

The Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement of Sri Lanka: The Elephant Moves and We Begin to Understand the Whole

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In its 50 years of existence, the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement has been described as the largest nongovernmental organization (NGO) in Sri Lanka, with all the connotations such a label implies. It is also known, incompletely, as a Buddhist grassroots development program, a peace movement, a microfinance scheme, a social service and early childhood education network, and as a combination of bottom-up empowerment strategies serving poor people, youth, and rural communities. Although grounded in the beliefs and values of South Asian culture, the movement's holistic approach has always transcended traditional methods and norms through a wide range of real-world and people-centered innovations. Over the past 50 years, Sarvodaya has engaged millions in the art and practice of sharing what they have, what they hope for, and what they can create by working together. The movement's founder, Dr. A. T. Ariyaratne, has established himself as an inspiring and visionary leader whose transformational methods and models have been heralded by scholars, educators, practitioners, policy makers, and other leaders around the world. Seen conceptually through the lens of normative systems, resiliency and protective factors, asset-based community and individual development, interfaith spirituality, sustainable economics, and even general systems theory—and pragmatically through interventions in service learning, maternal and child health, addictions treatment, conflict prevention, human rights, and social justice—Sarvodaya's ideas and influence have affected and inspired millions around the globe.

In the second century B.C., the legend of the blind men and the elephant was recorded in the Pali Buddhist Udana. More than a thousand years later, it was passed



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on through Sufi theologian Muhammed al-Ghazzali to Islam, and has appeared in a multitude of versions since. As the story goes, several blind men each felt only one part of the elephant in their attempts to understand what stood before them. On the basis of what they perceived through touch, they believed that the behemoth was a tree, a pillar, a wall, or a large piece of leather. Over the years and countless retellings, the story has evolved, but the core message remains the same. We understand what we perceive, and we perceive incompletely. In reality, what we believe, we know.

The story of the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement of Sri Lanka reflects a similar set of lessons. For instance, just as this parable was told first about three blind men, it has since expanded to five, then six; likewise, the numbers joining this nationwide people's movement have also expanded, sometimes almost beyond comprehension. At this point, residents of nearly 15,000 villages throughout Sri Lanka have participated in Sarvodaya's activities. Over the years, millions of Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, Christians, and other believers and questioners have come together in silent peace meditations led by Sarvodaya; so have prisoners, soldiers, parents-to-be, and children yet unborn. Worldwide, the movement has inspired new incarnations of its practices and philosophy that transcend disciplines, religions, and cultures.

When it celebrated its 50th anniversary in December of 2008—an event that included felicitations to a stadium full of well wishers, and a pictorial and written tribute from leaders around the world (Brooks & Perera, 2008)—one overarching reality was abundantly clear. Even as Sri Lanka's civil war dragged on, and the promise of self-governance remained elusive, this massive, holistic movement was larger, more diverse, more prescient, more comprehensive, more unfinished, more complete, and more inspirational than any of its adherents or critics

might ever have believed. Most definitely, the whole had become so much more than the sum of its parts.¹

A MOVEMENT ROOTED IN TRADITION AND AHEAD OF ITS TIME

According to popular literature and folklore, the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement began in 1958. An energetic young teacher at Nalanda College—a school for well-to-do students in Colombo, Sri Lanka—took his students to a village of the poorest of the poor to experience life on the other side of the economic and class divide. The goal was for each individual who participated to come awake in his or her own way, to perceive the suffering of their host families, know the power of service, and the joy of working for the common good. Biographers and scholars, however, can trace the roots of this movement to practices and ideas introduced long before 1958. In fact, Dr. A. T. Ariyaratne, the teacher in question, openly admits that the beliefs and experiences that motivated him had their origins in a combination of Western and South Asian value systems as well as his unique style of teaching. The movement's hallmark *shramadana* camps, for example, evolved from an ancient village tradition of sharing labor, especially at harvest time, as well as Quaker work camps after World War II.

