Lahor Attack - A Note

It was a moment of enormous pride for Sri Lanka when Kumar Sangakkara delivered the Eleventh 2011 MCC Spirit of Cricket Cowdrey lecture on July 4, 2011 at Lords,touching on the history, culture, role of cricket and the opportunities for cricket in a country liberated from the clutches of terrorism. It gave a huge uplift for Sri Lanka at a time when its international image was being sullied by groups with a political agenda.

Sangakarra starts his speech by telling his audience about the history of Sri Lanka and her people. He is proud of his country's heritage: close-knit families, strong communities, and an exceptionally hospitable culture. He describes how the game first provides an opportunity for affluent Sri Lankans of all races, castes and religious beliefs to come together to indulge a shared passion. When the game is opened to the masses, it solidifies the place of this very English game in Sri Lankan hearts.

Commenting on the Lahore Attack, Sangakkara begins by saying that he had never experienced war directly before:

                This was an experience that I could not relate to. I had great sympathy and compassion for them, but had no real                         experience with which I could draw parallels.

Then he goes on to recount the attack in a vivid and dramatic style:

              Not thirty seconds had passed when we heard what sounded like fire crackers going off. Suddenly a shout came from                   the front: "Get down they are shooting at the bus."

His description of the reaction of the players creates a sense of immediacy and high drama:

              Tharanga Paranvithana, on his debut tour, is also next to me. He stands up, bullets flying all around him, shouting "I                 have been hit" as he holds his blood-soaked chest. He collapsed onto his seat, apparently unconscious.

He displays his sportsmanship and their ability to face emergencies which they have learned through the game of cricket when he says:

             There was no insane panic. There was absolute clarity and awareness of what was happening at that moment.

It is with a sense of relief that he says how they survived the attack:

             We all sit in the dressing room and talk. Talk about what happened. Within minutes there is laughter and the jokes                       have started to flow. We have for the first time been a target of violence. We had survived.

Their sportsmanship is again displayed when he says:

             We were shot at, grenades were thrown at us, we were injured and yet we were not cowed. We were not down and out.                "We are Sri Lankan,"

Sangakkara had displayed many qualities of a good leader in this incident such as tactfulness, patience, sense of responsibility etc:

          Our emotions held true to our role as unofficial ambassadors.

He also displays humbleness, the greatest quality of a leader, when he reflects on what a soldier had said about dying "in action":

             How can this man value his life less than mine? His sincerity was overwhelming. I felt humbled.

Sangakkara's speech about the Lahore attack thus makes us experience the real nature of terrorism while highlighting some sterling qualities of Sangakkara as a leader and a sportsman and, above all, as a Sri Lankan.

Sangakarra firmly believes that cricket has provided an avenue for Sri Lankans to overcome the brutality of war, torture and persecution. He is adamant that his people can become a peaceful and a proud nation, healing itself from within, and taking its long awaited place on the world stage with confidence and courage.