

# **Japan's attack on Pearl Harbour ignited the liberation of Asia from Western domination – Time to express Asia's Gratitude to Japan**

by

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Good Afternoon. Ladies and Gentlemen. Thank you for inviting me to speak to you today. The title of my presentation is 'Japan's attack on Pearl Harbour ignited the liberation of Asia from Western domination – Time to Express Asia's Gratitude to Japan'. This is a very important topic not only for the people of Japan but also for people of Asia and beyond.

I am indeed honoured and privileged to be among such a distinguished audience in the Japanese Diet. I am grateful to the Society for the Dissemination of Historical Fact for providing me this precious opportunity and in particular Mr. Hideaki Kase (President), Mr. Hiromichi Moteki, Mr. Hiroyuki Fujita and Mr. Yukio Tanimoto, with all of whom I have been having informative and cordial correspondence on matters relating to accurate dispersal of news and views particularly relating to the Japanese involvement in the Greater East Asian War.

The Society for the Dissemination of Historical Fact is doing something marvelous and timely. To correct distortions in historical narratives which are usually biased, euro-centric and prejudiced against Japan. Ever since the end of the war Japan has been the victim of malicious propaganda that is directed against Japan, demonizing Japan and its people as the guilty party or the wrong doers, who deserve to be punished and shamed. This has to be challenged and countered in the interest of ensuring truth and establishing historical fact. The existence of the Society for the Dissemination of Historical Fact is therefore warranted and its work eminently justifiable.

Mr. Hideaki Kase's book 'The Greater East Asian War: How Japan Changed the World' and British Journalist Henry Scott Stokes book 'Fallacies in the Allied Nations' Historical Perception as observed by a British Journalist' serve as excellent resource material towards obtaining an insight into the true causes that forced Japan to enter the war.

I am here today not only to share thoughts on what needs to be done to rectify a blatant historical injustice done to the leaders and people of Japan in the aftermath of the second world war through manipulation of the media and history writing, but also to fulfill a long overdue duty as a Buddhist Sinhalese from Sri Lanka, as a representative of South Asia and a fellow Asian, to thank Japan for setting in

motion a phenomenal process that brought about the liberation of Asia from western colonial domination.

This year on December 8<sup>th</sup> 2018 the 77th anniversary of the Japanese bombing raid on Pearl Harbour will be commemorated. Special ceremonies will be held to remember the loss of the loved ones, friends and relatives. We share their grief. On December 8, 1941, Pearl Harbour was attacked by 353 Japanese fighter planes, bombers, and torpedo planes in two waves, launched from six aircraft carriers. All eight U.S. Navy battleships were damaged, with four sunk. The Japanese also sank or damaged three cruisers, three destroyers, an anti-aircraft training ship, and one minelayer. 188 U.S. aircraft were destroyed; 2,403 Americans were killed and 1,178 others were wounded. Japanese losses were light: 29 aircraft and five midget submarines lost, and 64 servicemen killed.

The purpose of my presentation today is not to embark on an inquiry to determine who was at fault and who was not. This is a complex issue with enough evidence readily available today to show that Japan was not the aggressor nation but was pushed under unavoidable circumstances to enter the war. Japan had no other option left to secure oil to sustain its existence as a nation, after USA regardless of probable consequences deliberately ceased oil exports to Japan in July 1941.

What is intended here is to examine the effects of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour and other western colonial possessions in Asia, on the psychology and morale of the people of Asia then mostly under western colonial domination, and ask whether Japan's anti-colonial leadership and battle success in the early phase of the War helped Asia's freedom fighters to step up their campaign for liberation from foreign occupation and achieve independence.

In the early part of the 20th century, it is undisputed that Japan was the only major country in the world that stood out openly for the liberation of Asia from western colonialism and had the capacity and resources to take on the challenge. 'Asia for Asians' became a battle cry of the Japanese. No other Asian country including China and India, took up such a Pan-Asian slogan or was placed in such militarily strong position.

On the day of the attack on Pearl Harbour i.e. December 8, 1941, an Imperial Rescript described Japan's war aims: to ensure Japan's integrity and to remove European colonialism from and bring stability to East and Southeast Asia. On December 08, 1941, the Japanese Prime Minister Hideki Tojo read out the Japanese Emperor Hirohito's proclamation of war to the Empire, excerpt of which are as follows:

"It has been unavoidable and far from Our wishes that Our Empire has been brought to cross swords with America and Britain.

“Eager for the realization of their inordinate ambitions to dominate the Orient, both America and Britain, .... have aggravated the disturbances in East Asia. Moreover, these two powers, inducing other countries to follow suit, increased military preparations on all sides of Our Empire to challenge us. They have obstructed by every means our peaceful commerce and finally resorted to direct severance of economic relations, menacing gravely the existence of Our Empire.

