

The other day, we had a speaker of a different sort from Sri Lanka. Dr PUNCHILAME MEEGASWATTE is gaining acceptance in top circles in Sri Lanka as a motivational speaker. He is said to visit army camps and speak to soldiers and motivate them to fight harder. An interesting idea, I thought. In its professional development one area that Sri Lanka lacked was this brand of professional speaker whose job it is to awaken his audience and drive energy into the latter for achieving desired outcomes.

During my last working days in Lanka I did have the opportunity to hear a few imported management gurus residing in Five Star hotels who used to motivate others for a big fee. Far back, we had personages like Anagarika Dharmapala who was a nationalist motivator. In this sense, Dr Meegaswatte is not a bolt from the blue.

Dr Meegaswatte employed the rich vocabulary of the Sinhala language to create evocative images and metaphors. He had done his homework about the exceptional achievements of our ancestors in the field of irrigation engineering- details about the 'Bisokotuwa', Yoda Ela etc. From there on our speaker took an astounding step. "Why", he asked his listeners, did our development halt after the days of the great Kings? He furnished the answer himself: "Due to the spread of the habit of alcohol consumption", he enlightened his audience. He asserted that under British governor Brownrigg taverns were opened all over. Dr Meegaswatte stated that this had been done by our British masters just in order to keep our people in a state of intoxication so that the rulers may rule. Today's version of Brownrigg's strategy may be the stories of military success against the Tamil Tigers.

I failed to understand why Dr Meegaswatte underestimated the intelligence of our audience that day at Victoria University St Albans Campus hall. I also averred that this may be the quality of the average Sri Lanka audience in this era of Mahinda Chinthanaya where the media has blunted the critical faculties of our people.

Our speaker structured his entire presentation on this flimsy thesis about alcohol consumption. Obviously he was not bothered about content accuracy but rather relied on emotional arousal. Dr Meegaswatte ineffectively attempted to get the audience to chant along with him the following stanzas:

- We are the Dutugemunu!
- We are the Parakramabahu!
- We built the Dagobas!
- We built the irrigation tanks!
- We built the temples!

It was the old emotional refrain of "Wewayi Dagobayi Pansalayi"

If he looked around with a modicum of circumspection Dr Meegaswatte would have noticed that this kind of emotional

sloganeering was not going to elicit results from the kind of people who assembled that night. **Before making any persuasive presentation it is imperative to know the context of the occasion.** The occasion was the Sri Lankan Expatriates Elders Day sponsored by SCATS. Most in the audience were mature persons who have been well exposed to standards of life here that are far superior to what they had known back home. Their experience has taught them why it is that things go wrong in Lanka and why the quality of life is so rotten over there. Dr Meegaswatte's central thesis flops because the audience is well aware that their hosts - the Australians- have a strongly established culture of alcohol consumption and a way of life where the Pub is a much loved

On the other hand, Dr Meegaswatte pledged to go back and close all the taverns in Lanka. The organisation arm that he has picked to do this is a new one called Sri Lankan Senior Citizens National Organisation. Its' Director General, Mr Irugalbandara, also accompanied Dr Meegaswatte and he also spoke that night. Our speaker at one stage pointing out to Mr Irugalbandara drew the audience attention to the fact that Iru stopped drink altogether "for the sake of the country (Rata Wenuwen)". One does not need a lot of cynicism to disbelieve this kind of mawkish patriotism. Surely, Iru has to think of his own health before he thinks of the country of his accidental birth!

There were many more



decision to close all taverns as there is no justification to ban liquor. It is best to let people decide if they are to have a glass of wine, a shot of arrak or toddy, a dram of whisky or some home-made beer. We

Dr MEEGASWATTE TAKES ON OUR SENIOR CITIZENS



drink has been the cause of individual failures and not national failures as posited by dr meegaswatte. he should stay his decision to close all taverns as there is no justification to ban liquor. it is best to let people decide if they are to have a glass of wine, a shot of arrak or toddy, a dram of whisky or some home-made beer. we have to value the freedom of the individual.

institution. **The alcohol industry over here is huge with wineries fanned out all over. Yet, Australia has achieved an economic miracle over a mere 200 years while Sri Lanka is botched in failure despite two thousand five hundred years of civilisation!** Right from the day of the First Fleet, Australians have eschewed ideology and got moulded into a practical nation. This land that has hosted economic refugees like us has enough created wealth that can afford a very high standard of care for a growing population. There has never been an abolition movement on the soil of this country. Communism and socialism never struck root here and the diverse groups have come to learn that their own future depends on joining hands with other groups.

Nor was alcoholism something that was absent in the idyllic period of our ancient history. History will tell you that. We were not angels before the nasty foreigners came.

misrepresentations in our speaker's presentation. It is not a fact that all development had stopped with the great kings. To be fair even to the devil, the British Raj itself had achieved considerable development- massive road and rail structures, commercial crops and tea, the port, professional educational institutions, and a sound administrative structure. It is a different matter that they did all that in order to benefit the colonial economy. Most of these developments have remained as the mainstay for our current economy. Since independence, we have added no rails and relatively few roads. On the other hand, even during post- independence we have achieved significant development in the way of additions to irrigation, colonization, commercial crops, public education, health, communications etc.

Drink has been the cause of individual failures and not national failures as posited by Dr Meegaswatte. He should stay his

have to value the freedom of the individual. It's historical fact that no country in the world has been able to succeed in drink-taboo campaigns. Policing the population of a country for drink is not practical. Besides, what about the more dangerous resort to drug addiction? Given that Dr Meegaswatte succeeds in closing all taverns can he stop the drug trade? He would secure himself a Nobel Prize if he does.



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