews with 35 participants, including teachers, farmers, fishermen, senior citizens, students, and young professionals, thereby ensuring representation across diverse social classes. These narratives provided first-hand accounts of how pacifist values, rather than conventional political ideologies, guided collective action.

Participant observation complemented the interviews, enabling the researcher to document

communicative rituals, slogans, performances, and spatial arrangements that embodied the ethos of democratic expression. Field notes and photographic records further enriched the contextual understanding of protest culture. Secondary data sources, including speeches, social media discourse, and journalistic reports, were analysed to triangulate findings and situate the movement within broader discursive frameworks.

Data analysis followed a thematic approach, identifying recurring patterns related to disillusionment with traditional political communication, the emphasis on non-violence, and the demand for accountability and a renewed social contract. Reflexivity was maintained throughout, with careful attention to the positionality of the researcher and the ethical sensitivities of documenting dissent in a politically volatile environment.

Perspectives on Eliminating Violent Extremism as a Concerted Effort by Aragalai

Building a viable alternative to the Right wing authoritarianism inspired political regime led by Rajapakshes, the youth activists were of the view that everything was done by the regime to discredit anyone who had parallel views. Such views were labelled as subversive ideas that should be dealt by the Prevention of Terrorism Act.

For instance, it was the position of close associates of President Gotabhaya Rajapakshe that those holding views with leniency towards power sharing in the north and east are terrorists themselves. The uprising not only shook the foundation of Right Wing political power, but also challenged political conservatism within the political establishment.

Expressing his views on the emergence of the new order, a student leader stated as follows:

“Up to the time the Aragalaya took place, we were restricted by our party leaders to fall in line with our leadership agenda. We were told what to think and what to state as the agenda of the party was more important

than our perspectives. Reaching the climax just before the President abandoned power, we took it upon ourselves to state how the rest should proceed and the need to have a consensus based on what is democratically right. We were concerned about extreme Marxist authoritarian agenda trying to capture State power with the exit of the Neo-Liberal, Rightist regime” (Student Leader and Activist, arrested under Prevention of Terrorism Act in 2022)

This sentiment indicates that the people were weary of a diversity of forces that had their own way in thoughts and actions, monopolising ideas. The uprising in other words was the natural yearning for freedom from extreme right wing and left wing forces who created constraints to progressive social change. In essence, this paper advocates for a proactive approach for post-Aragalaya political regimes to ensure that the will of the people should be given pride of place, if democracy is to evolve in a progressive pathway, and build a more resilient and equitable society.

Post Aragalaya Media Culture inspired by Democratic Transparency

The evolution of mass media and communication in Sri Lanka is a testimony to the dynamic interplay between the political establishment and anti-establishment movements as freedom never came on a platter. Historically, Sri Lanka's media landscape has been shaped by colonial legacies, post-independence political turmoil, and the rise of ethnic nationalism, all of which have contributed to a politicized media environment that is regressive and reactionary (Hattotuwa, 2013).

The state's tight grip on media outlets, especially during periods of political unrest and conflict, reflects an aversion to the liberal principles of free speech and press freedom. This control was often justified under the guise of national security or unity, but in practice it stifled dissent and marginalized voices. Upto this time, anti-establishment forces, including insurgent groups and political movements, have utilized media for

propaganda, sometimes rejecting liberal ideals in favor of narratives favourable to the ruling elites and anti establishment forces that monopolise the routine discourse (Mendis, 2002). This ecosystem has been further complicated by the advent of digital media, which, while offering platforms for equally diverse voices, also created space for disinformation and hate speech undermining political liberalism.

The result is a media landscape that reflects the broader struggles within Sri Lankan society over freedom, representation, and its role in shaping political discourse. The Fading of Oppressive Power based Neo-Feudal Attitudes and its Impact on Fundamental Freedoms In the pre-uprising order of things, societal norms emphasized conformity and deference to authority, perpetuating a culture where individual rights were often subordinated to the interests of the ruling elite.