“Patiently have we waited and long have we endured in the hope that Our Government might retrieve the situation in peace.

“But our adversaries, showing not the least spirit of conciliation, have unduly delayed a settlement, and in the meantime they have intensified the economic and political pressure to compel thereby Our Empire to submission.

“This turn of affairs would, if left unchecked, not only nullify Our Empire’s efforts of many years for the sake of the stabilization of East Asia, but also endanger the very existence of our nation.

“The situation being such as it is Our Empire for its existence and self-defense has no other recourse but to appeal to arms and to crush every obstacle in its path.”

President Roosevelt called the attack on Pearl Harbour ‘a day of infamy’.

Prime Minister Winston Churchill declared that the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor was “a staggering blow” and “our prestige suffered with the loss of Hong Kong”. In early 1942, Churchill reassured the House of Commons amidst widespread, mass resistance to colonialism in India, that the Atlantic Charter’s provisions were not “applicable to [the] Coloured Races in [the] colonial empire, and that [the phrase] ‘restoration of sovereignty, self-government and national life’...[was] applicable only to the States and the Nations of Europe’.

Japan’s war policy intended a total break from Western dependence, including a rejection of bankrupt Western cultural traditions, which had been slavishly adopted since the Meiji restoration, and a return to an Asian consciousness (as opposed to Western) and civilizational values as a source for national greatness. Critical to the nation’s survival in the midst of unbridled Westernization was political and cultural regeneration and a pan-Asian solidarity under Japanese leadership which was articulated as a new Order for Asia in resistance to Western imperialism.

Matsuoka Yosuke, Japanese Foreign Minister, proclaimed the “Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere” in August 1940. The idea of decolonization under Japanese leadership resonated with Asians widely because, in the words of former U.S. President Herbert Hoover in 1942, “universally, the white man is hated by the Chinese, Malayan, Indian and Japanese alike,” due to his heartless and spiteful conduct as a colonial master over a few hundred years.

Japan's military success in the Battle of Tsushima in 1905 fired the dreams of Asians and Africans for freedom.

Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany appealed to Europe to rise above its parochial disputes to defend "your holiest possession," Christianity and European civilization, against the rising threat of the "Yellow Peril".

Within a decade of the German Kaiser's raising of the alarm of the danger of the "yellow peril," Japan defeated Russia in 1905.

It prompted a young Oxford lecturer, Alfred Zimmern, to put aside his lesson on Greek history to announce to his class "the most historical event which has happened, or is likely to happen, in our lifetime has happened; the victory of a non-white people over a white people."

Japan's spectacular military victories at the beginning of the 20th century and their impact on Asian intellectuals are well documented in Pankaj Mishra's book titled, "From the Ruins of Empire: The Revolt Against the West and the Remaking of Asia."

This work is a survey of Asian intellectuals in the late 19th and early 20th centuries and their role in pan-Asian, pan-Islamic, and anti-colonial movements. The book begins with an electrifying moment in Asia's struggle for liberation from Western domination: the spectacular Japanese naval victory over Russia at the Battle of Tsushima in May 1905, which stunned Asians and Africans living at the time under the yoke of colonialism.

This victory of the small but resurgent Japanese navy over the imperial might of what was then accepted as a major European power fired the imagination of an entire generation of Asian leaders.

Jawaharlal Nehru, Mohandas Gandhi, Sun Yat-Sen, Mao Zedong, the young Kemal Ataturk and nationalists in Egypt, Vietnam and many other countries welcomed Japan's decisive triumph in the Russo-Japanese War with euphoric zeal. "And they all drew the same lesson from Japan's victory," Pankaj Mishra writes. "White men, conquerors of the world, were no longer invincible."

Even Lord Curzon, Viceroy of India, noted that "the reverberations of that victory have gone like a thunderclap through the whispering galleries of the East." The world wars that followed further shrunk Europe of much of what remained of its moral and political authority in Asian eyes. "In the long view, however," Mishra concludes, "it is the battle of Tsushima that seems to have struck the opening chords of the recession of the West."

Japan's defeat of Russia in 1905 was uplifting news for Asians. For the first time since the middle ages, a non-European country had vanquished a European power in a major war. And Japan's victory gave way to a hundred-and-one fantasies – of national freedom, racial dignity, or simple vengefulness – in the minds of those who had bitterly endured European occupation of their lands.

Mahatma Gandhi then made an astute far reaching forecast. He remarked that “so far and wide have the roots of Japanese victory spread that we cannot now visualise all the fruit it will put forth.”

