

BY SINDUJA UMANDI W. JAYARATNE

'Sri Lanka's Easter Sunday Massacre: Lessons for the International Community' by Prof. Rohan Gunaratna, is the first investigative book written on the Easter Sunday attacks in Sri Lanka. On 21 April 2019, multiple terror attacks were launched by nine terrorists influenced by the ideology of the Islamic State (IS). The book explains the catastrophic attack against the backdrop of Islamist extremism and violence in Sri Lanka. The author, Prof. Gunaratna is an expert in the field of terrorism studies. An Honorary Professor at Sir John Kotelawala Defence University, he is also a Professor of Security Studies at the Nanyang Technology University, Singapore. A specialist in national and international security, he has worked worldwide with governments to fight threats and published his findings extensively. Prof. Gunaratna's latest work investigates the anatomy of the Easter Sunday attacks in Sri Lanka. Considering the Sri Lankan government's decision to lift the ban on five of the eleven Islamic organisations in Sri Lanka in July 2023.

Prof. Gunaratna's book is timely to understand how national security is compromised for political gain. The ban on Muslim groups promoting extremist ideologies – the Jamiatul Ansari Sunnatul Mohammadia (JASM), Sri Lanka Tawheed Jamaat (SLTJ), All Ceylon Tawheed Jamaat (ACTJ), Lanka Tawheed Jamaat (CTJ), and the United Tawheed Jamaat (UTJ) were lifted. As a result of the investigations conducted by the Presidential Commission of Inquiry into the Easter Sunday Attacks, extremist and terrorist groups were banned through a Gazette in April 2021.

The evidence against these organisations revealed that they were promoting 'exclusive' ideologies such as Salafi Wahabism which leads to the radicalisation of potential Muslims in Sri Lanka. As Prof. Gunaratna mentioned in his book (page 76), the Easter Sunday attack leader Zahran Maulavi a.k.a Zahran Hashim started to work in 2009 as a preacher in Sri Lanka. The Tamil Nadu Tawheed Jamaat (TNTJ) influenced several sister organisations in Sri Lanka including Zahran to spread Islamic knowledge in its 'pure form'. The IS recruits that travelled to Syria in 2015 including its leader Nilam were from ACTJ. If ACTJ is

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permitted to function in future, it will radicalise Muslims that will be susceptible to recruitment.

Prof. Gunaratna's book on the Easter Sunday Attacks not only unveils the process of the tragic terror attack but also highlights the predicaments of 'exclusivism' and 'extremism' which was promoted by Salafi-Wahabi traditions (page 162).

'Sri Lanka's Easter Sunday Massacre' is unique in its nature since it starts with a chronology of events related to Easter Sunday Attacks (page xv – lix). Prof. Gunaratna has perfectly captured the essence of essential and minor details related to the catastrophe of the Easter Sunday terror attacks. The importance of the chronology is that:

1. It highlights the events prior to the Easter Sunday attacks but relates to the development of the tragic event which was mostly neglected when analysing this event.

2. It also makes the reader understand that, the 'Easter Sunday attacks' is not a single event of violent extremism which occurred within a night. The Easter Sunday attack is a result of a series of domestic events but influenced by the global terror scenarios due to the internal fault lines.

The book is rich in explaining the radicalisation process of individuals related to the Easter Sunday attacks. This provides the reader with an understanding of how the perpetrators of the Easter Sunday attacks have engrained radical ideology, especially by interpreting and understanding IS thinking and actions. Prof. Gunaratna states on page 94, "With the rise of the IS in 2014,

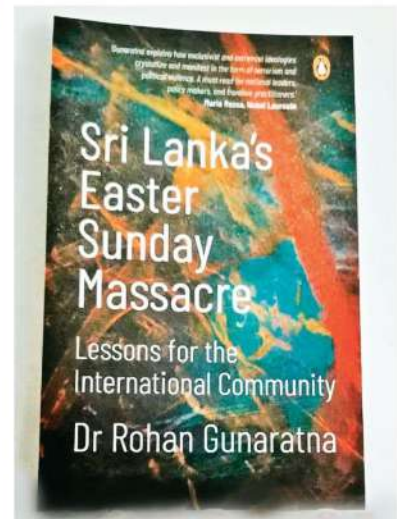
(Naufer) read widely on the organisation and, after engaging in an internal struggle, eventually succumbed to its ideology".

