

The pot or 'kalaya' as it is traditionally referred to, is a vital implement in the Sri Lankan village. A slight correction is called for here as I remind myself of the fact the village I was brought up in, is no more. Hence let me emphasize that kalaya or the clay pot 'was' a vital implement in the traditional Sri Lankan home. People used it to draw water from the well for a variety of purposes. To name a few, water drawn from the well was used for all household activities such as cleaning stuff for cooking and the very pots and pans used for cooking, cleaning stuff for cooking, washing pots and pans before and after cooking, ablutions by the entire household, and even bathing and watering the vegetable plot in the garden. The last-mentioned two activities were performed by drawing water directly from the well and away from home. All this goes to show the vital role played by an innocuous clay pot in a village household. The traditional village and its typical household have disappeared for good. However, the idioms and wisdom built around this vital village implement have survived for the benefit of future generations. It must be emphasized that village or folk wisdom and idiom do not come up overnight, but are the products of experience gained over generations. The most important household item known as the clay pot has given us perhaps the most valuable of such wisdom and idiom. The beauty of this idiom is that it has proved its value and relevance over and over long after its originator disappeared from the scene.

'Do not break the pot at the end of the day having all the while used it for drawing water.'

Our elders used to warn us with the above words whenever we were about to do something foolish so that we might lose the opportunities and advantages we had. Why does the simile of the pot become valid here? The clay pot in the household had become its source of sustenance and prosperity. Thus the breaking of it deliberately is nothing short of throwing the baby with the bath water. We would be destroying all our chances of getting ahead and becoming worthwhile humans.

Please bear with me for this long introduction to my main theme. I do not enjoy writing this, but feel compelled to do so as things are becoming unfortunately disappointing. I mean the political situation in our motherland. I had immense faith in the President who did the impossible in riding the country of terrorists and earned the goodwill of the entire nation. I did hope that he would usher in a new era of prosperity without corruption and of real democracy. Sadly though, it does not seem to be happening, and that really is my disappointment.

As much as the pot was the source of sustenance and prosperity for the household, the good will and respect earned by Mahinda Rajapakse over the years as a campaigner for human rights, devoted member of the SLFP responsible for its resurrection after being betrayed even by Bandaranaiques, and lastly the defeat of LTTE terrorists, was to be his sacred pot which would have sustained and kept him going as a revered leader of the nation. However, as things are, the pot is being systematically broken by his own kith and kin, either with or without his knowledge and blessings.

Why do I make this unkind statement? Good will is something earned with difficulty, but destroyed by 'one stroke of the pen.' I have put it figuratively, but the strokes referred to here are being carried out openly, if the reports appearing in the press are to be believed. One misstep is enough for a well-known character to ruin his or her reputation, and presidents or

even monarchs are not exempt. Once the downward slide begins it gathers momentum all the way and what starts as a whimper would develop to be an earth-shattering explosion.

In politics this process does not have to take its full course. Damage can be done and felt long before that. Only problem is that men who are used to praising the emperor's clothes never think of warning



the emperor. They will wait till their hero performs hara-kiri either to come out with the golden words 'I told you so,' or to decamp and find shelter in the opponent's camp. (Sri Lanka has enough examples to illustrate this point) It is a pity again to see a young man with 'bright prospects' is at the centre of the current slide. I refer to the much-publicized petition or complaint by the final year law student by the name Jayaratne, who claims he had been denied justice because the President's son was given special facilities in answering his examination papers, a privilege not accorded to other students.

Was this done without undue interference or instructions? Or did the laws college take upon itself the responsibility of providing special treatment to the president's son?

Even as I write this I hope my information would be proved false so that authorities at all levels can heave a sigh of relief. However, my hopes are not likely to be fulfilled according to what I hear from various quarters. This incident looks simple and silly, but is bad enough to accelerate the downward slide I mentioned earlier. The pot can be shattered to smithereens in no time, never to be restored to its original shape. Hence it would become utterly useless and ineffective.

All creatures, big and small, that belong to every species, love their offspring with the exception of a few that devour their young ones as soon as they are born. We notice this attachment mainly among humans because lesser ones do not attract our attention. Politicians are not immune to this natural inclination, and hence we come across various instances where a politician's son or daughter gets special mention or treatment. Earliest instance was perhaps when Sri Lanka's first Prime Minister D.S. Senanayake stunned the island after his sudden death by instructing the then governor to call upon his son to form a government. Dudley Senanayake survived the political upheaval when the heir - apparent Sir John came out with his (in) famous 'Premier Stakes.'