This entrenched dynamics hindered the development of a more democratic and inclusive society, where the voices and agency of ordinary citizens were marginalized. At both micro and macro levels, the prevailing ethos prioritized the imposition of one's will over others, reflecting deeply the ingrained power dynamics. This hierarchical system, dominated by a privileged few, stifled dissent and discouraged the recognition of basic liberties such as freedom of speech and assembly. The absence of functional fundamental freedoms fostered an environment where dissenting views could be suppressed.

Overcoming this legacy is essential for Sri Lanka to progress towards a more democratic society that respects the rights of all its citizens. Intolerance of such tendencies also meant that the people were not prepared to decisively challenge the status quo. Enduring intolerance of authoritarian tendencies in Sri Lanka's societal fabric led to a populace unprepared to question those who matter like dominant individuals and groups holding institutional positions of power.

This prolonged acquiescence fostered a culture of resignation, where questioning or resisting

entrenched power structures was viewed as futile or even perilous. Additionally, the pervasive influence of these dominant social classes, both politically and economically, inhibited the potential for meaningful dissent or resistance (Jayasundara-Smits, 2023).

Fear of reprisal, social ostracization, or economic marginalization deterred individuals and groups from challenging the existing order. Breaking free from this cycle required a seismic shift in societal consciousness, including the cultivation of collective courage, solidarity, and a renewed commitment to principles of justice and equality.

The New Political Communication Ethic in the aftermath of Aragalaya

The national uprising in 2022 marked a significant turning point in Sri Lanka's political communication order. The aftermath saw a surge in demands for transparency, accountability, and inclusive governance. Grassroots movements and civil society activism gained momentum, facilitated by social media platforms. These digital spaces empowered citizens to voice concerns, organize protests, and challenge traditional power structures in real-time. As elaborated by a Woman activist of the Ceylon Teachers Union, The ground level realities that provoked us to fight decisively in the streets, also impacted on our work relations with the Union hierarchy. Ideologically we were talking about the same things, but attitudinally there were so many incompatibilities that kept us distanced. Though we talked about the same issues, we were not one in spirit. There was a notable shift towards citizen journalism and alternative media sources, reflecting a desire for unbiased information and challenging mainstream narratives. Political parties and leaders began to recognize the importance of engaging directly with citizens through transparent communication channels. Open dialogues and town hall meetings became more common as efforts were made to bridge the gap between the government and the governed.

Overall, the emerging political communication order since the uprising emphasized the need for

active participation of citizens, the decentralization of information dissemination, and the imperative for transparent and accountable governance. Historically Pertinent Lessons for Post-Aragalaya Political Regimes Lessons learned through suppression of freedom and arbitrary decision-making demand commitment to a vibrant media culture inspired by social democracy, as this ideology defends freedom with responsibility [An ideological position that emphasizes respect for fundamental freedoms of the people, avoiding extreme rightist or leftist positions within the political spectrum].

The suppression of freedom to engage in contrarian views and arbitrary decision-making, exemplified by instances like the mishandling of fertilizer distribution to Sri Lankan farmers and the militarization of civil administrative roles, highlights the perils of unchecked power and centralized control.

These experiences demonstrate the importance of upholding democratic principles, including transparency, accountability, and respect for individual liberties (Rouet, 2024).

A vibrant media culture, rooted in the values of social democracy, is crucial in holding authorities accountable, amplifying diverse voices, and fostering informed public discourses. Such a media landscape serves as a watchdog, scrutinizing government actions, and providing a platform for marginalized communities to express their concerns (David Gurnham, 2022). By championing a media environment that encourages pluralism, investigative journalism, and the free exchange of ideas, post-Aragalaya political regimes can demonstrate their commitment to democratic governance and learn from past mistakes (Timberman, 2025).

