



16th Neelan Tiruchelvam Memorial Lecture

Democracy in Plural Societies: Problems and Solutions



by

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Democracy in Plural Societies: Problems and Solutions.

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It is a great honour to be invited to deliver this lecture in memory of Neelan Tiruchelvam. How much of an honour I didn't properly understand until I began to read about his life and work, for this was not someone I had encountered in person or in print. It is always a little humbling for an academic to be faced with someone who has not only won renown as a scholar but who has taken his scholarship and used it to make a difference in the real world of politics. As academics, the greatest risk that we face is probably getting a nasty book review or having an article rejected for publication. In politics, as we know only too well, it is a very different matter.

I do not come here as an expert on the politics of Sri Lanka, and what I have learnt through reading about the history of your country since independence has convinced me that it is one of the hardest places on earth to understand properly. An outsider is almost certain to make some elementary mistake. So the first rule for the visiting speaker is to refrain from offering advice, in the sense of telling people that they ought to be doing this or that – changing the constitution yet again, for example. So in my talk today I'm going to be offering you some general reflections on how democracy can be made to work in plural societies – I'll explain what I mean by that in a moment – and leaving you to draw any conclusions that might apply to Sri Lanka specifically.

Besides giving unwanted advice, there's another temptation that a visiting speaker needs to resist, and that is to endear himself to the audience by mirroring back to them all of the things that they're inclined to believe already. I could spend the next 45 minutes telling you how important human rights are, what a wonderful thing democracy is, and so on, and you would probably feel happily reassured at the end, but what would you have learned that was new? I think my job is to ask questions that might challenge some of the things that you believe: you can challenge me in return in our discussion period.

So my topic is democracy, and the first question I want to ask is what makes democracy possible in the first place. What makes people willing to be governed by democratic institutions? For they are not always willing. Democracies sometimes collapse because significant numbers of their subjects rebel against them: we have recently been reminded of this fact by the example of the 'Arab Spring'. Let's take a quick look back in historical time to throw some light on this point. In Britain this year we have been celebrating the 800th anniversary of the signing of Magna Carta, when members of the nobility forced King John to submit to constraints on royal power, including some elements of what we now call the rule of law – habeas corpus and the right to a fair trial. This is sometimes seen as one of the foundation stones of modern democracy. But if so, it took another 700 years for the remaining stones to be laid. How so: were we British very slow learners? Why was full-blown democracy not introduced sooner? The answer, surely, is that the social structure of Britain, with a small, rich landowning class confronting a mass of largely illiterate peasants, would not have allowed it. Even in the nineteenth century, when that structure had been transformed into an industrial economy, it was widely believed that giving the vote to the working class who formed the majority would mean the end of capitalism. This was the shared view of people like Lord Macaulay who wanted to defend private property and those like Karl Marx who wanted to destroy it. Democracy was

destabilising: either the vote must be restricted to the middle class, which was Macaulay's view, or if the workers succeeded in getting it, they would inevitably use it to create socialism, which was Marx's hope.

The lesson to draw here is a very simple one. Democracy, whatever particular form it takes, always places ultimate power in the hands of the majority. So where society is polarised into two sections with very different interests, the minority group is not going to be willing to be ruled by the majority if it fears that the majority is going to use that power to oppress or exploit. And then there are essentially three possibilities for the minority group. One is exit, either in the form of individual flight abroad or of secession, where the minority group attempts to set up a state of its own on part of the territory. A second is supporting a non-democratic government, where some authority figure or military regime succeeds in holding the balance between the two groups, the majority and the minority. And then the third is to attempt to create a moderated form of democracy where the majority's power is checked; in other words there are safeguards that prevent the majority group from using the power it has simply by virtue of numbers to exploit or oppress the minority.

