

## **GOOD GOVERNANCE AND THE HAPPY NATION?**

Celebration of World social work Day  
**National Institute of Social Development**

**A lecture by**

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at the Bandaranayake Memorial Hall  
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UVPA – Colombo - 2015

Honourable reverence, Dr Riddley Jayasinghe, Director General, National Institute of Social Development, Academics, other religious leaders, students and friends,

### **Introduction**

First of all I would like to thank my colleague Rev. Somananda Thero who invited me to deliver this short paper at the Seminar organized by the National Institute of Social Development to commemorate the world's Social Work Day. Therefore, it is my great pleasure to be here today as one of the speakers to raise a few questions about the most palatable word in the political and social arena today – The good governance.

As we all know, for the last few months, many political leaders and social activists, journalists and artists of the society uttered this word many times, asking for a regime change for this country. Laymen of the country also tried to understand the term good governance with what the politicians said and did. However, the term Good Governance has already been a vague and complex political jargon for the public. Furthermore, this term which currently circulates in the media has also created ambiguities among social workers and political activists by not being able to pin down the exact meanings signified by the term good governance.

Similar to political jargons such as democracy, free market economy, neo liberalism, representative parliament, ethnic conflict, human rights, freedom of expression, the term good governance appears in the political discussion in this country as a fresh jargon. This created more and more ambiguities and uncertainties of what it really means for the general public. Hence, it is very important for us to reconsider and develop a discussion around this area to clarify some of the important implications of good governance and the social responsibility within our society today.

Therefore, what I attempt to do in this short paper is to discuss the relationship between the good governance and the notion of happiness of people.

As you may already know, I am an actor, and a theatre activist. Further I am working as an academic at the Department of Drama Oriental Ballet and Contemporary Dance, University of The Visual and Performing Arts, Colombo. For the last few months, before the presidential election, artists, writers, lawyers, journalists, students and many others social activists gathered as a pressure group to raise important issues related to human well being. We believed that our society was going bad to worse because of the atrocities such as human right violations, censorships, crimes, and corruptions created by the political condition of the country. These groups operated as pressure groups to raise some of the important issues related to good governance and reconciliation among ethnicities. As artists and the citizens of this country, we believed that we need freedom of expression, freedom of creativity, right to live and practice our political beliefs, engagement with other communities and stop corruptions. Above all we needed happiness and well being.

Today what I want to discuss is this idea of happiness in relation to good governance and how the social intervention can contribute to uplift the well being and the happiness of the citizens.

### **What is good governance?**

As a field of academic enquiry, good governance has created many difficulties among scholars who have tried to come to a common generalisation of what good governance is about. As the two words signify to us, that good governance means good ways of ruling a country. Another connotation is that it is about the way that a government functions and administers the policies and how those policies are implemented for the betterment of the citizens of the country. As Van Doeveren points out, this term was first introduced in 1989 by the World Bank. Since then, the major international donor organisations and other institutions such as International Monetary Fund (IMF), Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and the United Nations (UN) have developed criteria in distributing development aid for the developing countries. These criteria reflect some of the key features of good governance.

United Nations Development Program introduces five principles of good governance. They are as follows: accountability, efficiency and effectiveness, openness and transparency, participation, and

rule of law. There are many variations and interplay between these key principles. As these key principles presuppose, they directly represent governmental mechanism of implementing policies and how these governing activities are linked with the masses. Many donor organisations and agencies have developed indexes and criteria for categorising countries. Through these indexing, donors are able to identify certain qualities of good governance in those countries which need funding to run their development projects. Accordingly countries are being ranked by those donor organisations, creating opportunities for funding. (Doeveren 2011, p. 301). This indexing of good governance is highly contradictory and always been articulated with different good governance standards. The World Bank for instance disregards the political values of countries when they provide funding support; whereas, the United Nations considers the political and democratic values maintained in countries when they provide aid for development purposes (Doeverent 2001, p 32). As Doeveren further contends, different donor agencies and institutions have different opinions and ideologies about interpreting the notion of “Goodness” (ibid, p. 302). This conflicting idea about the interpretation of the notion of “goodness” further reveals the difficulties of defining the human well being and the way we can define what is good and what is bad.

### **What is happiness?**

Because I am an actor and an educator, you don't expect me to talk like a politician. I am therefore here to talk on behalf of artists and for the citizens of this country. We all need happiness; the happiness in our lives. I ask whether there is a connection between happiness and good governance. Eradicating a brutal regime and establishing a new government have promised good governing practices. This new establishment should bring prosperity and peace for people's lives. But this change cannot be achieved overnight. The idea of happiness again is ambiguous as well as a vague notion which could be interpreted in different ways to define the people's fulfilments of their lives. In this sense, the happiness can surely be achieved through the enhancement of the quality of life. Hence the happiness and the quality of life are two similar terms which goes hand in hand. Without improving the quality of life, we cannot achieve the well being of the people.