### **Japan's proposal for equality of races at League of Nations**

Japan had championed the cause of peoples under European colonial rule at the Treaty of Paris (1918–19) and the formation of the League of Nations. Japan proposed an amendment to the League's covenant that would ensure “equal and just treatment in every respect, making no distinction, either in law or in fact, on account of their race or nationality.” To their great shame, the western colonial powers rejected the notion of equality between human beings, fearing that it would become a challenge to white supremacy and the Colonial Order which suppressed non-white people. However, Japan by this proposal for recognition of equality of all, gained the esteem of Asians and Africans as the “logical leader of all coloured peoples.”

In respect to the Second World War, Jawaharlal Nehru observed:

“it became ever clearer that the western democracies were fighting not for a change but for a perpetuation of the old order, ” and both the Allied and Axis powers shared a common war interest, the preservation of white supremacy and the colonial status quo. Both sides, he noted, embraced legacies of “empire and racial discrimination,” and in affirmation after the war, “the old imperialisms still functioned....”

### **Japan's stunning military victories in 1941 – 1942**

Thirty-six years after its victory in the Battle of Tsushima, Japan struck the greatest decisive blow ever by any non – white country or non – white people to European power in Asia with the attack on Pearl Harbour. In about 90 days, beginning on December 8, 1941, Japan overran the possessions of Britain, the US and the Netherlands in east and south-east Asia, taking the Philippines, Singapore, Malaya, Hong Kong, the Dutch East Indies, much of Siam and French Indochina, and Burma with bewildering swiftness to stand poised at the borders of India by early 1942. All over Asia, subject people cheered the Japanese advance into countries forcibly held and occupied by western colonial powers.

Days before Singapore fell to the Japanese in early 1942, the Dutch Prime Minister-in-Exile, Pieter Gerbrandy, had conveyed his fears and anxieties to Churchill and other Allied leaders in the following words “Japanese injuries and insults to the

White population ... would irreparably damage white prestige unless severely punished within a short time”.

Mahathir Mohamad, Malaysia’s former Prime Minister, has said “most Asians felt inferior to the European colonisers and rarely did we even consider independence a viable option.” The colonies, he explained, were structured “to serve the European demand for raw materials and natural resources,” and were thus dependencies. But Japan’s expulsion of the British “changed our view of the world,” showing that “an Asian race, the Japanese” could defeat whites and with that reality dawned “ a new awakening amongst us that if we wanted to, we could be like the Japanese. We did have the ability to govern our own country and compete with the Europeans on an equal footing.” So despite the suffering under Japanese wartime occupation and the “tremendous disappointment” over the return of the British after the war, Mohamad wrote, the shackles of “mental servitude” had been broken.

Similarly, Singapore’s Lee Kuan Yew testified that Japan’s defeat of the British “completely changed our world”.

### **General Tomoyuki Yamashita – Tiger of Malaya**

The brilliant military campaign of General **Tomoyuki Yamashita** in the Malay Peninsula in early 1942 is described in great detail and displayed with graphics in the Yushukan Museum which is found next to the Yasukuni Jinja (Shrine) in Tokyo.

The Japanese conquest of Malaya and Singapore (considered impregnable by the British colonial rulers) in a mere 70 days under the leadership of General Yamashita and the sinking of the British warships Prince of Wales (Pride of the British Royal Navy) and Repulse by Japanese carrier - borne torpedo aircraft led to the British Prime Minister Winston Churchill calling the humiliating fall of Singapore to Japan as the "worst disaster" and "largest capitulation" in British military history. It was one of the biggest blows to Western prestige in Asia as it was coupled with the surrender of 130, 000 British Empire troops to General Yamashita’s Japanese army of 30,000 troops. This was the death blow to European colonialism and it was never able to recover their supremacy in Asia thereafter.

### **Expressions of praise and gratitude to Japan**

The Japanese with their stunning military victories over a common foe had made Asian people proud and stand erect with their heads held high.

“Britain was colonizing, enslaving Asian people before WW2. They ruled the Indian people for 180 years. It was Japan that got rid of the British from most of Asia and later all those countries gained independence.”

“Japan lost WW2 but as the consequence of Japan’s entry to war all S E Asian

countries and India achieved their long hoped for independence from the Western colonial powers within 15 years after the end of the War.”

British historian Arnold Toynbee said: “Japan put an end to West’s colonialism in Asia once and for all.”

Toynbee added “In World War II, Japanese people left a great history. Not for their own country but for countries that achieved benefit from the War. Those countries were ones that were included in the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, a short-lived ideal that Japan held out. The biggest achievement Japanese people left in history is that they succeeded in displaying the fact that Westerners who dominated the world were not “Undefeatable Gods.”

Former Thai Prime Minister Kukrit Pramoj Expressed his Admiration for Japan  
The former Prime Minister of Thailand, Kukrit Pramoj, who was Chief Editor of the newspaper ‘Siam Rath’ at the time and who took office as Prime Minister in 1973, stated:

“It was thanks to Japan that all nations of Asia gained independence. For Mother Japan, it was a difficult birth which resulted in much suffering, yet her children are growing up quickly to be healthy and strong.