How does that diagnosis apply to what I am calling 'plural societies', by which I mean societies that are divided by religion, ethnicity or nationality in such a way that we can speak of a majority community and one or more minorities? Of course almost every society is multicultural in certain ways, but in plural societies the divisions run deeper. People identify primarily with their own group and are very unlikely to change sides. You might nonetheless think that the problems for democracy here will be less severe than in class divided societies like 19th century Britain. There seems no obvious reason why people divided by religious or ethnic identity should have strongly conflicting interests. Very often, however, the opposite proves to be the case, because class divisions need not be as clear-cut as the

pessimists about democracy assumed. Both Macaulay and Marx got it wrong: democracy and capitalism proved to be compatible with each other. One reason was that the working class turned out to be internally divided. The Conservative politician Benjamin Disraeli, who supported extending the franchise, spotted what he called ‘the angels in marble’, workers who aspired to join the middle class and saw Conservative policies as helping them to realise their aspiration. This continues to be Conservative strategy to the present day.

In societies where the lines of division are based on religion, ethnicity or nationality – or sometimes all three together – in contrast, political identities are more rigid. If you are a Catholic in Northern Ireland, for example, you cannot aspire to be a Protestant. Even if you lose your religious faith, you are still going to be a Catholic – that is your community. Sociologists will tell us that ethnic identities are more fluid than we often assume, and that there will always be minorities within minorities. That is certainly true, but nonetheless it is often the big markers of identity that matter politically. To use the example of Northern Ireland again, it is overwhelmingly the case that Catholics vote for Catholic parties and Protestants vote for Protestant parties. I expect you to tell me that this applies equally to Sinhalese, Tamils, Muslims and others here. What this means, of course, is that although the party make-up of the legislature may change over time as parties rise and fall, there is still going to be a permanent majority for the largest group. The best that the minority groups can hope for is that splits within the majority along party lines may sometimes allow their representatives to be junior parties in a coalition. There is never going to be genuine rotation such that sometimes the majority is in power and sometimes the minority, so long as people continue to vote on the basis of their group identities.

You might say: what’s the problem with this? Democracy is always going to mean majority rule. Since there will never be

complete consensus, who else but the majority should decide? But the problem with that reply is that it doesn't tell us why the minority groups should agree to be ruled in this way. They are entitled to ask for a fair deal – their proper share of all the benefits that living together in a society can provide. If they aren't getting a fair deal, they will certainly be tempted to turn their backs on democracy in one of the ways I described, and as we know, that temptation has often proved strong enough to disrupt or even destroy democracy itself.

So, in a plural society, a stable democracy needs to find a way of ensuring that minority groups are not only getting a fair deal but also can see that they are getting one. I want to look at three ways in which this problem might be solved: I will call them the human rights approach, the power-sharing approach, and the devolved government approach. These are not mutually exclusive. Perhaps the best solution will involve a combination of all three. But I will begin by examining each on its own merits, starting with human rights.

As I'm sure you already know, human rights are hugely popular today as a means of tackling social and political problems. Advocates speak about a 'Justice Cascade' sweeping the world and forcing political leaders everywhere to conform to human rights norms or else face sanctions, including criminal prosecution. Whether this is really happening is a matter of judgement. I want to look at human rights as a solution to the minorities problem I've been discussing. The proposed solution is that a wide range of human rights should be entrenched in the state's constitution, such that decisions by government or parliament will be subject to judicial review and nullified if they can be shown to infringe one of the entrenched rights. The rights will protect everybody, but especially members of the minority who might otherwise be subject to legislation or policies designed to promote the majority's interests or values at their expense. Obviously this depends on the majority community being willing to support a

constitution that has this restraining feature built into it. It also depends on the existence of a judiciary that is sufficiently independent that it can take decisions that the government dislikes. These are going to be real issues in practice. But I want to ask a different question here. How effective are human rights as a way of protecting the interests and aspirations of minority groups in plural societies?

The essential problem here is that human rights are designed as protections for individuals; they are not targeted at groups. The protections they provide are certainly important for members of minorities. If human rights are made effective, they will be protected against arbitrary arrest and detention, they will be able to speak freely and practice their religion or their culture, they will be protected against discrimination in the workplace, and so forth. These are important safeguards. But minority groups typically also care a great deal about what I will call collective goods, and human rights are not so useful here. Depending on the kind of group we are talking about, they may care not just that they should be permitted to use their own language, but that their language should receive official recognition. They may want support for their culture or religion, in the form for example of schools in which that culture or religion is transmitted down to the next generation. They may have territorial claims – ideas about areas of land that they see as rightfully belonging to them, and that should they should therefore be allowed to control. They may care about the state's symbols – about the flag or the national anthem or the kind of ceremony used to inaugurate the head of state. These are all collective goods in the sense that if they are going to be provided, they will be provided for the whole group and not for individual members.