According to Prof. Gunaratna, Naufer was the 'mentor' of Zahran. Chapter 2 is specifically dedicated to explicating how Zahran Maulavi has been radicalised and alienated from his own society and the rest of the Sri Lankan community. Prof. Gunaratna narrates on page 57 that, "Zahran's story provides insight into the genesis and evolution of an alien ideology implanted in Sri Lanka and its consequences. It routes the birthplace of extremism and how it has shown within Sri Lanka's socio-political nexus". Apart from that, Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 also showcase that the radicalisation process of individuals differs from one to another depending on the socio-economic circumstances and the contexts to which the individuals are exposed to.

This model explains the Case Studies of Easter Sunday suicide bombers such as Zahran, Mohamed Ibrahim Ilham Ahmed, Abdul Latheef Jameel Mohamed and others that perpetrated 'Sri Lanka's Easter Sunday Massacre'. The book vividly portrays the nexus between ideology and terrorism through the case study of Zahran. Tracing Zahran's childhood, Prof. Gunaratna states on pages 58-59 that, "They lived in extreme poverty, and to support his family, Hashim sold packets of food on the streets". This asserts the point that Zahran's 'pre-radicalisation' context or his background had an impact on his aggressive and narcissistic personality which led him to perform as a leader craving for recognition among his society/

followers. The book also showcases how educated youth such as Jameel has become a victim of 'indoctrination', arguing that poverty is not the only reason for radicalisation. On page 174, the author explains how Jameel has been exposed to radical ideology in al-Furqan Islamic Information Centre during his stay in Australia, ultimately making him embrace the ideology of IS. Therefore, Prof. Gunaratna's book 'Sri Lanka's Easter Sunday Massacre' is a classic in elaborating on the process of radicalisation of individuals who are from different backgrounds. Thereby, it highlights that radicalisation is a distinct process for each and every individual who is exposed to different circumstances in life, making the process of radicalisation difficult to generalise.

Finally, the author has dedicated the last chapter to reflect on lessons learnt from the Easter Sunday attacks in 2019. Apart from, a broad discussion of the failure of national security, the most captivating essence of this chapter is how the author has illustrated the dilemma of the 'consumer-producer relationship' in Intelligence Studies. Prof. Gunaratna states on page 201 that the intelligence agencies (particularly DMI and SIS) "knew of almost all the Easter Sunday attackers but reportedly needed the political patronage and legal support to keep the steadfast 'three in check'. This depicts that the 'producer' of intelligence has yielded the production while leaving a question of whether the 'consumer' or the policy maker has consumed the production of intelligence on time.



Prof. Gunaratna's investigative writing ability attracts the attention of the reader making 'Sri Lanka's Easter Sunday Massacre: Lessons for the International Community', a 'must read' book on the tragic terror attack in the island nation. The book is an eye-opener on 'reciprocal radicalisation' in the post-war context while illustrating the drawbacks of the national security system to address the threat. Thus, the book serves a dual purpose of exposing 'radicalisation' as a threat to national security and how best the government can 'prevent' such tragic circumstances in the future by improving the security

system. Prof. Gunaratna has answered many of the questions raised on the tragic attack while inviting, even more, to be investigated in the future. Hence, this book has paved the way for future academics and researchers to navigate and explore more on the subject of terrorism and national security, taking Easter Sunday attacks as a Case Study.

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Benefits of Social Dimension of Metaverse in Marketing

BY DR. NIRMA SADAMALI JAYAWARDENA AND DR. ABHISHEK BEHL

Future marketing platforms will utilise the metaverse to present a wide range of brands within a 3D interactive digital space. Essentially, the metaverse is a digital version of the physical world and how we work by applying it in daily life. Users of this 3D virtual space will be able to interact with each other via avatars that are based on their likenesses. The way we communicate in the future will have a significant impact on the way in which they use the marketing function. The term 'metaverse' was first used in Neal Stephenson's dystopian and cyberpunk novel *Snow Crash* which was published in 1992. It is worth noting, that the metaverse is not the stuff of science fiction. As a result of *Snow Crash*, in 2003, software engineers devised the online platform referred to as 'Second Life,' which gave users the ability to construct a cartoon representation of themselves, connect with other people in a variety of virtual environments and communicate with them. This article discusses the benefits of the social dimension of a metaverse in marketing by considering the social component, standards or tools and technologically advanced techniques.