For more than five decades now, *shramadana*—the sharing of labor—has taught millions of Sri Lankans and world citizens the meaning of community. But like the story of the blind men and the elephant, that meaning is a matter of interpretation. Above all, awakening and welfare of all—the literal translation of the word *sarvodaya* coined by Mahatma Gandhi—occurs in ways that range from the sublime to the spectacular. Its tangible achievements are impressive although, by Sarvodaya's own admission, still imperfect and changing; its immeasurable dimensions continue to evolve. The community development strategies that now seem so elegant and clear were not the product of anything even remotely similar to an organizing toolkit or catechism. Indeed, most of the fundamental strategies that characterize the movement in academic literature and organizing handbooks have been synthesized retrospectively, often by outside observers rather than by the people wielding picks and shovels at *shramadana* camps. Sequential processes and steps to success have emerged from praxis rather than from the musings of any guru. At the same time, Ariyaratne has a clear knack for naming and explaining, and that talent undoubtedly is part of the reason for the effectiveness of his movement. Examples include the five

R's for dealing with disasters: relief, rehabilitation, reconstruction, reconciliation, and reawakening. The five-step graduation process for village awakening and Ariyaratne's articulation of ten basic human needs have uncanny resemblances to lists like Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs as well as the 12 steps of Alcoholics Anonymous. But Ariyaratne's lens is arguably and simultaneously more far-sighted and near-sighted, as the awakening of which he speaks takes place on the individual, family, village, community, national, and global levels. The awakening need not be sequential. It is synchronous.

Both process and product matter to such a holistic development effort, and the outcome need not always be in the form of bricks and mortar. In the 1960s, in fact, the Sri Lankan government made the mistake of believing that reproducing *shramadana* camps was enough to ensure success. The results were dismal. What government workers could not replicate—the psychosocial and spiritual foundations of the movement—turned out to be much more important than merely calling people together to work.

Nor can outcomes and impact measures tell the whole story. The Buddha and his successors would readily recognize how Jataka stories, the Pali Canon, and texts with titles almost unpronounceable by English speakers have guided Sarvodaya practices since the beginning, whenever that was. So have the tenets of Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, and Judaism and—to the surprise of many—secular humanism.

Fifty years after the first official *shramadana* camp in the village of Konatoluwa, the blindness of contemporary observers may seem more sophisticated than that of the men in the parable, but the origins of their perceptions are likely the same. Some researchers, however, have cut through the scrim of culture. Consider, for example, *Dharma and Development: Religion as Resource in the Sarvodaya Self-Help Movement*, by Joanna Macy (1991), who infuses her observations and analyses of the movement with the concepts of general systems theory. Equally insightful regarding theory and practice are observations offered more recently by scholars such as George Bond and Sallie King, who interpret Sarvodaya both historically and through the lens of engaged Buddhism in order to understand what can and cannot be seen (Bond, 2003; King, 2006).

SHIFTING PARADIGMS, CROSSING DISCIPLINES

A different set of lenses may also be employed to affirm Sarvodaya's prescience. In the 1980s and 1990s, for example,

psychologists and youth development specialists deservedly trumpeted the findings of breakthrough studies on resiliency and protective factors, painstaking scholarship that resonated with Sarvodaya's philosophy, which was first articulated in the 1970s. Emmy Werner's (1982) longitudinal study of children on the island of Kauai, Hawaii, described in *Vulnerable but Invincible*, propelled the youth development field forward from a problem-oriented approach to strength-based prevention and treatment strategies. By observing how children at risk grew into adults who often functioned quite well despite—or because of—adversity, Werner confirmed much of the wisdom that Ariyaratne and his movement had relied on for years. Or consider Bonnie Benard (1991), whose interpretations of resiliency research catalyzed widespread interest among scholars and practitioners. In her articulation of three groups of protective factors—caring and support, high expectations, and participation and involvement—she described a framework for lifelong personal development that had long been practiced in the integrated Sarvodaya approach. As a final exemplar, family counselors such as Steven and Sybil Wolin (1993) identified internal resiliencies, which could enable children of alcoholics to thrive and help kids in trouble turn into young people with much to offer society. No doubt, had Werner, Benard, or the Wolins been living and working in a *shramadana* camp, they would have witnessed affirmation of their theories up close with the children, youth, women, men, and elders living these values on a daily basis.

Likewise, local governments and social service programs around the world could take a page from the *shramadana* manual of practice, by emulating the village governance model, wherein people at all ages serve on the boards of village banks, legal service groups, and Sarvodaya Societies. Each person has something important to offer, according to the Sarvodaya belief system. Scholars of Eastern religions would contend that all of Sarvodaya's efforts are informed by the quest to understand suffering, apply innate wisdom and knowledge, and act with compassion. And, certainly, this movement has facilitated just such transformations in thousands of villages, as the very purpose of *shramadana* camps has been and remains awakening. In this regard, the Sarvodaya motto, “we build the road and the road builds us,” illustrates why seemingly similar work camps—on paper at least—missed their mark. Although building roads, canals, community centers, and preschools are necessary, they are in no way sufficient, as the unseen dimensions of construction are indispensable to authentic processes of awakening. In short, people feel empowered when they become aware of what

they may accomplish together, not out of some externally proposed plan, but because they grasp the greater potential within themselves and each other.