Human rights as they are usually understood belong to individuals and not to groups, and so they are of very limited use when minority groups are being deprived of the collective goods that they believe to be important to them. It does not

make sense to talk about an individual right to an official language, or to religious schooling, or to territory. There is really only one widely acknowledged collective right, the right to self-determination, which although not included in the original UN Declaration, is present in the later International Covenants: 'All peoples have the right of self-determination'. As this is usually understood, however, a 'people' here means all the citizens of a state taken together. The right is meant to protect them from foreign domination, especially from colonialism. It says nothing about how they should arrange their affairs internally. In fact the relevant clause goes on to say that it is up to them to decide what form of government they wish to have.

So human rights are certainly very important for minority groups, but taken by themselves they don't really address the political disadvantages that minority groups face simply by virtue of the fact that they are minorities. If the majority uses the power it inevitably has to make the state into an instrument of its own will – pursuing policies that reflect its own cultural or religious values at the expense of the other groups in society – human rights even when they are properly enforced are not going to provide an effective safeguard. So now let me move to the second approach, which I called the power sharing approach. The basic idea here is that we should arrange things politically so that the majority is forced to share power with one or more minority groups. This can be done at different levels – either at parliamentary level through the electoral system, or at governmental level, or at both together. The electoral system can be made more minority-friendly in a number of ways. One is through the introduction of some form of proportional representation, so that parties representing the minority groups are able to win some seats in parliament, which they might not be able to do under a traditional Westminster-style system. A different approach which stays with the first past-the-post system for counting votes involves drawing constituency boundaries in such a way that minority groups become the majority in a certain number of constituencies. Yet

another possibility is formally to reserve a certain number of seats for particular ethnic or religious groups – this happens in countries as different as Croatia, Lebanon and New Zealand. Of course none of these methods will provide the minority groups on an equal footing with the majority in parliament – they will still remain minorities. The theory, however, is that they will be able to make their voices heard, and that they may be able to exert some influence on government in cases where they become junior partners in a coalition.

I think that these forms of power-sharing have some value, but whether they are an effective way of protecting minority groups' interests depends too much on contingent factors such as whether members of the majority are willing to listen to what is being said by the minority's elected representatives, and whether they turn out to be essential to forming a ruling coalition. You might contemplate the position of Arab parties in Israel's Knesset as an example of how little real power formal representation guarantees. So what if we move up to a higher level and examine power-sharing in government? What I am thinking of here is a formal arrangement that reserves certain government offices for members of each group. If the Prime Minister comes from one group, then his or her deputy must be drawn from the other group, and so on. This can be combined with proportionality rules for the civil service and the judiciary. We have had an arrangement like this in the UK for Northern Ireland since the Good Friday Agreement was signed in 1998. Ministries are allocated to parties according to their proportions in the Stormont assembly, which is itself elected using a form of proportional representation. What this means is that in practice the Northern Ireland Executive is nicely balanced between Protestant Unionists and Catholic Nationalists. It is by no means a utopia – there have been several crises along the way when one or other side has threatened to walk out – but it has meant that the province has been spared the inter-communal violence that lasted through the three previous decades.

I am not trying to offer post-Good Friday Northern Ireland as a specific model for anywhere else, but it's certainly worth asking what has made it work. Well, first, although Northern Ireland is a majority/minority community, it is fairly evenly balanced between Protestants and Catholics: the population split is about 48% Protestant identifiers to 45% Catholic identifiers, and this translates into 56/43 seat split in favour of the Unionist parties in the current assembly. So it is not a question of a large majority confronting a small minority. In fact, on current trends, it may not be long before the Catholic identifiers become the larger group. Second, the power sharing arrangement is held in place through pressure exerted by both British and Irish governments who very much want the deal to stick. Essentially the threat on the part of the British government is that if power-sharing breaks down, then Northern Ireland will once again be ruled directly from London. Although that would be more unwelcome to the Catholics than the Protestants, no politician in Northern Ireland really wants it to happen. So they have a big incentive to make sure that power-sharing continues to work. And that of course is over and above the great improvement to the economy and living standards that the end to violence and stable government has brought about in the years since 1998. And third, the Nationalist parties have been willing to put their ambitions for a united Ireland into cold storage for the time being, and accept that their primary political role is to work for the benefit of the Catholic community in Northern Ireland – so in effect they've accepted the legitimacy of a system that gives them a guaranteed (but not majority) position.