There was no one to beat the 'Father of the Nation' although attempts were made now and then. Dr. N.M.Perera expedited his exit (to use an euphemism in place of expulsion) from the government when he referred to a crown prince ignoring the mother's love for her son. However that

crown prince was not up to the mark and the highest he could go was to the position of opposition leader. I remember meeting an inspector of police once hanging around with parents in an afternoon at St. Bridget's Convent. When I asked him what he was doing he frankly admitted that he was in charge of the security of the Hon. Prime Minister's daughter who had come to meet a nun. That I thought was a price the public had to pay when they elect men with children to hold such positions. They cannot always find a Dhanayake to be their P.M. Once attending a farewell party of my expatriate colleagues held at the then exclusive Colombo Swimming Club, our host shocked us with the information that the President's son was playing water polo with tight security all round preventing even club members from going near the pool. That too was fair enough I thought. Let the privileged few also get a taste of what common folk go through regularly, I concluded.

That water polo playing son is no doubt watch-



anonymous concealing his identity. He shed his surname for that reason.

How much would a son of a Sri Lankan politician enjoy being an ordinary citizen? To come to the individual concerned, I believe Namal Rajapakse is a pleasant young man who is able to stand on his own two feet, politically speaking, without being propped up by his parents or their henchmen. If not he would not have got elected by such a large majority at the last election. Why didn't the President allow him to take his own time and grow up as a politician able to command a following in the country without trying to foist him and literally push him down the throat of the masses? Going by the reports this is exactly what is taking place.

After I started writing this I come across an explanation offered by the head of the law college as to how Namal Rajapakse came to be answering his examination papers sitting in a separate room. That apparently was due to the fact that there was no room in the Exam hall. Dr. Rodrigo (that seems to be his name) by his explanation proves the fact that Jayaratne was not making false allegations. How simplistic is the doctor's prescription? What does he take citizens of Sri Lanka to be? Not only Sri Lanka, I think, the whole world would be watching the spectacle. The spectacle of an island's premier legal institution being dragged down to the depths of degradation in a country trying to export pure Buddhism to all corners of the world, and blasts the three Buddhist suttas over the radio and TV day in and day out. One sermon admonishes, among other things,

'Let not one deceive another

BREAKING THE POT?

ing the fun right now with unabated glee and interest and gratitude. He would never have imagined the current President would be so benevolent towards him. As things are of course Sajith must be the happiest man in Sri Lanka as the President and his men are doing the unimaginable, i.e. shattering the mountain of good will and trust that the President had soon after the defeat of the LTTE..

Politicians do and should be able to pamper their children and give them all the comforts they can afford. No one would grudge that. But when that comfort or privilege comes as a result of being his or her son, the public would not be so forgiving and applauding. For us living in a country where democracy is practiced more seriously, this type of favoritism looks utterly absurd. We remember the occasion when Prime Minister Bob Hawke paid some forty five or fifty dollars as the usual fine for the traffic offence of not wearing a seat belt. Some journo had reported seeing him travelling in his official car with no seat belt. When a similar report appeared about Prime Minister John Howard's daughter being transported by an embassy vehicle in Paris from the air port to her hotel, John Howard promptly paid the fee to the relevant authority. When the young Premier of Victoria Steve Bracks came to know that his son was copped for drunk driving, he thought it was time to quit politics altogether. He was just fifty years old. Most impressive of course was the story of Bob Hawke's son who decided to devote his time to work for the welfare of aboriginal people in the Northern Territory. He wanted to remain

Nor despise any person whatsoever in any place In anger or ill-will let not one wish any harm to another. Just as a mother protects her only child At the risk of her own life Even so let one cultivate a boundless heart towards all beings'

No explanation is necessary to illustrate the hollowness of the Buddhist virtues flaunted by the so-called Buddhist rulers. More important perhaps in the current context is the impression created and the situation brought about as regards the democratic values of rule of law and independence of the judiciary broadcast all over the world. The whole world is keeping an eye on what happens in our lovely little island accused of putting its war hero behind bars unjustly and human rights violations at the closing stages of the war against terrorists. If the premier legal institution in the country cannot treat its students without discrimination how can the world look up to the country's legal system with any respect and trust?

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