

Professor DPM Weerakkody

At the fall of an unseen light

The light of a lamp is said to lose none of its flair although many more lamps are lit with its flames. But there are great such lamp-like humans who haven't even seen or known the light for real as they were making their way out of a womb and into this world. Professor D. P. M. Weerakkody who passed away from this world and into the heaven he believed in, along with the setting sun of Wednesday, June 26, is one such great individual who illuminated many lives with knowledge and wisdom even without sensing what it means to see the light.

During his span of life that had nearly reached four scores by the time of demise, he had achieved a lot and encouraged many others with help and guidance to achieve much more than what he could reach himself.

His uniqueness as the first and only visually impaired Sri Lankan to obtain a PhD and to become a professor is regarded as a great achievement to date. A random googling of the name D. P. M. Weerakkody could pop up only a modicum of his greatness unlike in the cases of many others in the same caliber. And yet the youtube clip of the interview segment called Pothakin Pituwak with Prof D. P. M. Weerakkody shall forever enliven the memory of his presence.

Numerous journalists who penned his story and his achievements in papers at the time he was well and alive, just brought the sympathetic aspect of his blindness into light and the way he does not turn the lights on in his house at night was their usual starting point. Yet, the greater part of the service he rendered silently on his own, so far remained untold.

As many of his close acquaintances knew very well, Professor Weerakkody was one of the friendliest persons of his caliber in Sri Lanka that anyone could approach and struck up

a conversation. His conversations did not bear even an iota of the bravado and self-importance that many others of his academic caliber tend to reflect. Instead, every time one engaged in conversation with him, he enriched such dialogues with humor as well as a lot of flute music. The source of inspiration for many a person weren't his words per se but his musical charisma.

At the time he had been young and when he was residing in Ja-ela in his village called Thudalla, it is said that his name meant awesome piano music at church to everyone. Hence while he excelled in the oriental music canon with flute, he mastered his skill in piano and electric keyboards when it comes to the western music. Later in life he could work musical wonders with a portable guitar-like keyboard that he had purchased in his tours abroad which served as a backing instrument that embellished many musical recitals in numerous concerts and events he took part.

Astonishingly enough, music wasn't the main stream that he followed in academia, his uniqueness spans beyond what I mentioned above at this point when he happens to be one of the eminent scholars in the field of Western classics all around the world who mostly represented the entire Asia region. His direct translation of Plato's Republic from Greek to Sinhala reflects his mastery of classical languages whilst convincing us of the outstanding point where the quality of his great service lies. Unfortunately, this great attempt may not have received the due recognition in the literary canon because it was published in a transitional phase of the politics in this country. Ironically enough, there were times that his friends had to get him the copies of his own book all the way from Colombo when he

needed them, because of the irregularities associated with its publication and distribution island-wide and that was just a part of his story.

He lavishly shared his knowledge on the subject just as he does with any other subject he knew, with the students and the classics enthusiasts. Many of the people who took up Greek Roman Classics for G. C. E. Advance Level are well aware that every year Professor Weerakkody came to Colombo for seminars a month or two before the exams and clarified all their doubts while extend his friendly hand to gain more knowledge. The Department of Western Classics in the University of Peradeniya where he fostered the future cannon of Western Classics in Sri Lanka wasn't the only place he was known even in the University of Peradeniya. He had even taken the initiative of establishing a special unit with a lot of facilities for the students with special needs in the university. The said unit comprised facilities for both visually impaired and mobility impaired students to learn computers and even to read books in Braille medium. And it wasn't a strange place or a banned territory for the rest of the vision impaired people in Sri Lanka. He invited many of the schooling students as well as the school teachers with visual impairments for various workshops and trainings he organized there single-handedly even with food and proper accommodation sometimes along with the participation of foreign resource persons as well. Such were his great potential as well as his resolute interest to serve the community at large without too much of self-pampering in public.

Two of the most memorable and unparalleled initiatives in this respect could not help being mentioned in detail. The International movement called DAISY that enabled the people



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with print disabilities to read books was introduced to Sri Lanka with the pioneer contribution of Prof. Weerakkody. He personally traveled to several foreign countries with the hope of receiving trainings regarding the said talking book production method called Daisy and imparted his knowledge with several other local and foreign experts to many students in Sri Lanka through several workshops he organized both in Kandy at the special unit of the Peradeniya University, as well as in Colombo.

Secondly, he wanted to share the rarely earned knowledge he possessed in western music and particularly the usage of Braille symbols pertaining to western music with the visually impaired music enthusiasts and teachers in Sri Lanka. With this regard, he organized a one week-long residential training for many interested people at his university along with Braille material and even a special book compiled on his own to help them recognize the way in which the western music symbols are used in printed sheet music. This could be, therefore, regarded as yet another unique and outstanding milestone even in the International sphere music education.