So could something like the Northern Irish solution be replicated in plural societies elsewhere? It is one thing to write a constitution that has power-sharing requirements built into it, and another to show that the communities themselves have sufficient reason to make it work. Why in particular would the majority agree to implement such an arrangement, if there is no external force (like the British government in the case of Northern Ireland)

compelling them to do so? One answer could be that the alternative appears worse still – that without power-sharing, the minority will try to secede, or civil war will break out. But this is not a very stable solution. Fear alone is not enough to hold a state together.

In fact, in countries such as Belgium where a form of power-sharing has lasted over a long period of time, it seems that another factor has entered the equation: although there is a fairly clear linguistic and cultural division between the two main groups, the Flemish and the Walloons, there is also a widely shared and valued overarching identity as Belgians. Both sides would lose something of value to them if Belgium were to split. In other words, Belgium is not just a plural society, divided along linguistic lines. It is also a nation with the usual trappings of nationality, a monarch, a capital city that neither side wants to abandon, and so forth. I am going to come back later to talk about the importance of shared national identity in plural societies. What I am saying at this point is that a power-sharing form of democracy can be made to work, but that it needs the right kind of motivation, which can either be supplied externally, as in the case of Northern Ireland, or internally, by the different communities sharing a desire to stay together and therefore needing to find a fair way of resolving their disagreements.

As time has gone on, the Belgians have in fact drifted rather more towards the third approach I want to consider, the one I called the devolved government approach. Here, each community is granted considerable autonomy to make decisions in its own geographical region. It is given control over policy in areas like education and welfare, while the central government retains authority over security, defence and foreign policy. The devolved government may even be given some tax-raising powers. Sometimes this arrangement is described as a form of federalism, but it need not be – in the UK, for example, substantial powers have been devolved to Wales and Scotland as

well to Northern Ireland, but, the UK does not describe itself as a federal state. The essential point is that the different groups in the society should feel that their interests are being protected by being granted self-government over the areas of policy that matter most to them.

How well does this work as a solution to the majority-minority problem in plural societies? Notice first of all that because it relies on devolving power to a particular geographical area, it is only going to work where the minority is concentrated in a particular region. So it depends upon the kind of pluralism we are talking about. The most straightforward case is where the minority groups are minority nations, and where the nation's borders are already well-established. Scotland within the UK is a case in point. As you'll know, an independence referendum was held last year. It was finally lost, but there was a moment at which it looked as though the Yes vote might well carry the day. So this was somewhat controversial, but what was not controversial was the area in which the referendum was held. The borders between England and Scotland were settled in the 16th century, and have not been challenged since, though Nicola Sturgeon, the currently very popular leader of the Scottish National Party, when asked in an interview whether she might consider putting up a candidate south of the border in the city of Carlisle – the site of a famous Scottish siege 700 years ago – said, jokingly 'Don't tempt me' (at least we hope she was joking). The point, then, is that devolved government can only deliver within the borders of its jurisdiction, so if we're concerned about the minority's access to collective goods, these will go most directly to the people who live within those borders.

Nevertheless, devolved forms of government may indirectly benefit members of the minority living elsewhere. Language protection may be the best example here. A minority's language is always vulnerable to being eroded because there will be an incentive to convert to the majority language, or to an international language

like English, and especially to have your children educated in that language as an insurance policy. If a minority group wants to preserve its native tongue, it is important to have a physical space in which that language is the official language – the language of government and public life. The Belgian philosopher Philippe van Parijs puts this nicely when, thinking about the fate of the small languages of Europe, he says that every language needs a territory in which it is ‘queen’ – a region where everybody is expected to learn and use the language. A devolved government can ensure that the queen retains her supremacy and this can be of benefit to people who speak that language outside the territory. For example it helps to ensure that books, films and TV shows continue to be made in the language. A good example is the role that Quebec plays in preserving the use of French in Canada, thereby benefitting French speakers in other provinces. This couldn’t happen unless Quebec was self-governing with the freedom to create its own language policy within the limits laid down in the Canadian constitution.

