

December 12th 2007 marked the 4th death anniversary of Revd Gangodawila Soma, more commonly called "Soma Hamuduruwo" in Australia. Every successive death anniversary of this remarkable monk appears to be petering out into an increasingly routine and pale exercise. Such is life!

Even the JHU leaders who benefited politically from the demise of this monk, played it out low key this time. At the last General Elections in Sri Lanka, the Sinhala Urumaya Party transformed itself into the JHU with Buddhist monks on the frontline. While their promise to 'save the nation' and bring in a dharmishta yugaya had been looked upon with public scepticism, a more specifically pinpointed agenda, namely to appoint a commission to probe the death of Revd Soma, fired the imagination of the popular mind and got the monks to where they should not be-parliament.

Revd Soma, although he did not make much of an impression as a preacher for many years in his adopted home Australia, seemed suddenly reborn during a visit to Sri Lanka



Christian evangelical missionaries seized the growing vacuum in the spiritual life of the people and began to spread their wings and entice rank and file Buddhists with favour and false ideology.

Soma Hamuduruwo, quick to sense this, pressed the right buttons. With

## SOMA HAMUDURUWO AND THE REVOLUTION THAT STOPPED

Revd Soma's popularity was partly a reflection of a tumultuous and nervous era in Sri Lanka. The liberalised economy and globalisation that came along with it sent ripples of social disruption with which traditional institutions of social control could not cope. The selfish notion of making it good at any cost gained wide acceptance and Lankan society seemed to be losing its moral compass and compassion. One sees this development gaining greater clarity today as the

lessons from his Australian exposure he projected a modernised, less-doctrinaire Buddhism bereft of the outworn ideas that were kept firm by the gathering moss of ancient years. Unlike the Christian religion that is burdened with mystery and doctrine, the Dhamma has the capacity to relate rationally to the young and to talk to the latter in their own terms. Soma Hamuduruwo saw this great competitive strength of the Dhamma. He initiated a revolution in the Temple that belonged to the spirit of the great Reformation movement in 15th century Europe. The Temple itself was threatened. We have anecdotal evidence of some temples getting rid of the images of Hindu gods.

people of all divisions suddenly became downsized within one division. One of Revd Soma's last publications was a letter inviting all Christians to reconvert to Buddhism.

The final tragedy came well before his physical death; when he decided to launch into politics. That was his undoing and the undoing of a nation that was waiting to be energised by a new prophet.

The revolution had suddenly stopped. It was left to the political vultures of the

*To this ideology that had the potential of changing the worldview of ordinary people. Soma Hamuduruwo, however, later added an unfortunate political injection by propagating a narrow Sinhala- Buddhist nationalism- a kind of neo-revival of the ideology of the Buddhist Commission Report that had become the plank of the Bandaranaike revolution in 1956.*

day to utilise what was left of a man who could have been an inspiring and decisive force of our time. Selfish politicians working on the outside and looking for a cause seized the opportunity. Although Soma Hamuduruwo publicly despised many of these leaders, the latter succeeded in utilising the public memory and image of him for their own debut in parliamentary politics. They covered their greed by a clarion call to set up battle against the Christian community. "Christian missionaries conspired to kill Soma Hamuduruwo", they cried. "Put us to Parliament and we will bring them all to book".

Many people obeyed. Nothing has, however, happened to this day because nothing can possibly happen. An impartial body of doctors had already carried out a post mortem and forensic investigation and declared that Soma Hamuduruwo, an acute diabetic, had died of natural causes.

Shakespeare famously said: "the good (that people do) is often interned with their bones". Nevertheless, in Australia are fortunate that we have a lasting monument to the good that Soma Hamuduruwo did, namely the beautiful Sakyamuni Viharaya at Berwick.



where he miraculously morphed into a messianic phenomenon. Thousands across all Lankan society flocked to hear him and to get a glimpse of him. Some of the faithful saw him as Buddha come alive again. Even many Christians and Muslims, who could not see him physically, avidly watched him on TV. Soma

moon gains clarity with the passing of clouds. Temples were becoming irrelevant and many monks were unable to reach the people with messages relevant to them. These temples continued to be steeped in the past embroidered by iconic images of the old Hindu pantheon of Gods while monks were more focused on magic and rituals. The younger generation in particular could not find in

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Hamuduruwo became not only a preacher exemplar but also a TV star. Political leaders became envious and the government of the day felt threatened.

the Temple any counsel for resolving their innumerable personal dilemmas. Many rural temples suffered with declining numbers offering Dhana. Buddhist leadership of the stature of yesteryear had disappeared.

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