Since there is a limit for the writing space in press just as there was a limit for the lifetime of this wonderful individual, all his happy and sad tales shall not unfold themselves right now. Although his light of life thus extinguished at last, the eternally bright light he bestowed upon his community, his cannon and his country, shall forever be celebrated, commemorated and enshrined with limitless gratitude and respect.

Jani Bee

Reconciliation is a two way street

Dr. Shanthikumar Hettiarachchi

Reconciliation is a word abundantly used, but misunderstood in many circles. Most records indicate that a fourth century etymological development hails from a Latin root word reconciliare, to bring together again, from re + conciliare, to make friendly or become friendly with someone who has been estranged or to re-establish friendly relations between parties, to settle a quarrel or difference, to make (two apparently conflicting things) compatible or consistent with each other.

The process of reconciliation is a long, difficult and a painful path, those who wish to travel on it are few, and those that rubbish it are many. However, it remains the only hope for a decent and right relationship formation within a citizenry that has been in conflict. It is imperative for the states and other civil bodies to engage in these acts as part of building community resilience especially in post conflict situations. This discussion is about how the Tamil community might wish to envisage reconciling among themselves, because there is evidence that they too are a fractured community due to wanton violence executed by one group against the other and individuals. The Tamil leadership perhaps needs to redirect their energy to rally people to understand and rise from their mono ethnic ideology and evoke a perspective which would help them to opt for a path of reconciliation.

Majority Minority Fault line

Majority, minority, tribal, ethnic, language, national, religious, cultural and political issues are not new to our society. Humans have dealt with them differently and have succeeded in some instances while there have been failures as well. Sri Lanka's conflict too has many implications related to the above litany of issues and concerns. Who was right? What should have been done? Who made the first mistake? Which steps should have been taken avert disaster? Indicate yet another litany of a blame game that does not help the future of any people whether they are a majority or a minority.

Sri Lanka's 30-year-old violent conflict which fractured the two main communities initially over power sharing, eventually led to an unbendable separatist power struggle within the minority community (from the assassination of A. Duraiaappa, the then incumbent Mayor of Jaffna to L. Kadrigamar, the then incumbent foreign minister of Sri Lanka) indicates a shameful elimination of charismatic individuals who had alternative political views and a vision for Tamil people. These created years of internal fights to prove political supremacy and domination over and above any other. It was very clear the 'grand finale group' that could survive this mania of atrocities against one's own people, and to declare themselves as the 'sole representatives of the Tamil people' could not fit into any form of governance, except with and through violence. This slogan was politically untenable in any decent citizenry and social adjustments programs of communities. Political obstinacy of this political perspective made it a 'persona non grata' outfit by over 30 countries and named a terrorist organization. By then certain Western nations did purposely consider and devise words like 'de facto state', even declared Killinichchi to be the 'capitol city of the state'. All avenues were in place for the inauguration of a geographical state (flawed concept of Nation state) but not necessarily an authentic power sharing for which the so called liberation struggle was first launched. Hope for the Tamil minority was indeed high even though it was to be gained at a terrible human cost. The Tamil resistance begun in the fifties over constitutional reforms was ruthlessly high jacked and cocooned into a single narrative of a violence ridden group activity against one's own and anybody who raised opposition. Hence reconciliation is imperative for both the majority and the minority in Sri Lanka's conflict.

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Tamil Masses and Reconciliation

Reconciliation is not a one way traffic plan. It must happen both within each community and between different communities, especially those that have been in the conflict. In the case of Sri Lanka, Tamil people in the North and East were severely affected due to their areas being used as direct location for propaganda, intimidation, recruitment and combat operation. However, terrorism affected the nation as a whole; a fear psychosis infested every nook and corner of the island.

Reconciliation is no miracle and does not happen overnight and can be difficult to execute if both parties are not willing. Neither can pressure groups foreign or local or political parties push for reconciliation, unless they too are willing to do so. The parties in conflict must also partake in the post conflict efforts of understanding the parties that led to the conflict.

Reconciliation is a process and a movement, hence is not led by one single individual, group or organization. It is a collective activity that happens at different levels with different organizations and bodies. A simple act of meeting of former suspiciously separated parties for a shared meal tenders a great deal of ice breaking of unfounded fears and hatred. Tamil political parties too must take lead in this, religious bodies, especially the Catholic church of the North and East when speaking and engaging not only just talk about rights alone but also about responsibilities of people in a citizenry. Help people to reconcile with their violent past and not linked to a romantic Diaspora dynamics of instigation of the same old futile separatist dream yet again, while they live in comfort with habitual weekend protests.

Some argue that speedy and accelerated programs of development processes would transform the way people think of each other and the past. Some others propose that provision of equal rights and equal opportunities would soften the 'hard to break' views and perspectives of formerly divided people. Former cadre population of over 11000 who under a general amnesty were to go through a process of rehabilitation which is now recognized by the beneficiaries themselves as reconciliation with not just with the other party that was in conflict, but also reconcile with their violent past and to move on as citizens of a nation.

