

Homegrown Solutions; What Make Them Successful?

With the defeat of terrorism by our armed forces, the idea of homegrown solutions has gained a much awaited respect from all and sundry. What guarantees the success of a homegrown solution? To answer this question we could look at another homegrown solution that worked out well over a decade ago in the field of Cricket. On this occasion Sri Lankan Cricket led by Arjuna Ranatunga (AR) contrived a unique brand of cricket that ultimately resulted in us winning the Cricket's most prized award: the World Cup in 1996, a feat that has yet to be matched by Sri Lankan Cricket. Of course accomplishments in Cricket pale in to insignificant when compared with the defeat of terrorism. But in an abstract sense they are both about winning against major oppositions. The nice thing about Cricket is that in Cricket things happen much faster than in politics.

According to Cricket experts, innovative transformations that AR made to Sri Lankan Cricket were the reason behind their success. These transformations include: bringing talented under privileged players from outside of Colombo, allowing players to play their natural game and using strategies like pinch hitting in the initial overs and drying out runs in the middle overs using excessive spin. AR matched these innovations by resilient character both in an out of the field that built confidence in his players. Although he was confrontational at times, his approach to cricket was calculated and modest. These were some of the features of his brand of Cricket. It was often said that this brand of Cricket worked well with the way our Cricketers played the game. That means that even though we learnt Cricket from our colonial masters we had absorbed the game into our culture in our own inherent way and that AR created something new along those same lines. But what is most important is that he did not just improve on some methods that were already in existence. His was an invention; an invention that others tried to emulate once it became evident that it could win matches.

Coming back to the present time; building on AR's innovations Sri Lankan Cricket has since grown to be a professional outfit. The current lot is talented like the players of yesteryear, if not more; they are physically fitter and might even go on to win another world cup. But there is a huge difference. None of the Sri Lankan teams since then (including the present team) has been able to make an impact of the same magnitude on the Cricketing world as Arjuna and his team did in the nineties. They may have won more matches, series etc but their stuff has not made anybody wanting to emulate us. This is probably because we have not invented any new winning strategy in Cricket; meaning we have not contributed any significant new knowledge to the field of Cricket since AR.

Why was AR able to invent things in Cricket when others failed? The answer to this can be found in constructive relativism which says that knowledge is constructed relative to one's own Chinthanaya. It follows then that one is proficient at creating new knowledge only within one's own chinthanaya. If so, then AR was able to invent things in Cricket because he was thinking within his own Chinthanaya; like a Sri Lankan. Then it is no wonder that his brand of Cricket was in line with the way we naturally played the game. Thus it is likely that the most fundamental thing about AR's success was the fact that in

the nineties as a Cricketer he was intellectually a Sri Lankan. In other words, if he were thinking like an Australian or an Indian or any other AR may not have invented anything new; and if it weren't innovative his brand of Cricket would not have made such an impact on our own Cricket or that of the world.

However, innovative ideas alone will not give rise to successful solutions. That is because those who want to be in control of the game will oppose it if it goes against their interests. In Cricket this comes from those who control the game culturally, politically and economically mainly England, Australia and lately to some extent India. It is they who decide what is Cricket and not Cricket, which format is to be accepted, what rules should apply (If Upul Tharanga, not Adam Gilchrist were to hide a squash ball in his glove would the MCC have interpreted the rules the same way in 2007?), what an ethical practice is, what a good cricketing talent is and so on. (Asians residing in committees that decide on these things does not mean that they have a cultural influence on the decisions) This cannot be helped since Cricket as played today is their invention. So it is natural when they become good at a certain format of the game or certain type of bowling/batting to the extent that they are in a position of advantage, those in control of the game find avenues to exploit that advantage. For instance, Power play, field restrictions, and twenty over game are some major transformations made to the game by Australia and England. Would we have made these same changes if it was up to us? Why is spin bowling made to look like the poor cousin of fast bowling? Why are pitches that favor spin bowling over fast bowling called sub standard but pitches that favor fast bowling over spin bowling are not? This is not a conspiracy but how the system works; just as Tony Blair did in politics rules of the game can be changed by the Cricketing fraternity to our disadvantage and we cannot do anything about it.

There is asymmetry in cultural, political and economic power in Cricket. Those who have more power, use it to win in Cricket. While things seem even on the Cricket ground, these forces act outside of it. The effects of asymmetry in power outside the Cricket ground is never challenged or hardly even considered relevant. In this sense the fairness on the ground is somewhat of a smoke screen; oddly resembling how the UN works in the political arena. So, what did AR do to overcome these external forces? On one hand he was fortunate that the conditions were just right that a window of opportunity was presented in which he could negate any pressure by the external forces that controlled the game (e.g. World cup 96 was played in spin friendly Asian pitches). On the other hand he took the battle beyond the confines of the Cricket ground when it was necessary as when he fought to protect Murali from being banned. His actions were deplored by the Cricketing fraternity as "not Cricket", but that is exactly the reason why it worked. These factors combined with his Sri Lankan intellect that led to innovative ideas were the reasons for his successful homegrown solution.

Now if we stretch our imagination we may generalize our experience in Cricket to other fields of interests. It is not the genetics of the leadership or the material they use that make up a homegrown solution or its success. For a homegrown solution to be successful, it is essential that the proposed solution must be innovative meaning it must create new knowledge in the relevant field. For this, the leadership behind the solution

must think within our own Chinthanaya because without so innovative ideas will be hard to come by. Additionally, to successfully implement a solution we may have to counter asymmetries that exist in the relevant field. Either we have to take advantage of opportune times when the conditions are right or they must be actively fought without confining the battle to the space and parameters defined by those opposing forces.

It is not difficult to see that this formula applies very well to how Rajapakse government defeated LTTE. Much has been written about it hence no need to repeat it here. We should keep producing homegrown solutions like these to our problems. It won't be easy because the odds are stacked against us. It will take courageous leaders that are intellectually Sri Lankan to produce innovative solutions. Regardless of what they could achieve in other parts of the world, patriotic, learned people equipped only with Ivy League certificates might only give us outstanding interviews on Fareed Zakaria's show on CNN; nothing much relevant.

-Janaka Wansapura