At another level of analysis, normative systems strategies of social and organizational change championed by Robert Allen (Allen & Harris, 1978)—and now often taken for granted—teach what the Sri Lankan school-teacher wanted his students to understand with their hearts, hands, spirits, and brains. *Shramadana* camp organizers in the poorest, most remote villages on the island, learned how to call on and activate the innate motivations of children, youth, mothers, farmers, and elders in order to accomplish what none of them believed was possible. The Sarvodaya approach exemplified what American scholar-organizers John Kretzmann and John McKnight (1993) referred to, in the subtitle for their book, as *Building Community From the Inside Out*. And, in fact, asset-based community development (ABCD) has since become one of the most esteemed among the array of strategies in an organizer's toolbox, an approach that is remarkably compatible with Sarvodaya's action-oriented philosophy of awakening the individual, family, community, nation, and—eventually—the world.

Similarly, the assets-approach to nurturing children and youth, popularized by Peter Benson of the Search Institute (<http://www.search-institute.org>), expresses in contemporary form what Ariyaratne and his millions of village cohorts learned by living the Sarvodaya credo: Give young people a voice and help them participate in community life by sharing their talents, and they have a much better chance of succeeding. Sarvodaya's entire village empowerment system is based on such thinking. Evidence of effectiveness is demonstrated by the countless Sri Lankan leaders at all levels who first attended preschools built in *shramadana* camps, which were managed by local Sarvodaya Societies; thousands of these preschools still serve Sri Lankan children today, offering protective environments for learning in the warm embrace of village life, while preparing children for the more strident standards of mass education, which have been inherited from colonial times.

But the Sarvodaya story and *thirst for becoming* extend far beyond the traditional definitions of education, parenthood, community organizing, and even religion. For example, in "Education Without Borders to Promote Wisdom," Ariyaratne (2005) makes plain the many interdisciplinary sources of his own perspectives, and that of Sarvodaya, including the need to focus on education as a lifelong process, beginning at conception. As he observed,

We believe that whatever the mother eats, whatever the mother feels in the body, whatever the mother smells, whatever the mother hears or sees or whatever the mother thinks, all these six sectors can affect the child in a positive or negative way. When the child is to be influenced in a positive way then the mother has to be prepared for it spiritually, morally, culturally and socially. This has nothing to do with a particular creed. What is essential is not religious dogma but this spiritual awakening which can be brought about to promote wisdom in the society. (Ariyaratne, 2005, p. 10)

WISDOM AND SHARING

Observing the similarities and differences between the Sarvodaya Movement and other strategies is much easier with 50 years of hindsight, even as new incarnations of the Sarvodaya model emerge. That is because for half a century now professionals and teachers around the world have been part of an unending stream of co-collaborators of this ongoing movement. Students of rural sociology, women's studies, youth and community development, health promotion, psychology, international development, and many other fields have come to know Sarvodaya up close and frequently have been transformed by the experience. For example, over the years, international aid experts who ostensibly came to Sri Lanka in order to offer advice about how to build economic infrastructure often returned to their home countries with deeper insights about what supposedly uneducated village people might teach postindustrial societies. Spiritual seekers who showed up at the Moratuwa headquarters outside of Colombo to discover their own inner resources often learned that meditation acquired much greater meaning if it was infused with compassion and action; in other words, if the context and direction of meditation was outward as well as inward.

One of the more poignant articulations of this movement was described by Ingunn Grande, a Scandinavian alcohol treatment professional, who applied Sarvodaya thought to therapeutic communities in Norway. Through her personal experience at a *shramadana* camp, she remembers how

the repeating fractal structure of meaning in Sarvodaya philosophy, handing trays of sand from hands to hands for building a road, gave us experience of contributing to a better world while enjoying each other's company in the dust and heat of never ending Sri Lankan sunshine. (Grande, 2003, p. 12)

Here, the structure of her Sri Lankan experience, later applied to the context of addictions treatment, made sense in transcendent terms. As Grande observed,