“Who was it that enabled the citizens of the nations of Southeast Asia to gain equal status alongside the United States and Britain today? It is because Japan, who acted like a mother to us all, carried out acts of benevolence towards us and performed feats of self-sacrifice. December 8th (1941) is the day when Mother Japan – who taught us this important lesson – laid her life on the line for us, after making a momentous decision and risking her own well-being for our sake.

“Furthermore, August 15th (1945) is the day when our beloved and revered mother was frail and ailing. Neither of these two days should ever be forgotten.”

Long accustomed to servility in colonial countries, western powers grossly underestimated the post-war nationalism that the Japanese had both wittingly and unwittingly unleashed. They had also severely miscalculated their own staying power among foreign subject people innately hostile to them. Despite futile counter-insurgency operations and full-scale wars, especially in Indochina, the spread of de-colonisation was swift and extraordinary.

Burma, which hardly had a full blown nationalist movement before 1935, became free in 1948. The Dutch in Indonesia resisted with a rear guard defense and US and British assistance but Indonesian nationalists led by Sukarno finally overpowered them and pushed them out in 1953. Postwar chaos forced Malaya, Singapore and

Vietnam into long periods of insurgencies and wars, but an ultimate European retreat was never in doubt.

### **Japan's unsung role in India's independence struggle**

British governance in India — three centuries of exorbitant taxation, unfair trade practices, rampant free-marketsteering and deliberate starvation had led to the deaths of millions of Indians in preventable famines. Japan played a critical (largely unsung) role in India's struggle for independence by supporting Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose and assisting him to form the Indian National Army (INA).

It is argued with vehemence by informed observers that without Bose's INA, India might never have achieved independence.

This is because, although the INA failed militarily in the Battles at Kohima and Imphal along the India–Burma border in 1944 as part of the Japanese attempted entry to India, its troops (INA) got another opportunity to challenge the British Colonial Government in a Delhi courtroom in 1945. Three INA Officers were put on trial for treason at Red Fort. This move backfired on the British. The accused a Muslim, Sikh and Hindu justified their roles as liberators of a colonized nation and won the sympathy of the Indian public.

This led to support for the defendants spreading throughout the nation — including among Indians serving in the British Indian Army. These newly radicalized troops staged strikes and mutinies across the subcontinent in 1946 against the British occupation. With its once-solid military foundation shaken to the core — and facing widespread, huge demonstrations and possible mutinies by the three forces, Army, Navy and Air Force, on a scale bigger than the Indian Mutiny in 1857 — the British authorities decided that it was time to pack up and leave. On August 15, 1947, they granted India its independence.

An unwise partition of the Indian subcontinent, which placed two new nation-states in endless conflict, marked Britain's humiliating departure from India in 1947. "Europe," Jean-Paul Sartre claimed in his preface to Franz Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth*, seemed to be "springing leaks everywhere." "In the past we made history," Sartre asserted, "and now it is being made of us."

The retreat of the West from its colonies in the East may well be said to be the singular most important event of the 20th century.

My presentation is also intended to make a plea to right a great wrong done to Japan. In other words, to call on Asian countries to shun looking at Japan as an aggressor with criminal intent to plunder and loot other Asian countries a line pushed by massive western propaganda but to look at Japan as the real spark that ignited the fight all over Asia for independence from western domination. The time has come for fellow Asians who have benefited from Japan's massive war effort and



the blood sacrifices of Japanese soldiers to concede due acknowledgement to Japan. To single out Japan for war crimes selectively while avoiding any mention of the crimes committed by western countries in third-world countries including calling for reparations which both Germany and Japan have paid, is anything but a travesty of justice.

What is surprising and morally repugnant today is the unrepentant nostalgia for western hegemony that has not only gripped many prominent Anglo-American leaders and opinion-makers but also several servile Asian politicians, NGOs and columnists writing as cheer leaders of neo-colonialism, who strive to see Asia through the narrow angle of protecting western colonial interests, leaving unexamined the historical memory and the collective experiences of Asian peoples during the dark period of western colonial rule.

Colonialism and foreign occupation constitute crimes against humanity. They represent some of the most serious violations of national sovereignty of states and breach of international law, and in almost all colonial territories in Asia, Africa, North and South America horrendous crimes against humanity have been committed by the occupying colonial powers. The perpetrators have yet to be held accountable and brought to book under international law for these genocidal crimes.