In the broader sense my practice as an actor and being empathised with a character and portray it on the stage or on screen also bring forth such aspirations and demands for the enhancement of a good life for us. I believe that artists' social intervention in cultural products influence the

enhancement of a good cultural life for people. These cultural products and their implications upon the society are varied and the changes that can bring forth the society are diverse. They can affect the construction of the cultural psyche and the consciousness of the people and cultivate the awareness of the socio-political environment of the society. The cultural productions and their interventions can expose the stark nakedness of the social unjust and political hypocrisies of governments. As an artist, I believe that these cultural activities and questions raised by artistic practices directly address the important issues in good governance and the well being of people. Arts practices provide us aspirations and desires of achieving good lives. They provide paths to see the deeper realities of the human life.

Nevertheless, as middle class bourgeoisies, we always lament for a lost culture, heritage and the history of our race. We believe that today's life, ethics, and values are a product of such a history that our ancestors lived with and shared with each other. In that sense, we objectify the notion of culture as a product of our ancestors which has been transferred for the continuation of the social progression. The problem with this ideological assumption is that the cultural life of human being is conceptualised and understood within the context of a lost society. However, we always talk and argue to reconstruct such a lost universe and believe that these value systems and archaeological cultural products could possibly enrich the cultural life of today. The irony is that we want that culture in its former sedimented, archaic form. The culture for us is something that is coming from the past and flowing to the future. We don't see that our contemporary lives produce culture, and our cultural consumptions are different from what our ancestors produced and consumed.

### **Happiness and Governance**

If the situation of good governance is still a contradictory and a controversial area of study, I would say that there should be a connection between the happiness of people and the good governance. As this short paper intends, it is questioned whether the good governance could bring the happiness to the people who are succumbed to such a political practice.

I now would like to present an important work conducted on this particular area of research. Is there a connection between the good governance and the happiness of the masses? This question is particularly important to me as I am also working in some industries where we try to produce happiness and entertainment for human beings. There are two conflicting ideas in this debate. One

is that if the sole intention of cultural industries is to produce happiness or aesthetic pleasure, the political consciousness of the consumers could be misled by such engagement between the arts and the masses. This idea is not a new thing. Plato in his Republic first addressed the atrocities of the artists' involvement with the state and the governance. The idea behind this is that the aesthetic pleasure may disguise the actual political realities and engagements between the citizens and the government. Furthermore, the religious institutions of the society particularly interested in human beings' salvation and these religious teachings directly inform the individual achievements of happiness through different metaphysical states. Therefore these two ideological institutions which have a concern about the human happiness, salvation or nirvana affirm that the political engagement of direct involvement with the governing process cannot achieve the ultimate happiness of life.

There are many variations of understanding of what is good governance in our Asian region. In countries such as Sri Lanka or Indonesia, defining the goodness is conceptualised through many religious perspectives. For instance, in Sri Lanka, many false consciousness that are being developed by regimes can be the index of good governance practices despite the atrocities and unlawful situations created by such governments. People tend to believe that this or that government is good and their policies bring goodness for the masses because of those so called "Asian values". These so call values hegemonize the goodness of governance. What we have seen for the last few years in this country is a clear example of how these "Asian values" or I would say ideologies, playing a significant role in ruling the country despite all the corruptions, unlawfulness and brutality which overshadowed the country.

Media always propagated that people are happy because the regime executes what the masses expect from them. As long as the government ensures and protects those Asian values, people are happy. In this sense, if people are happy what is the problem with good governance? If we go back to the actual fact we see the ideological constructions dominated in our society: a major claim is that we have defeated our brutal enemy. We have found a leader who has defeated the enemy for the first time and is dedicated for protecting the long lasting religion which is the back bone of such heroism. We have produced leaders who are always following the religious values and protect and work towards the betterment of our secular as well as metaphysical attainments. So what are the reasons which prevent us by not being able to be happy? We are the nation of happiness. We are a

nation which opposes to all neo-liberal politics and economies coming from our colonial fathers. In that sense, we have defeated them and continue to be fighting and winning the game of neo-colonialism. Further we are a happy and contend nation because we have identified our other enemies and opponents. Our religion and the leaders are always dedicated for protecting and enhancing the thousands of years of our religious heritage and the value systems that are being continued to operate and protect our race and our kinds in the next millennia.

### **Conclusion**

To sum up what I argue is that the notion of good governance is not a neutral term. It represents ideological baggages which operate in different ways in diverse social contexts. In general, good governance practices are introduced by funding agencies or donor countries of the developed world to implement good practices of government in the developing countries. However, these strategies are mainly focused on the legal political and economic growth of a country where the consumerism is one of the indexes of measuring the happiness and fairness of the people's rights. A major research work done by R. Shankar argues that heightened consumerism does not directly reflect the good governance and the happiness of the people. He argues that 'the effective public policies are ineffective to increase the happiness of the people. For example, a decreasing trend can be observed in Denmark' (Shanker, 2013, p. 251). Shanker's research further affirms that countries such as China and Nepal, the happiness of the people and the satisfaction of their life do not directly correspond with the economic and other policies implemented in those countries. There are other hidden factors which affect the social consciousness and the happiness of the nation. This also affirms that the good governance does not necessarily promise the fulfilments of the lives of the people. There are many other areas of interests that are being influenced to enhance the quality of the life of a citizen. Social workers, cultural activists and artists therefore need to reconsider these factors which affect the cultural, social and spiritual aspects of a human being. The good governance cannot confirm the happiness of the people only through the consumer democracy.

Thank you,

Dr Saumya Liyanage | 2015