Wherever we are, whatever field we work in, we can add meaning for ourselves and others by encouraging each other to make use of our unique gifts for the common good. Growth of identity, sense of belonging, and purpose of life are integrative, creative forces, increasingly available to us as we enjoy the challenges and opportunities continuously emerging at the edge of chaos. Creativity can be seen as the ability to see and make real something that does not yet exist. From this point of view, we all have the potential to contribute with something that can make the world a better place. Co-creativity means to make use of our creative potential together, as we are already co-creating the world. (p. 24)

Highly congruent with this perspective, the picture that Sarvodaya most elegantly brings into focus is that which refracts through a multiplicity of lenses. Like the fractals of *shramadana*, Ariyaratne has often contended that a critical mass can transform what he refers to as the psychosphere—the composite and collective expression of human emotion and thought—as well as daily reality. An unabashedly metaphysical principle, Ariyaratne believes that cultivation of the mind sense along with our other senses of sight, touch, smell, taste, and hearing will facilitate our capacity for awakening within ourselves and to each other.

On occasion, observers have found it easier to peg the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement of Sri Lanka as something else—a political movement, a threat to the government, an empowerment strategy, a monumental organization whose lumbering bureaucracy could not compare well with that of the corporations with headquarters in Colombo. Like the fractals described earlier, however, a more insightful analysis would focus on the thousands of Sarvodaya villages that formed savings societies and banks of their own. Or consider another initiative, in which Sarvodaya community organizers taught poor families to make *kola kenda* drinks from natural ingredients—which cost nothing except the time to harvest and mix—rather than relying on a commercial sugar water concoction, which was protected by international patents. *Kola kenda* was far more nutritious. Malnourished children and their mothers gained weight and became more resistant to disease.

At another level, the sharing of time that Sarvodaya has incorporated into its modus operandi now appears as the centerpiece of complementary currency systems such as Ithaca Hours and Time Banking, created by American attorney Edgar Cahn (2004), who likely would endorse Ariyaratne's (1996) preference for "sharing" over "giving," as the former word implies a sense of community reciprocity. By valuing giving and receiving equally, as well as reciprocity and justice, hundreds of Time Banks around the world are building networks of support in place of government-sanctioned free enterprise systems that have resulted in vast, increasing, and morally indefensible discrepancies between rich and poor people and nations. Again, such laudable systems of mutual assistance seem remarkably similar to the pragmatic approach of Sarvodaya, which empowers those who did not apprehend their own assets, builds sustainable interdependent communities, and, in the final analysis, saves money for individuals, communities, and governments alike.

Ariyaratne has often referred to the thinking of Ervin Laszlo (2001), founder and president of the Club of Budapest and author of *Macrosift: Navigating the Transformation to a Sustainable World*. Like Laszlo, Ariyaratne (2005) has asserted that human consciousness is integral to the evolving web of connection and communication enveloping the planet. Preferring a paradigm that transcends disciplinary boundaries across the humanities, social and natural sciences, Ariyaratne draws on cybernetic terminology and quantum physics as well as the Buddhist traditions that have always informed his thought and action. For example, even as he considers the philosophical principles of the Anuradhapura Period of Sri Lankan history, he explains Sarvodaya thought as a forward-looking view of what Buddha described as the Five Cosmic Laws (i.e., genetic order, climatic cycles, cause and effect, the laws of all phenomena, and consciousness). As he maintains:

Modern science dissolves barriers between living and nonliving things. Everything is related to everything else. After all, wasn't this the principle that the Buddha laid down as the *Paticcasamuppada Dhamma*, the Principle of Dependent Origination? . . . Whatever suffering—man-made or natural—that is taking place in our societies anywhere in the world has originated in our minds. Mere accumulation of knowledge is not the solution to this global problem. I go on my conviction that Wisdom and not Knowledge is the answer to the problems we are facing today. (Ariyaratne, 2005, p. 17)

Lawyers, economists, and government officials might well reject such metaphysical musings as hokum. But Sarvodaya's unique use of meditation suggests that prudent reflection on his approach is a wiser response than hubristic dismissal. For example, his regularly scheduled prison meditations and prenatal classes involving health education as well as parental communication with the unborn have generated significant interest by the public and administrators alike. Likewise, the Sarvodaya Legal Services Movement has conducted psychospiritual healing sessions as precursors for understanding human rights and legal education, and mass meditations for peace have involved nearly 2,000,000 participants. Whether the ceasefires that occurred after such mass meditations resulted from focused spiritual energy most certainly is and should be open to debate. But among the participants in such sessions, there is little question that the self-reported experience of enhanced inner peace has been associated at the very least with reduced violence at the individual, family, and village levels. And in any case, as it has always been, Sarvodaya remains very open to the contributions of social scientists and other scholars who are interested in observing and evaluating such programs, processes, and outcomes, so that we may better understand what works, what doesn't, and why.