### **De-colonise Asian minds and show gratitude to Japan.**

The challenge before fellow Asians is to de-colonise our minds and look at Japan's conduct before and during the Second World War afresh. Though Japan eventually lost the war its military effort was not in vain. It substantially weakened and demoralised the western countries then in occupation of large tracts of Asia, such as Britain, France, Netherlands, Portugal and the US, that they were forced to quit Asia in next to no time.

Tragically today the legacy of Japan's heroic contributions and sacrifices as the first Asian country that stood up and fought to drive out European colonialism from Asia in the 20th century, is seldom acknowledged, rarely celebrated, and hardly observed as a form of thanksgiving.

It is never too late to show Asia's gratitude to Japan and re-write the historical narrative.

### **Sri Lanka's Independence – a direct outcome of Japan's entry to the Second World War which sealed the fate of European Colonialism in Asia**

Now let me talk about Sri Lanka's Independence.

Sri Lanka together with several other Asian countries owe much in winning their freedom, to Japan's entry to the Second World War and the resulting chain of events that sealed the fate of European colonialism in Asia.

Jawaharlal Nehru, the Indian Prime Minister (1947 – 1964) when asked in the 1930s to name a likely date that India would win independence from Britain, replied by saying it would probably be in the late 1970s i.e. long after their time.

According to Major - General Mohan Singh of the Indian National Army (INA) “ The British had not given even an empty promise to grant us complete freedom after the war” ( The Reader’s Digest Illustrated History of World War II).

The fact that India gained freedom in 1947 much earlier than the date that Nehru thought was possible, followed by Burma and Ceylon in 1948, was largely due to the interplay of both external and internal factors.

Today, there is a great turn around in Historiography in respect to the role of Japan in the Second World War. Japan no longer has a pariah status or subject to isolation because of its conduct in the war. In fact, except in a couple of Far Eastern nations, Japan is increasingly gaining acceptance and recognition in much of Asia for being the catalyst in igniting the relatively dormant Asian Independence movements.

Nehru himself refused to take part in the San Francisco Peace Treaty Conference held in 1951 on several specified grounds and declared that Japan has done no wrong to India for India to seek an apology and reparations from Japan. India’s sympathies beginning with Subash Chandra Bose and Judge Radhabinod Pal ( the only dissenting Judge in the Tokyo War Crimes Trial) have always been with Japan. J.R. Jayewardene from Ceylon made a resounding plea for Japan citing the Buddha’s insightful words that ‘Hatred does not cease by hatred, but only by love; this is the eternal law.’”

Asia’s leaders and Historians now see a direct and incontrovertible connection between the Japan’s attack on Pearl Harbour and Western Colonial bases in Asia, and the subsequent success of the independence movements which drew inspiration from Japan’s courage to take on the West and liberate Asian colonies. Japan more than any other Asian country was responsible for sealing the fate of European colonialism in the Orient.

Historiography and the narrative on who won Independence for India in 1947 is also rapidly changing with an increasing number of writers prepared to give credit to Netaji Subash Chandra Bose, Indian National Army and Japan for the eventual liberation of India, while conceding to Mahatma Gandhi and his followers due respect for their noble and sustained efforts in seeking freedom from British colonial rule.

### **New Book - ‘ Bose: An Indian Samurai’**

In a new Book ‘ Bose: An Indian Samurai’ by military historian General GD Bakshi, claims that the former British Prime Minister Clement Attlee had said that the role played by Netaji’s Indian National Army was paramount in India being granted Independence, while the non-violent movement led by Gandhi was dismissed as having had minimal effect.

In the book, Bakshi cites a conversation between the then British PM Attlee and then Governor

of West Bengal Justice PB Chakraborty in 1956 when Attlee – the leader of Labour Party and the British premier who had signed the decision to grant Independence to India in 1947 – had come to India and stayed in Kolkata as Chakraborty's guest.

Chakraborty, who was then the Chief Justice of the Calcutta High Court and was serving as the acting Governor of West Bengal, is quoted as saying : “When I was acting governor, Lord Attlee, who had given us Independence by withdrawing British rule from India, spent two days in the governor's palace at Calcutta during his tour of India. At that time I had a prolonged discussion with him regarding the real factors that had led the British to quit India.”

“My direct question to Attlee was that since Gandhi's Quit India Movement had tapered off quite some time ago and in 1947 no such new compelling situation had arisen that would necessitate a hasty British departure, why did they had to leave?”

“In his reply Attlee cited several reasons, the main among them being the erosion of loyalty to the British crown among the Indian Army and Navy personnel as a result of the military activities of Netaji,” Chakraborty said.

“Toward the end of our discussion I asked Attlee what was the extent of Gandhi's influence upon the British decision to leave India. Hearing this question, Attlee's lips became twisted in a sarcastic smile as he slowly chewed out the word, ‘m-i-n-i-m-a-l’,” Chakraborty added.