This entails safeguarding press freedom, promoting media literacy, and nurturing an ecosystem where journalists can operate without fear of reprisal. Ultimately, a robust media culture is essential for building trust, strengthening democracy, and ensuring that the lessons of history are heeded. Liberating people from the

prevailing Anti-freedom Fear Psychosis and Legislation to Strengthen Participatory Governance. It is crucial to emancipate people from the prevailing culture of fear and suppression by enacting legislation aimed at fortifying participatory governance. This involves empowering citizens to actively partake in decision-making processes, ensuring their voices resonate and their apprehensions are addressed. Legislative measures geared towards enhancing participatory governance may encompass mechanisms to amplify transparency, enforce accountability, and facilitate citizen engagement in policy formulation and execution.

Furthermore, such legislation ought to safeguard fundamental freedoms, including freedom of expression, association, and assembly, thus fostering an environment conducive to the flourishing of civil society. By nurturing a climate of openness and inclusivity, these legal enactments can dismantle the entrenched culture of fear and repression, paving the way for a more democratic and equitable society where citizens feel empowered to contribute to the governance process.

As stated by Doyle and Sambanis, (2000: 799), "The outward lack of dissent and seemingly peaceful veneer can lead to a simmering mass of people underneath. Civil wars arise when individuals, groups and factions discover that a policeman, judge, soldier or politician no longer speaks and acts for them."

The Culture of communication as a Mirror reflection of Social Reality

The evolutionary process of development of our communication culture reveals that Sri Lanka as a country remained more "Closed than Open at an overall level, due to the dominant ideology that favours submission to authority". During the British colonial rule, Ceylon experienced restrictions on press freedom, with censorship and oppressive legislation being commonplace. The case of the Irish Editor in Ceylon in British times, Dr. Christopher Elliot, who was critical of oppressive legislation by the British was unique

with democratically maturing Imperial England demonstrating the capacity to exercise tolerance.

Dr. Elliot, stood out for his outspoken criticism of British imperial actions. His case highlights the tensions between colonial authority and the aspirations for freedom of expression. Interestingly, Dr. Elliot's experience also underscores a nuanced aspect of colonial governance. Despite the overarching control exerted by the British Empire, instances of tolerance and accommodation towards dissenting voices occasionally emerged.

In Dr. Elliot's case, the fact that his criticisms were tolerated suggests a degree of democratic maturation within imperial England, wherein some colonial officials recognized the importance of allowing space for debate and dissent. This historical episode serves as a reminder that the culture of communication reflects not only the prevailing social realities but also the complex power dynamics and evolving norms within a society, including those shaped by colonial influences.

British Imperialism to a Neo Feudal Order Dominated by Sri Lankan Elites

Following independence, Sri Lanka witnessed the emergence of a new ruling class composed of local elites who inherited power and influence. However, rather than embracing democratic ideals, this new elite class perpetuated a neo-feudal order characterized by entrenched hierarchies and patronage networks. Economic power remained concentrated in the hands of a few influential families, while political power often relied on familial or dynastic connections rather than meritocracy. This neo-feudal order replicated some of the exploitative dynamics of British imperialism, with elites controlling key industries and resources to enrich themselves at the expense of the broader population.

Moreover, the consolidation of power within a select few perpetuated social inequalities and hindered efforts towards democratization and inclusive governance. At an overall level, the transition from British imperialism to a pro-feudal

social order in Sri Lanka was an unanticipated factor that impacts on genuine socio-economic and political transformation in the post-independence era.

Political participation in decision making as an instrument in the hands of Incompatible forces

This is a factor symbolizing quasi democracy, since a level playing field was not in the interest of the privileged who inherited power from colonialists. The urge to sustain political participation in decision-making in the hands of those with a feudal background is a strong indicator of the space for quasi-democracy in Sri Lanka. Despite the transition from colonial rule to independence, power remained concentrated among elites with feudal origins (Rösel, 2017).

This perpetuated a system where political participation and influence were reserved for a select few, often based on familial connections and historical privilege (Anwar, 2022). This dynamic hindered the establishment of a level playing field in the political arena, as the privileged class sought to preserve their dominance and control over key decision-making processes.

Consequently, genuine democratic principles such as equal representation, meritocracy, and inclusivity were compromised, leading to a system that only superficially resembled democracy. In essence, the persistence of feudal power structures within Sri Lanka's political landscape has been a significant barrier to the realization of true democracy, as it has marginalized the voices and interests of the broader populace in favor of entrenched elites.