1. The true value of the metaverse lies in its social component

Virtual environments may be more advantageous in some circumstances than 2D Internet environments. Virtual stores, for example, can be more engaging than websites. Although VR experiences are less impressive, they are significantly cheaper than those in the physical world, such as riding a rollercoaster in VR instead of one in a theme park. It is important to note, however, that the real value of the metaverse is in its social component. A fundamental limitation of the 2D Internet is that despite its many strengths, it is not designed to facilitate collaboration with its users. Comparing the 2D Internet to the metaverse, especially when you view it in virtual



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reality, there is a striking difference when it comes to hosting social behaviours. Various contexts exist in which companies can harness their potential to create such social value to maximise their benefits.

It has been shown that virtual reality can help predict product adoption and how virtual reality can affect specific aspects of consumer behaviour, such as haptic (when consumers 'touch' products) and auditory (when consumers hear a product sound in virtual reality). A study by Meißner et al. (2020) indicates that virtual reality influences consumers' choices but does not necessarily lead to greater satisfaction. The capability of the metaverse to link individuals on a global scale in a manner that is both extremely dynamic and immersive is one of the factors that have the most significant impact on social ties. By removing geographical boundaries and making it possible to connect in virtual environments, the metaverse paves the way for the formation of global communities and the promotion of cross-cultural dialogue. It is possible to use the metaverse ecosystem to improve city services which are essential for the tourism sector and



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also in planning, administration, and support for virtual tourism.

2. Interchange standards and tools

As a first step, a metaverse ecosystem must have the necessary hardware, networking, and virtual platforms. Essentially, this is a fundamental building block that is comprised of a wide range of technical solutions, protocols, formats, and services that all contribute to the interoperability of the system as a whole. It is our intention as customers to become as integrated into the metaverse as possible to have the greatest possible impact on it. As a result of their search for activities to occupy their children while they were stuck inside, millions of people who were sceptical of the benefits of digital technology have now engaged in virtual worlds and activities such as Fortnite or Roblox. A high-fidelity virtual-reality headset accessing the metaverse constitutes a novel computer-mediated environment that enhances the options available to consumers.

There are numerous devices and platforms around us today that we need to integrate to accomplish this goal. By engaging in social activities such as



meetings, collaborating on projects, playing games, and learning in virtual environments, the concept of metaverse offers transformational new opportunities across industries to enhance the user experience. While some may argue that the metaverse is simply a new term for existing technologies, it is much more than that. A metaverse should be different from conventional terms, as it offers 'shared', 'persistent' and 'decentralised' features. There is no social connection between learners in simulation, AR, or VR. Despite the ability to adopt new identities and interact with others, multi-user interactive systems like Second Life cannot offer a persistent world or culture for users to live, work and learn in. The use of decentralised technologies (e.g., blockchains, non-fungible tokens) can ensure the security of economic activities. Therefore, a metaverse ecosystem must have the necessary resources such as VR and AR headsets, projection cameras and screens, wearables and more.

3. Most suitable way to approach the consumer. Discover what works and what does not

Using the technology of the metaverse, companies can create digital twins of their goods and their facilities. From marketing and teaching to research and development, these models have a wide range of

applications. There has been evidence that when workers are allowed to experiment with new ideas or processes in a risk-free virtual environment, this can result in increased creativity and efficiency in the real world. One such example is digital twin avatars. In addition to existing on screen, these twins will also be rendered as holograms that are controlled by AI. To communicate with multiple stakeholder groups simultaneously, a CEO could activate an AI-powered hologram of himself. For remote work experience, 3D rooms can be used to occupy employees to collaborate.

Finally, this article discusses the benefits of the social dimension of a metaverse in marketing by considering the triple perspectives of social components, interchange standards or tools and approachable technologies.

Key takeaways

- The metaverse is a digital version of the physical world and how we live. The avatars that consumers will use in this 3D virtual space will be based on their likenesses.
- It is the ability of the metaverse to connect individuals globally in a way that is both dynamic and immersive that has the greatest impact on social ties.
- Simulations, AR, and VR don't connect learners. While multi-user interactive systems like Second Life allow users to adopt new identities and interact with others, they cannot provide a persistent world or culture. Economic activities can be secured with decentralised technologies (e.g., blockchains, non-fungible tokens).
- By utilising the metaverse technology, companies are able to create digital twins of their goods and facilities.

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