### **Fear of another Indian Mutiny**

Though Japan lost in 1945, the legacy of Subhas Chandra Bose endured to stir the Indian masses and soldiers of the British Indian Army and ratings of the Royal Indian Navy to mutiny following the trial of the INA Officers at the Red Fort. It was the fear of such a Mutiny on a scale bigger than the Indian Mutiny in 1857, that convinced the British that it was time to quit India, and Burma and Ceylon within a few months.

No colonial country withdraws voluntarily from its colonies unless there are insurmountable ‘push’ factors or except under compelling circumstances. The best illustration of this proposition is the shameful return of the Dutch and the French to regain their colonies in Asia after the end of the second world war. Japanese occupation during World War II had ended Dutch rule, and the Japanese encouraged the previously suppressed Indonesian independence movement.

Despite their opposition to the tyranny of Nazi rule of France and Netherlands (1940 -1944), and delight in being liberated by the Allies, these two colonial powers were not prepared to share the freedom they gained in Europe with the subject people in Asia ( and Africa). They were not welcomed when they returned. Indonesians under Sukarno with the help of Japanese volunteers that remained in Indonesia after the defeat of Japan, defeated the Dutch in a series of military battles to finally gain independence in 1949. Likewise the Viet Minh under Ho Chi Minh performed admirably to wrest control from the

French by defeating them at Dien Bien Phu in 1954 and finally resulting in their withdrawal from all colonies of French Indo – China under the Geneva Accords of 1954.

## **External factors**

Mainstream writings on the Independence movement in British occupied Ceylon have so far failed to account for the external factors that contributed to advancement of the date of independence.

A study of colonial history of Ceylon shows clearly that local Kings have sought external help to end foreign occupation of parts of Ceylon. Several Kings of Kandy had contacts with the Dutch finally leading to the Treaty of 1638 signed in Kandy where the Dutch undertook to assist the Kandyan Kingdom under King Rajasinghe the Second to expel the Portuguese which was successfully achieved in 1658.

Likewise the Kings of Kandy solicited the assistance of the British Empire towards the end of the 18th century to end Dutch occupation of Ceylon. This was achieved in 1796.

It is necessary to show that external factors again contributed substantially to end British occupation of Ceylon finally leading to independence in 1948.

To remain oblivious to these external factors and extend credit exclusively to the locals on the ground that they were 'Freedom Fighters' is an exercise in fantasy. There were no authentic freedom fighters in Ceylon after 1848. The last shot for freedom from colonial rule was fired in Matale in 1848 during the second war of independence (also called the Matale Rebellion).

The succeeding generations yearning for freedom produced marvelous orators, letter writers, pen pushers and even collaborators who preferred British colonial rule to continue rather than handing over the country to the locals. Several were quite happy to accept knighthoods and other perks, and co – exist with the colonial administration. There was no fight in them compared to what we have seen in warriors such as Keppetipola Disawe, Gongalegoda Banda, Puran Appu or even earlier in Kings such as Sitavaka Rajasinghe, Mayadunne, Veediya Bandara ( son in law of Buvanekabahu the 7th), Wimaladharmasuriya I, Senerath and Rajasinghe the Second, among others.

Local leaders pursued ' Constitutional Reform' and not total independence though armed resistance e.g. Indonesia, or even large scale civil disobedience movements e.g. India. They were far removed from the type of fight and determination we have seen in other Asian nationalist leaders who fought against Western domination of Asia such as Hideki Tojo ( Japan), Subhas Chandra Bose (India), Mao Tse Tung (China), Ho Chi Minh ( Vietnam), Sukarno ( Indonesia), and Aung San ( Burma). These Asian freedom fighters and patriots preferred to use the only language that the West really understood and respected i.e. force of arms.

Except for Angarika Dharmapala, the world`s first Global Buddhist missionary, the freedom movement in Ceylon never produced a single leader of repute who enjoyed widespread support and admiration overseas for speaking out and engaging in battle for the liberation of Asia.

## **Historiography - a neglected field in Sri Lanka**

Ceylon was very fortunate in gaining independence in 1948 despite not having fought in the real sense of the word to rid the country of foreign occupation. It is soldiers from other Asian countries e.g. Japan, who primarily made blood sacrifices to fight western domination of Asia during the Second World War. We were beneficiaries of these sacrifices and battles. We have to acknowledge this support from fellow Asians at some point in time.

Historiography in Sri Lanka is lagging behind the rest of the world. It is a relatively neglected field. In respect to the narrative relating to the Second World War, our Historians have been merely echoing western perspectives and self – serving interpretations instead of carving out a separate original and independent path of research and writing.

It is time that we learn to look at historical events not from the angle of the colonizer but from the angle of those who have resisted foreign occupation both within and outside Sri Lanka.