Political Left as a Contributor to an Authoritarian Political Communication Culture

Leftist political orientation led to the marginalization of individual liberties and freedom of expression. In some cases, the political left maintained unity through conformity, resulting in a culture where dissent was discouraged, and authoritarian measures were employed to maintain control. Left-wing

governments or movements justify authoritarian communication practices as necessary for achieving their vision of social justice or protecting the interests of marginalized groups. This rationale can lead to the concentration of power in the hands of a few leaders or an elite vanguard, further undermining democratic principles.

Overall, while the political left often advocated progressive values, its pursuit of ideological goals contributed to an authoritarian political communication culture, emphasizing control and conformity over individual freedoms and democratic norms. The Marxist JVP as an instrument of greater oppression eliminating those unfavorable to their World View- Over the past 75 years, the Marxist JVP (Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna) has on several occasions resorted to violent means to overthrow both Centre-Right and Centre-Left governments.

Their objective has been to establish their own authoritarian rule and impose their ideological worldview (Abeyratne, 2017). The JVP's history is marked by several violent uprisings and insurrections, characterized by ruthless tactics in eliminating perceived opponents. In their pursuit of power, they have demonstrated a willingness to resort to extreme measures, including targeted assassinations, bombings, and acts of terrorism. Their actions have led to significant loss of life and widespread destabilization, causing immense suffering and hardship to the Sri Lankan people.

While claiming to represent the interests of the marginalized and oppressed, the JVP's methods have often resulted in further repression and authoritarianism, undermining the principles of democracy and human rights. Though their attempts were unsuccessful until 2024 elections in Sri Lanka; they helped the governments to accelerate militarization of society since 1970.

Furthermore, the turmoil created by the JVP's activities provided justification for governments to enact laws and policies that further entrenched militarization. Civil liberties were often restricted, dissent was suppressed, and the militarization of

law enforcement agencies became more pronounced. However, the 2022 Aragalaya movement emerged as a watershed moment, signaling a desire for change and the rejection of authoritarianism. It challenged the entrenched power structures and called for a more democratic and inclusive political order.

In this context, the Aragalaya movement represented a decisive break from the old order, offering hope for a more transparent, accountable, and rights-respecting society in Sri Lanka. The counter Aragalaya actions of the government, unleashing terror at Galle face Green also motivated the JVP to engaged in violence, claiming ownership over the uprising. The result is great oppression against independent citizens who wanted greater democracy. The JVP capitalized on the government's repression, portraying itself as the champion of the uprising and claiming ownership over the movement.

As a consequence, independent citizens who advocated for greater democracy found themselves caught in the crossfire between the government and the JVP. The escalation of violence led to widespread oppression and fear, with innocent civilians bearing the brunt of the conflict. Moreover, the government's crackdown on dissent further eroded democratic principles and civil liberties, creating a climate of authoritarianism and impunity.

The cycle of violence perpetuated by both the government and the JVP undermined the aspirations of the Aragalaya movement for a more transparent, accountable, and democratic society. Social Democratic Ideals as the Foundation for Post Aragalaya Revival The principles of Social Democracy offer a robust framework for revitalizing the post-Aragalaya movement in Sri Lanka.

Emphasizing ideals such as social justice, equality, solidarity, and participatory democracy, Social Democracy aligns closely with the aspirations of this movement. By advocating policies that prioritize the well-being of all citizens, Social Democracy addresses the root causes of

discontent that fueled the Aragalaya uprising. This includes promoting equitable access to education, healthcare, housing, and employment opportunities, as well as ensuring the protection of civil liberties and human rights.

Furthermore, Social Democracy emphasizes the importance of inclusive decision-making processes, where citizens have a meaningful voice in shaping policies that affect their lives. This participatory approach to governance fosters transparency, accountability, and trust between the government and the governed which were key tenets that were central to the Aragalaya movement as proved through their actions with the political mainstream. In essence, embracing Social Democratic ideals can help galvanize the post-Aragalaya revival in Sri Lanka, offering a vision of a more just, equitable, and democratic society.

