

A SOCIAL, ECONOMIC, POLITICAL AND CULTURAL APPROACH TO THE SRI LANKAN REALITY

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We all realize that the world today is racing towards the end of the 2nd millennium. And in this historically eventful and accelerated journey, we are experiencing rapid changes in every imaginable sphere. The Berlin wall has been ripped apart as a result of a people's revolution in Eastern Europe and the last nail has been driven into the coffin of Communism. The state of emergency has been lifted in South Africa, granting freedom to Nelson Mandela to speak on behalf of his people. In Asia, while battles still rags in East Timor, in certain parts of India, Pakistan and of course, Sri Lanka, the people in Asia have been resilient and not resigned themselves to a state of apathetic fate. For them, destiny lies not only in the assertion of their civic and political rights, such as the individual's right to vote, freedom of speech and the right of free movement and assembly, but also in the realization of their economic and cultural rights, namely, the community's right to food, to a place to live, to decent health care, education, and most of all a minority community's freedom from political, social, economic and cultural oppression, concretized in the use of one's language and one's right to worship in freedom. Here we see a combination of the Northern concept of International Human Rights, with rights of communities of indigenous people living within the confines of Third World Countries.

However, while the end of communism and a transition to democracy has brought freedom and a better life in material terms to Eastern Europe, many things in the Third World still remain unchanged. In the Third World, over one billion people still live in abject poverty.¹

One in three children suffer serious malnutrition and one and a half billion people lack basic health care. About half a million women perish annually when pregnant or while giving birth. In many Asian countries, persistent droughts and continuous floods have turned attempts at development into disaster.²

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