## **Perspectives on the Tokyo Trials**

Finally, as a lawyer, I would like to end this speech by sharing some of my perspectives, on the International Military Tribunal for the Far East ( Tokyo Trials):

- Japan was not prepared to accept the freezing of the World Order based on colonialism and making it the Status Quo that could not be challenged or changed except at the risk of being branded as committing crimes against peace. Japan led the world in rejecting the western theory of Manifest Destiny which held that the United States was destined—by God—to expand its dominion and spread democracy and capitalism across the entire North American continent and there after the Asia – Pacific.
- Japanese leaders have unfortunately paid the supreme penalty for their defiance of the West. They were brought before Tribunals which in the words of their own American judges were nothing but ' high grade lynch mobs'. In a sense these Tribunals were nothing but ' Kangaroo Courts'.
- A survey of Courts set up by colonial authorities all over the world in European colonies to try freedom fighters, whether they be black, brown, yellow or even white, shows a remarkable consistency in the manipulation of justice to serve political ends of colonial rulers.
- Victor's Justice was what was served to those who had fought for freedom of their people and were unfortunate to be defeated and then be brought before courts accused of committing crimes against peace, humanity and war crimes.
- The International Military Tribunal for the Far East (also known as the Tokyo Trials) was a larger and more sophisticated manifestation of Kangaroo Court type trials held in European colonies during the last 500 years.
- In Sri Lanka the rebels who fought in freedom struggles in 1818 and 1848 were executed and the entire communities in rebel controlled territories were subject to vicious reprisals e.g. Uva- Wellassa (1818) and Matale (1848) that were not very

different to what happened to the innocent civilians in Lidice in Nazi occupied Czechoslovakia in 1942.

- The Nuremberg Trials for major Nazi War Criminals (1946) and the Tokyo Trials for Japanese war time leaders were not conducted on the same footing though there were some similarities in respect to procedure adopted.
- There were critical differences in the alleged war crimes. Racial prejudice against the accused of the Tokyo Trials stood out prominently. This was not surprising as the Japanese proposal for Racial Equality was rejected by several western countries in the League of Nations in 1919.
- The Jewish Holocaust was the highlight of war crimes in the European theater of war. It had no parallel in the history of any country though anti - semitism has religious roots. There were no such similar crimes in the Greater East Asian war.
- The Judges in the Nuremberg Trials were all Europeans. The majority of Judges in the Tokyo Trials were European though the theater of war was exclusively Asian.
- In excluding Asians from the panel of Judges bar three out of the eleven judges the authorities displayed a crass colonial attitude of contempt and insensitivity to Asian claims for equality and like treatment.
- Only one Judge had the spine and moral backbone to challenge the legitimacy of the Trial. He was the legal luminary Justice Radhabinod Pal (India). In his 1, 235 page landmark dissent he condemned the trial as unjust and unreasonable, contributing nothing to lasting peace. He saw the exclusion of western colonialism and US use of nuclear (Atom Bomb) weapons, on Hiroshima and Nagasaki from the list of war crimes and the side lining of Japanese judges (of the vanquished nation) from the bench of the IMTFE, as signifying “ the failure of the Tribunal to provide anything other than the opportunity for the victors to retaliate ”
- Justice Pal referred to the US dropping of Atomic Bombs on Japanese cities and innocent Japanese civilians as the worst atrocities of the war comparable to Nazi crimes.
- “ Weren’ t Western countries morally guilty as well in practicing colonialism? If the acts of aggression of Western countries were not indictable as war crimes why should only Japan be singled out for war crimes, was Justice Pal’s line of thinking.
- In every aspect of the Tokyo Trials there was unfairness and perversion of justice to achieve both political and unlawful objectives. Basically the trials were one sided and lacked even the trappings of Justice.
- The conviction of the Japanese leaders was based on grounds that were not criminal at the time of the commission of such conduct. Retroactive trials are bad in law and unsustainable in societies that respect the Rule of War.