The challenge for the big players of the Tamil community of this country, is to make some serious and responsible choices, that running to Delhi, Chennai, Mitcham, Markham or Oslo proves lack of political vision and strategy and the inner lethargy to deal with issues among their constituents here and resolve them tactically. Reconciliation is providing support to their people to settle down after years of trauma and fear. It is fair by them that the Tamil leadership, political, religious and their foreign counterparts heed to doable propositions without deceiving the people yet again. They too need reconciliation and face the new challenges and opportunities ahead of them.



Mammoth Cabinet is a liability to both the Government and the nation

Let Cabinet skeletons roll out

Gaston de Rosayro

Contemporary Sri Lanka politics has become a gigantic swindle perpetrated by many of the people, elected by most of the people and supposedly for all the people. But they are anything but for the people who are beginning to recognize the bitter reality that many of those chosen representatives run the country only with their own interests at heart.

So, the average Sri Lankan is constrained to live on air while the politicians by all appearances appear to waltz on it. Several of our nouveau riche politicians have no scruples about amassing filthy lucre while living off the public purse. A disproportionate number of them are riff-raff, who are mostly enraptured with their own persona.

And once in power many of these glorified street-corner thugs suffer from severe delusions of grandeur. They ride roughshod over us mere mortals on the public highways in their jaunty high-tech palanquins accompanied by their praetorian guard with the panache of celestial beings.

Sinful indulgences

Essentially, the people are living in an ambience of famine, fear and frustration. They are discontented and have largely lost hope by the nation's inability to govern itself with honesty or aptitude. Across the country there is a belief that corruption is flourishing and is most rampant in certain ministerial alcoves.

In a nation where poverty and inequality remain discouragingly prevalent, perhaps nothing is more damaging to public trust in a democracy than several of these low-life politicians who impose austerity on

the many while somehow purloining the exchequer for their own sinful indulgences.

But the worrying and perhaps most intolerable aspect to the ordinary citizen is that hardly any member of the grossly corpulent Cabinet has even made the least token gesture in support of practicing austerity among themselves. They allow immoral latitude to their fat-cat cronies on whom they bestow comfortable nooks to manipulate in monopolistic market recesses.

Disastrous course

There is another intriguing custom among our politicians that is frightfully interesting. They all tell the people that they are ashamed of the disgusting behavior of their predecessors and that despite their own shortcomings during their earlier tenures they are resolved not to behave as boorishly and would lead better lives in the future. Oh yes, and pigs might fly!

The indiscretions, blatant violence, scandals, collusion, prodigality, profiteering, corruption and mindless economic policy have all contributed to turn this nation into one of the most depraved corners of the earth.

For a Government confronted with an aggregation of devilishly confounding dilemmas, it would be political and economic suicide to continue its present disastrous willy-nilly course. If it does, it will be heading with lemming-like proclivity to hurtle over the precipice and into political oblivion. That would be quite acceptable as far as the people of this nation are concerned, except for certain disturbing consequences that would be bound to originate from such a development.

Iron-fist

The main legitimate worry in such a scenario concerns its replacement, which is the other big-party political dynasty which has an equally bad, if not worse track record of governance. Indeed, as long as these two see-sawing powers continue to dominate the scene, the voters will be left with such little choice. The voters, over the last two and a half decades or so, have had low expectancy of what successive governments can achieve.

Another concern is that such a development would further strengthen the iron-fist of an already over-mighty political Executive Office. Still it now seems apparent that the Executive seems to have grossly overrated the suitability of too many of his Cabinet associates to administer competently the portfolios they have been entrusted with.

To be fair, there are some among the caucus of ministers who have suddenly realized that the truth actually hurts, not because of the searching after it but because of the running from it. Now that, asserts a political satirist, is because in Sri Lankan politics that once in a blue moon an innocent man is sent to the legislature.

Parasitic politicians

The people of this nation are being choked by a financial grinding that is threatening to whisk them to the very brink of subsistence. Living standards have nose-dived as ordinary people bear the burden of an unparalleled rise in the charges of utilities and prices of essential commodities. The men and women who toil are the ones who bear the cost of government. But these people are foisted with unbearable financial burdens in

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addition to unbearable taxes.

Governments, for too long now have been looking upon this nation as a convenient cash cow which they have all been responsible for milking dry. The main contribution of many of them while commanding the scene, has been to dole out patronage and divvy up concessions to their sycophants and camp followers. Opulence has become a sort of natural habitat for these parasitic politicians and those who have become part of their enchanting corrupt circuit.

Few of them have shown much interest in the problems of the ordinary people. Rather, they have seen public office as a route to riches and have stopped at little to win power or hold on to it. Besides, it would only be logical to perceive that so many who comprise the mammoth Cabinet are a liability to both the Government and the nation.

They are, besides being an embarrassment to their party and a millstone around the nation's neck, ill-equipped to handle their portfolios and are positively expendable. They are a monumental reminder to everyone that there is no surer way of leading a party to electoral extinction than having them on board.

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