So devolved government can work for minority groups that are territorially concentrated – but not for groups that are spread more or less evenly throughout the state, as may be the case with religious minorities, for instance. But there needs to be agreement on the borders within which devolution will occur. What, however, if there is no agreement? Typically national minorities will have a territorial heartland that is of great symbolic importance to them, but there may be a large periphery in which many of their members actually live. How much of that area should be included in the devolved territory? Unfortunately there is no obvious way to answer this question. Sometimes it is suggested that the way forward is to hold a referendum: let the people themselves decide whether they want to form part of a particular regional unit or not. But then the question becomes: who should be included in the constituency for the referendum itself? The issue was famously posed by the man largely responsible for the original constitution of independent

Ceylon, Sir Ivor Jennings, who attacked the doctrine of self-determination in the following words:

‘On the surface it seemed reasonable: let the people decide. It was in fact ridiculous because the people cannot decide until somebody decides who are the people.’

There is another potential problem with devolved government: it may serve as a half-way house leading to demands for outright secession. As I understand it, this is one of the reasons why the idea of federalism has consistently met with opposition in Sri Lanka. Some regard it as a slippery slope leading towards the break-up of the country. In saying that this is a potential problem, I am assuming here that the nature of the division between majority and minority is not so acute that a complete divorce would be justified in any case. I am assuming in other words that the two groups can live together if they can work out an arrangement that is fair to both. Why then is devolution not always a stable solution? Experience tells us that there is an incentive for politicians in the devolved unit to win popular support by demanding an ever-increasing share of power and resources from the centre. When times are hard, they can blame the national government for austerity, and paint a rosy picture of how life will be once the territory becomes independent. In this way they can create a demand for independence even though this may not be what they really want in their heart of hearts.

Having said that, there are plenty of examples of multinational democracies which are federal in form and yet have remained stable over many years, including some like Canada where secessionist movements have sprung up, but then later seen their support fall away. Switzerland has not faced a serious challenge to its unity since the Sonderbund War of 1847. So how has this been achieved? In my view, a key factor in these success stories is that though they can be described as multinational democracies, they are not just multinational or multi-ethnic. There is also an overarching national identity that

bridges between the majority and the minority. People in Quebec mostly think of themselves as Canadian as well as Quebecois or as French-speakers. German, French and Italian speakers in Switzerland think of themselves as Swiss first and foremost and celebrate Alpine landscapes and William Tell. An inclusive sense of nationality like this dampens down any separatist urges and makes it easier for majority and minority groups to collaborate politically since there are common points of reference that they share with each other. So this makes it easier both to create power-sharing institutions and devolved forms of government: people can trust one another not to abuse the opportunities these institutions provide simply to promote the interest of their own group. In democratic politics, trust is the most precious commodity we have. Whatever promotes it should be seized with both hands.

There is, though, a potential problem with national identity as the cement that enables democracy to work in plural societies. Typically, the identity itself is not culturally neutral. It bears the imprint of the majority group, whether this is a matter of language, religion, or historical points of reference. So how can minority groups buy into it? Some scholars today argue that what needs to be promoted in place of traditional national identities is 'civic nationalism' or 'constitutional patriotism'. The idea here is that what should hold people together is not so much a common history, or a language, or a set of cultural values, but their loyalty to the state itself, or in particular to the principles that are laid down in its constitution, which will usually mean liberal principles like human rights, the rule of law and indeed democracy itself. In other words the idea of 'the people' should be redefined so that it no longer refers to an historic group that have lived on the territory for centuries past and have developed their own customs, religious practices and so forth, but to all the people living together as citizens of the state, regardless of their cultural background, whether they are from long-established families or newly arrived immigrants, and so forth.