THE SARVODAYAN VALUES OF "NON"

This mass movement is often described as the largest non-governmental organization (NGO) in Sri Lanka. Because there are thousands of indigenous NGOs and hundreds of foreign NGOs on the island, the category denotes little and connotes a good deal, often negative. Nonetheless, Sarvodaya's bottom-up power structure, values, and achievements—and integrative, holistic approach—are decidedly pioneering among NGOs; not surprisingly, then, Sarvodaya workers and leaders alike are reluctant to see themselves as mere NGO functionaries. Therefore, to understand what Sarvodaya is from the perspective of those who are most centrally involved, it may be most helpful to understand what it is not.

At all levels, the movement is definitely *nonprofit*, refusing to generate affluence by trafficking in the suffering of its participants. Because of its nationwide presence, however, it has been often accused of great wealth. Although its various divisions and independent units generate the majority of operating expenses, contributions come from many other countries. Of significance also, most salaries are significantly lower than those at Sarvodaya's private and public sector counterparts.

Nonviolence, on the other hand, is a term freely adopted from Gandhian rhetoric and practice. Although the Sarvodaya way clearly rests on the principles of nonviolence, it does not endorse passivity or meekness. Rather, respect for all life is a bedrock value of this movement. In this sense, the Sarvodaya commitment to the well-being of all necessarily requires acceptance of the Buddhist principle of *metta*, or loving kindness—the opposite of violence. Founder Ariyaratne has been true to this value from the start. "We should not have even an iota of doubt regarding non-violence, justice and the correctness of the path we are following," he declared in 1996. "Instead we should have an unshakable faith that all the other groups that are violently struggling for power among themselves will exhaust themselves and arrive at the Sarvodaya path" (R. Brooks, personal communication, January, 1998).

Ariyaratne writes frequently of *nonhate*, *nonthinking*, and even *nonsense*, particularly when reflecting on the causes of, and solutions to, interpersonal and intergroup conflict. In all its forms, from intolerance to active discrimination, he has asserted that hate can be diminished by nonhate. Moreover, having led thousands of meditation sessions, Ariyaratne speaks often of *nonthinking*, letting go of the burdens and complications of suffering. In this way, the mindfulness of which he and other engaged Buddhists speak necessitates neither heavy thinking nor consciousness, although scholars have sought helpfully to explicate such matters. For example, Mario Kamanetzky (1999)—the former World Bank administrator who came to know Sarvodaya before writing *The Invisible Player*—often spoke in his day-to-day dealings as well as his writing about these very connections between consciousness and action.

At the same time, Ariyaratne continues forthrightly to speak truth to power. Politicians and supposed diplomats alike occasionally have been singled out by his blunt descriptions of their behavior as *nonsense*. Of necessity, then, this movement and its founder have been steadfast in their *nonpartisanship* as well. Although nationalists and party politicians not infrequently have felt threatened by Sarvodaya's willingness to listen to and work with factions on opposing sides of issues, the movement has for the most part carefully avoided affiliation with one side or the other. As perhaps the best evidence of this nonpartisan commitment, Ariyaratne has publicly been accused of being a pawn for both the Sri Lankan government and the Tamil Tigers.² In media interviews over the years, he has favored a higher road, emphasizing long-term peace over acquiescence. More recently, the official voice of the movement, his son Vinya Ariyaratne, has followed the

same path, in a decidedly pragmatic direction, as Sarvodaya's chief executive officer. The enemy, he has said, is not the Tamil Tigers, the Sri Lankan government, or other factions caught up in the seemingly endless cycle of violence and retribution. Instead, the younger Ariyaratne contends, along with his father, the enemy is violence itself (Ariyaratne, 2000). A community health physician, Dr. Vinya Ariyaratne has inherited the monumental task of guiding the nationwide grassroots movement from the bottom up while negotiating with national and international leaders from the top down, even as he manages a constantly changing family of organizations grappling with seemingly intractable challenges.