- In applying the method of selectivity and singling out the Japanese and in turn excluding the victors i.e. British (India), Dutch (Indonesia), French (Vietnam), Russia (Poland), America (Philippines) from any form of investigation for war crimes in their colonies the controllers of the Trials showed extreme bias and prejudice, and lack of impartiality.
- Japan is a part of the proud Asian civilization. Asia's liberation after centuries of evil colonialism of the West was largely due to Japan's daring effort to rid Asia of Western dominance.
- Should Asia not be grateful to Japan for having come to our rescue when we were down and out?
- How shall we repay our debt to Japan for contributing to our liberation from the stranglehold of western colonialism?
- We must try to wipe out the ignominy of the Japanese being judged and convicted as war criminals and wrong doers in show trials that did not have even the slightest attribute or pretense of fairness and impartiality.
- Enlightened leaders of Asia drawn from various professional and academic backgrounds must convene a Tribunal of Judges (like the Kuala Lumpur War Crimes Tribunal which works like a court of conscience rather than as a UN Backed body which has powers to enforce its determinations) to re- examine the verdicts of these so called 'Tokyo Trials' and set aside the flawed judgments as unacceptable as they constitute a travesty of justice.
- 'Asia for Asians' is not a slogan of the past. It has power and relevance in this 'Asian Century'. It is Asia's turn to ensure Justice for its fellow Asians. There is no greater feat of Justice in Asia than to have a Re – Trial for the wrongfully convicted Japanese leaders by the International Military Tribunal for the Far East. Even the dead are entitled to be exonerated from false charges and wrongful convictions.
- Former Tokyo Governor Shintaro Ishihara made the following observation in 1995 “ Many Westerners act as if Human Rights are their moral ace in the hole, until their abysmal record in Asia is cited, and their position collapses like a pack of cards. Pointing out their hypocrisy does not deter the Americans, however. They blunder on badgering Asian Governments .... ”
- " Heramba Lal Gupta, one of the leaders of the Indian Independence Movement, gave the following speech in 1946: "I think that the International Military Tribunal for the Far East will surely be re-evaluated by the nations of Asia by the time we enter the twenty-first century, and then, a second Tokyo Trial will be held where Asia and all the world will regain its good sense and will judge all deeds in a fair, equal, and truthful manner. At that time, all the war heroes of the United States and of the great powers of Europe, who have been committing acts of aggression against Asia for many years, will receive stern punishments. Conversely, the Japanese who were accused of serious crimes by the IMTFE, especially the seven killed as Class A war criminals, will be rehabilitated, and the

day may come when they shall be worshipped like gods as the saviors of Asia. That is what should rightfully happen."

When both Germany and Japan stood condemned like outlaws or pariahs of the international community by the victorious Allies at the end of the Second World War, seeking huge amounts of reparations and heavy punishments for their leaders, political and military, as war criminals, the leaders and people of Ceylon / Sri Lanka adopted an entirely different approach to both these countries. It was an approach based on the Buddha's teachings.

The words of Ceylon's delegate Finance Minister J.R. Jayawardene ( who later became President of Sri Lanka in 1978) in defense of a free Japan at the San Francisco Peace Conference on September 06, 1951 are worthy of reproduction here. He said:

"We in Ceylon were fortunate that we were not invaded, but the damage caused by air raids, by the stationing of enormous armies under the South-East Asia Command, and by the slaughter-tapping of one of our main commodities, rubber, when we were the only producer of natural rubber for the Allies, entitles us to ask that the damage so caused should be repaired. We do not intend to do so for we believe in the words of the Great Teacher the Buddha whose message has ennobled the lives of countless millions in Asia that hatred ceases not by hatred but by love.

"It is the message of the Buddha, the Founder of Buddhism which spread a wave of humanism through South Asia, Burma, Laos, Cambodia, Siam, Indonesia and Ceylon and also northwards through the Himalayas into Tibet, China and finally Japan, which bound us together for hundreds of years with a common culture and heritage.

"This common culture still exists, as I found on my visit to Japan last week on my way to attend this Conference; and from the leaders of Japan, Ministers of State as well as private citizens and from their priests in the temples, I gathered the impression that the common people of Japan are still influenced by' the shadow of that Great Teacher of peace, and wish to follow it. We must give them that opportunity."

Mr. Kase's father Kase Toshikaz participated in the surrender ceremony accompanying plenipotentiary Shigemitsu Mamoru. He was standing right beside Foreign Minister Shigemitsu on USS Missouri as he held back his tears and signed the Instrument of Surrender at the table placed directly in front of General MacArthur.

When Hideaki Kase was in middle school, he had asked his father what was going through his mind while he was on board the USS Missouri. His father's reply was as follows :

"Although Japan had been defeated in battle, we had liberated the people of Asia from hundreds of years of oppression and enslavement. As I stood on the deck of the USS Missouri, I knew in my heart with pride that Japan had actually won the war, insofar as we had led Asia into a great new era of history. Shigemitsu felt the same way."

Mr. Kase says: " As I grew up, I felt the same pride and sorrow that my father did the day that he stood on the deck of the USS Missouri. These feelings have still not



left me. The impact of Asia's liberation, which Japan had won at such a high price, was soon felt on the African continent as well. The peoples of Africa, who had been oppressed by Western powers, achieved their independence, one after another. Japan played a monumental role in human history. Today's world of racial equality was forged through battles fought by Japan."

I wish to end this presentation by reminding the people of Asia as a fellow Asian that the time has now come for Asia to express its gratitude to Japan.

Thank you, Japan.

Senaka Weeraratna