Inclusive civic nationalism of that kind is a noble vision, but is it a realistic one? Can people really identify with something as abstract as a constitution, or a set of principles? Well in some places, perhaps they do. Americans clearly revere their constitution, despite the fact that it contains some clauses (such as the one that refers to the right to bear arms), that make it quite dysfunctional today. For different reasons, so do the Germans. But in many other places, constitutions themselves are contested politically and change over time. When I first began studying politics, there was a joke about the man who went into a bookshop in Paris and asked to buy a copy of the French Constitution and was told to look in the Periodicals section. And in Britain, of course, we don't really have one at all, despite the Magna Carta. But even if the constitution exists and is stable, the question remains whether it is likely to provide the kind of emotional bond that is needed to hold a plural society together. If the question is 'who are we? What makes us Sri Lankans and not Indians or Pakistanis (say)?' the answer is not likely to refer to a state or a constitution.

Is there a middle road here, between traditional nationalism, which is too 'thick' because it is imbued with the cultural values of the historic majority, and purely civic nationalism, which I am suggesting is too 'thin' to serve the function that it needs to serve. Is it possible to develop an inclusive form of nationalism that all groups in a plural society, the minority as well as the majority, can identify with? I believe it is possible, but it requires careful crafting. One question is whether there are points of reference that all groups in the society share – for example occasions in the past when they have come together to defend against a common enemy. It occurred to me when reading about the history of Sri Lanka that the process of decolonisation might have been such a point had there been more of an independence struggle – if a Sri Lankan Gandhi had appeared. The handover from British rule, which at the time seemed commendably smooth, might in retrospect not have served the country's future integrity as

well as something more contested. Sport can also become an arena in which national identity is expressed, and I have read a couple of interesting commentaries on the reasons why Tamils have been under-represented (with some notable exceptions) in Sri Lankan cricket. Putting that right would be one of my top priorities if I was ruler for the day.

Another question is how to strike a cultural balance between majority and minority. The aim cannot be complete cultural neutrality. A national identity must reflect the cultures of the groups that now make up the nation, and this also means that the majority culture (if there is one) must be given some degree of precedence. But this is consistent with recognition and support for the minority cultures. Take the often problematic area of language policy in multilingual societies. Broadly speaking there are three solutions. One is to give each significant language official status and ensure that they can all be used throughout the territory for public purposes; this is the Canadian solution for French and English. The second is to follow the territorial principle and make each language 'queen' in particular regions. This is the Swiss solution: if you travel on a Swiss train, the announcements will change from, say, German to French as you cross a cantonal border. This means that there is no national language as such. The third is to have the majority language as the national language and encourage everyone to learn that, while providing educational and media support for speakers of the minority languages. This is the UK's solution for speakers of Welsh and Gaelic. Which solution is preferable will depend partly on the numerical balance between majority and minority, and partly how important it is, in terms of creating a shared identity and conducting public business, to have a single language that everyone speaks.

Building an inclusive national identity in a divided society is never going to be an easy task, but the prize at the end of the road is very great. Let me try to sum up what I've been arguing in this

talk. I began by talking about the basic problem for democracy when societies are deeply divided between a majority group and the rest – the problem of giving the minority or minorities reasons to play the democratic game. I then canvassed three possible ways of solving the problem: through enforcing human rights, through power-sharing, and through partially devolving government to regions. Each of these strategies is promising, but has limitations. Human rights by themselves won't ensure that minorities get their fair share of the collective goods that the state provides. Unless power-sharing is enforced by some external power (like Britain in the case of Northern Ireland), it needs commitment on both sides to make it work. And devolved government can be a source of conflict when there are disputes over the boundaries of the devolved unit and/or which powers ought to be handed over to the regional body. The best answer to the problem is likely to involve combining all three of these mechanisms, but it needs something else as well – a force that holds the groups together and creates enough trust to make these institutions work. So I turned finally to national identity and its place in a plural society. I suggested that the success stories were countries that have developed forms of national identity that were sufficiently inclusive that minorities could share in them. Without that emotional commitment to national unity, changing the institutions – or indeed writing a new constitution – won't ever be sufficient.