While advocating patience and awareness of injustice, Sarvodaya has also initiated direct and nonviolent action via marches, interfaith mass meditations, and public statements at crucial moments. Overall, Sarvodaya has chosen *nonconfrontational* alternatives, favoring silent persuasion, while modeling *noncoercive* sociopolitical and economic solutions and structures outside the formal system but within the law. In this regard, *non-power seeking* is an apt description of the official Sarvodaya record and stance on party politics and elections. More recent clarifications of that position depict people's power—grassroots democracy and participatory local governance—as preferable alternatives. Along these lines, in appeals to “sanity and fearlessness” over the years, A. T. Ariyaratne has stated,

Every human being is a sacred entity. Human beings should be helped by one another to liberate themselves from their inner defilements as well as outer bondages of individual or party dictatorships or state absolutism. This is Sarvodaya politics. It is radically different from the capture of power. (R. Brooks, personal communication, March 30, 2005)

Throughout its history, few Sarvodaya concepts have been met with as much skepticism by Americans as the goal of a *nonpoverty, nonaffluence society*. Nonetheless, it often seems that the capitalist model on which Western economies have relied for generations—with increasing disparities between rich and poor—has greater moral tolerance for injustice than a nationwide movement that is assuredly based in Buddhist values but open to people of all religions. “We should produce more and more wealth,” A. T. Ariyaratne wrote in 1996.

But in producing wealth we must take care not to get trapped by affluence. We must think of those who are

at the lowest levels of society. An unpatriotic system which is limitlessly unjust and produces wealth for an affluent few must not become our model. (p. 7)

Along these lines, more than 50 years of lunchtime discussions at the open Ariyaratne household have not overlooked Marx, Tolstoy, Ruskin, Keynes, or the machinations of the fragile world economy. As an activist philosopher, Ariyaratne has promulgated an understanding of economics that has inspired World Bank managers even as he frequently disparaged their methods and assumptions.

CONCLUDING THE FIRST AND BEGINNING THE NEXT 50 YEARS

The simplest encapsulations of Sarvodaya (e.g., in popular articles describing “Sri Lanka's Little Gandhi” or focusing primarily on the movement's size and scale) miss the point that there is no one point, only the possibility of responsiveness to human need and potential on a moment by moment basis. In this way, the voice of Dr. A. T. Ariyaratne over the past 50 years has resonated with some of the most empowering, nonviolent strategies in the world—across cultures and times, through the latest theories, beyond political correctness, past dogma, and, ironically and importantly, transcendent of religion. Perhaps most recently, in the transformational emergence of Barack Obama from community organizer to leader of the most powerful nation on earth, many of A. T. Ariyaratne's predictions have come true, particularly the worldwide economic implosion of 2008. In this way, the founder of a movement has magnified and multiplied his vision and voice through millions of engaged citizens around the world. Even as young Obama has written convincingly of the audacity of hope, A. T. Ariyaratne has demonstrated how such hope may be operationalized in the real world.

Fifty years down the line, Ariyaratne would maintain that Sarvodaya is nothing more or less than a fundamental expression of all we humans are meant to do and be. As he writes,

All my life, beginning with my school days up to today, I would like to confess, that uppermost in my mind and heart, my foremost objectives in life were the eradication of poverty in my country and the world, bringing about harmony among people by taking measures to break the barriers that exist nationally and internationally. (Ariyaratne, 2005, p. 15)

Snapshot of Sri Lanka

- Full name: Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka
- Population: 19.3 million (UN, 2007)
- Capital: Colombo (commercial), Sri Jayawardenepura (administrative)
- Largest city: Colombo
- Area: 65,610 sq km (25,332 sq miles)
- Major languages: Sinhala, Tamil, English
- Major religions: Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Christianity
- Life expectancy: 69 years (men), 76 years (women) (UN)
- Monetary unit: Sri Lankan rupee
- Main exports: Clothing and textiles, tea, gems, rubber, coconuts
- Gross National Income (GNI) per capita: US \$1,540 (World Bank, 2007)

Retrieved from British Broadcasting Corporation on January 14, 2009 http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/country_profiles/1168427.stm#facts

Fifty years hence, the daily rebirth of such thinking and action continues with more vibrancy and relevance than ever. The men with their elephant believed what they knew. In Sarvodaya, what we see is what we believe. Somewhere between the words of the Buddha—and the yet-to-be-realized legacy of world change, championed by Barack Obama—is the compassionate acceptance of impermanence that Ariyaratne's Sarvodaya daily expresses and uniquely embodies.

NOTES

1. In addition to the many references throughout this article, please see <http://www.sarvodaya.org/> for more information about Sarvodaya.
2. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) have waged a separatist campaign against the government of Sri Lanka since the 1970s.

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