Seventy-five years of post-independence: Looking Back on Hindsight

While the post-independence period since 1948 cannot be blamed for the plight of the Sri Lankan nation, one could say that this period created lop sided development of social institutions as in education, media, health and opportunities in the public service. They have failed to serve the aspirations of the large mass of people favoring democracy and equality. In the realm of mass media, government control and manipulation have hindered its role as a neutral watchdog and source of unbiased information.

Instead of promoting democratic values, media outlets often served the interests of political elites or specific interest groups. Similarly, the education system has struggled to provide quality education uniformly across the population, perpetuating socio-economic disparities and limiting social mobility. Public service institutions have suffered from inefficiency, corruption, and politicization, impeding their ability to deliver essential services equitably. Overall, the skewed development of these social institutions has undermined the pursuit of democracy and equality in Sri Lanka, highlighting the need for comprehensive reform and restructuring.

Inclusive Governance with Participatory Decision Making.

As what is needed is greater involvement of people in decision making, the work of Thomas Aquinas is inspiring since nothing should be at the expense of the people. This inclusive approach fosters transparency, accountability, and legitimacy in governance, while also promoting social cohesion and trust between the government and the governed.

The work of Thomas Aquinas, particularly his emphasis on the "Common Good," provides valuable inspiration for this endeavor. Aquinas argued that the well-being of society as a whole should be prioritized above individual or sectional interests. In the context of Sri Lanka, embracing the concept of the Common Good means pursuing policies and practices that benefit all citizens, especially the most marginalized and vulnerable.

By adopting an inclusive governance model guided by principles such as the Common Good, Sri Lanka can move towards a more equitable and democratic society where every voice is heard, and every individual has the opportunity to participate in shaping their collective future.

Concluding Observations: Towards a New Sri Lankan Social Contract

(a) Catapulting the nation into a period of reflection and reevaluation, the new Sri Lankan social contract must prioritize democracy, equality, and the common good.

Central to this new social contract is the notion of inclusive governance, where participatory decision-making processes ensure that the voices of all citizens are heard and valued. Embracing moderation as through Social Democratic ideals means addressing socio-economic disparities, promoting transparency, and upholding human rights. Moreover, drawing from the lessons of history, it is essential to build robust institutions that safeguard democratic values and ensure accountability.

This includes reforming the mass media, education, and public service sectors to better

serve the interests of the people. This new social contract will be the cornerstone of a brighter future, where every citizen can contribute to and benefit from the nation's progress.

(b) Constitutional Reforms favoring Social Justice, Equality, and Equity.

Constitutional reforms should aim to decentralize power and promote participatory democracy, allowing for greater citizen engagement in decision-making processes at all levels of government. This includes ensuring equal rights and opportunities for marginalized groups, such as ethnic minorities, women, and the economically disadvantaged. This can help address regional disparities and empower local communities to address their own needs and priorities.

Additionally, efforts should be made to strengthen the independence and accountability of key institutions, such as the judiciary, the electoral commission, and the human rights commission. This will help safeguard against abuse of power and ensure that the rule of law is upheld. By reforming the constitutional order to prioritize social justice, equality, and equity, Sri Lanka can build a more inclusive and democratic society where all citizens can fully participate and thrive.

(c) Citizen Empowerment through Political Education for the New Social Contract

This is a must if citizens are to be socialized into such values supported by sustainable political reforms and constitutional guarantees. Alongside political education, sustainable political reforms are necessary to institutionalize democratic practices and ensure accountability. This includes constitutional guarantees that protect fundamental rights, establish mechanisms for transparent and accountable governance, and promote inclusive decision-making processes.

By committing to these reforms, Sri Lanka can lay the foundation for a more just, equitable, and democratic society. Deliberative democracy, characterized by meaningful public participation and respectful dialogue, will foster a culture of cooperation and consensus-building,

strengthening the social contract between the government and its citizens.

Ultimately, these efforts will contribute to a more resilient and inclusive democracy in Sri Lanka.

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