Of course, redefining national identity so that it becomes more accessible to minority groups involves a sacrifice on the part of the majority – they have to rein back their ambition to be culturally dominant – so it can only happen if that group sees that the prize is worth it. And success can never be guaranteed. Many of us thought that the UK's Scottish question had been solved by the creation of a Scottish parliament in 1998, but last year we were biting our nails as the independence referendum results were read out. As I said at the beginning, it would be impertinent for me to propose solutions to the problems caused

by ethnic and minority national divisions in Sri Lanka, problems to which the man we are honouring today devoted much thought and practical effort. Having read some of his parliamentary speeches, it was clear that he was unwavering in his commitment to the protection of human rights for all groups in the society. He also devoted considerable energies to the issue of devolved government, particularly to the constitutional status of the Provincial Councils in the mid-1990s. And he grappled with the issue of power-sharing, asking himself the question whether the ethnic cleavages in Sri Lanka were not too deep to allow it to work. But he was aware, I believe, that none of this could succeed without a resolution to what he called ‘the national question’. So I am going to finish my talk with a question, not mine however, but his, which I think puts the key problem in a nutshell: ‘Can modern constitutionalism accommodate multiple and distinct forms of belonging to the community, the region and the nation?’

LIST OF PAST LECTURES

Date	Topic	Speaker	Speaker Profile
March 2000	Nationalism and self-Determination: Is There an Alternative to Violence?	Mr. Michael Ignatieff	Writer, Historian And Broadcaster
July 2000	Human Rights Political Conflict & Compromise	Mr. Ian Martin	Former Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary- General for East Timor and former Secretary-General, Amnesty International
July 2001	No Greater Sorrow (Times of joy Recalled in Wretchedness)	Prof. Amitav Ghosh	Novelist, Anthropologist, Professor of Comparative Literature, Queens College, City University of New York
July 2002	Truth and Reconciliation in Times of Conflict: The South African Model	Prof. Alexander L. Boraine	President, International Center for Transitional Justice
July 2003	Whose Face is That I See?: Remembering the Unfallen	Prof. E Valentine Daniel	Professor of Anthropology and Philosophy, Columbia University
October 2004	Justice and Human Rights for All: The Key to Peace and a Sustainable World	Ms Clare Short MP	British Labour Party Politician and Member of Parliament
July 2005	The Political Formation of Cultures: South Asian and Other Experiences	Prof. Narendra Subramanian	Associate Professor of Political Science McGill University, Montreal, Canada
July 2006	Terror and the Constitution: Notes from America since September 11	Mr. Steve Coll	Staff writer, The New Yorker, former Managing Editor, The Washington Post

July 2007	The Limits of State Sovereignty: The Responsibility to Protect in the 21 st Century	Prof. Gareth Evans	President, International Crisis Group
July 2008	Democracy & Development: Restoring Social Justice at the Core of Good Governance	Prof. Gowher Rizvi	Harvard University Kennedy School of Government
July 2009	Constitutional Utopias: A Conversation with Neelan Tiruchelvam	Prof. Upendra Baxi	Emeritus Professor of Law University of Warwick, UK
August 2010	Histories and Identities	Prof. Romila Thapar	Emeritus Professor of Ancient Indian History, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi
July 2011	Making South Asian Cities Habitable: A Perspective from the Past	Prof. Ramachandra Guha	Historian, Biographer, Columnist, Environmentalist and Cricket Writer
July 2012	Constitutional Design in Plural Societies: Integration or Accommodation?	Prof. Sujit Choudhry	Cecilia Goetz Professor of Law, Faculty Director, Centre for Constitutional Transitions, NYU School of Law
July 2013	“The law, this violent thing” dissident memory and democratic futures	Prof. Vasuki Nesiah	Associate Professor of Practice New York University
July 2014	Stone and Flower: Truth as a Foundation for Community Learning and Reconciliation	Ms Galuh Wandita	Co-convenor of the Coalition for Justice and Truth in Indonesia, a member of a “citizen’s council” tasked to seek the truth on Indonesia’s past crimes

The Neelan Tiruchelvam Trust (NTT) is an indigenous philanthropic organisation that supports social justice, peace and reconciliation. It was founded in 2001, two years after the assassination of Dr. Neelan Tiruchelvam. NTT is devoted to sustaining his intellectual legacy as a peacemaker, legislator, constitutional lawyer and institution builder.

Our Vision

The establishment and protection of a just, equitable and peaceful society.

Our Mission

To collectively promote peace, reconciliation and human rights, sharing responsibility, resources and risks through strategic partnerships with civil society, public sector, business community, diaspora, academia and donors.



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