

"Being an actress is just like being a politician"- Ruwanthi Mangala

Can we make sense of this widespread attack on the rush of cine and tele-cine actresses onto the political stage in Lanka in time for the Provincial Council elections? Examine this phenomenon a little critically and you will find that the jeering and sardonic criticism does say more about the critics than about their victims. It is all publicly displayed hypocrisy. It is also misogynistic. It is in bad taste. It is unfair.

OUR FEMALE STARS IN THE GOLD RUSH

The latest to stage an attack is the Island feature writer, Lucian Rajakarunayake (1/2/2014) who labels the lot of beauties as sex symbols, suggesting they are unworthy of the 'superior' game of Lankan politics. Lucien's diatribe matches with numerous emails going around. I just received one that refers to these young women as "kirimandala" (milk machines) and using photo shop creativity to highlight their breasts. The image juxtaposes the face of the Minister of Health, Sirisena, displayed as enjoying pneumatic bliss. It is immaterial here that Sirisena is unable to supply drugs to suffering cancer patients. The stars are described as 'gon wassan,' (young cows).

In the first place, what is intrinsically wrong about a film actor participating in politics? The world has had famous television personalities that performed with distinction in politics? Ronald Reagan, former President of America, is a prominent illustration. Sri Lanka, too did have Gamini Fonseka, TB Ilangaratne, and Vijaya Kumaratunge. Some, like Paba, maybe dreadful examples, no doubt; but then the good and the bad is common across all categories of polities. Paba had been a special ignoramus. The late Cyril Dharmawardena related to me a story according to which Paba was seated in front of Cyril at a Sirikotha meeting; she turned behind to Cyril and sought to be educated: "Cyril Ayye, kawda aney Castro

deemable by now.

We like to think stereotypically that the intrusion of less-spoilt young women might bring in some honesty and compassion badly needed in our degraded male-dominated legislatures. Some of them may well go up the learning curve and act on their own free will while others may be proxies for the corrupt. In Parliament we have a hardened legislature that remained composed and unaffected when General Sarath Fonseka was framed up and jailed and his hard-won bravery titles grabbed away; a hardened Legislature that found it fit to drag out, abuse and toss out of office the sitting head of the judiciary, Shiranee Bandaranayake, as though she had been a common criminal. One has to hope that these film actors would not be robotic voting hands like the famed Malini Fonseka who condoned such myriad misdeeds.

Can't you guess that had these stars been male there would have been no fuss made at all? The flood of scurrilous emails serves to demonstrate a kind of plain male-chauvinistic mysogonism. This is why the breasts are focused in email images. It also shows up the sexual hunger for the female bosom on the part of these critical males. Sri Lanka is still dominantly a country of men. We had the world's first Prime Minister but that appears to have been an accident. Women politicians are the bite for male critics. One instance was when a scurrilous poster appeared describing one high profile female candidate in Dehiwela-Mt Lavinia as "Muhuna kethayi. Puka Hurathal." I refrain from translating this as the English version may sound even more obscene.

Can we get at the precise concerns of these critics? Are they worried that the Provincial Councils would get into a mess? Surely not, as it is conventional wisdom that the Provincial Council is an absolute joke. The PCC have added nothing to the quality or level of governance; rather they have been a huge burden to the public purse and thereby a serious distortion to the allocation of taxpayers' money. They have amplified the pressure of politicization of governing agencies in the island. Policemen are at risk in their duties; so are doctors in hospitals, heads of schools, teachers, and even sanitary inspectors. The application of the rule of law-or whatever remains of that after the extractions of the Rajapakse regime - is dangerously at risk. Even ordinary men and women on the street are at risk. Palath Sabha Councillors have established a reputation for deflowering virgins, and the police can do little about that. The fact is that the whole system of governance in Sri Lanka has turned out to be a metaphorical merry-go-round. Over a hundred Ministers going about with nothing to show in the way of policy-development in their jurisdictions; an illegally constituted Chief Justice who, unconcerned with the irony, says he wants to reform the justice system; a Prime Minister facing allegations of heroine dealing; the examiner who had failed the son of a big shot in a preliminary aviation test being pushed out of office; the



Law College Principal who was sacked on serious allegations of nepotism in the conduct of examinations being promoted to high office; high police officers involved in huge corrupt deals being untouched; a person alleged to have been involved in murder and drugs made Defence monitor; allegations that the Air Lanka Chairman (a relative of the Big Boss) is able to divert the airline at will to suit his personal travel interests; the allegation that powerful people are able to hide rapists; and so on-the stories are galore and they are expanding by the day. Sri Lanka is indeed a carnival of some sorts.

our cine and tele-cine actresses skilled in the acting art? They would, surely, perform better than Gammanpilla? Politics would come naturally to them. One of the stars, Ruwanthi Mangala, spotted the truth and was honest to express it: "Being an actress is just like being a politician," Ruwanthi stated. So why not they join the merry-go-round and infect the public, hopefully, with their fun?

One can't blame the attraction that our stars have for politics because Lankan politics offers unlimited prize money. The stakes are high and it constitutes reward with little effort and risk unlike the rewards that accrue from one doing legitimate business. So why not politics? Salaries and pensions, luxury cars, and free permits for extra cars, diplomatic assignments for the family, trips around the globe and so on. It is all great fun. The rush for political position in Sri Lanka is like the rush for gold in Australia in the mid-18th century; the lucriveness is so magnetic that aspirants are prepared to lie, deceive or even be openly treacherous in its pursuit.



Making Sense Shyamon Jayasinghe

kyianne?" (Brother Cyril, can you tell me who Castro is?). Mind you, Paba topped the UNP preferences at Gampaha beating mature business leader, Karu Jayasuriya.

On the other hand, a significant number of MPs in Parliament are ignorant persons; aren't they? Persons who have only a 9th standard pass are Ministers. So why bother about Paba? Sri Lankan Legislatures in the long march toward development have said 'goodbye' to the days when erudite leaders from the legal profession, from the medical profession, from the teaching profession and from business ranks adorned them, to make way for school drop outs, empty-headed clowns, drug traffickers, and simple idiots whose only skill is in the practice of deceit and their readiness to stooge the center of power and act at the latter's bid. Someone remarked the other day that, like water, Sri Lankan society is moving to its comfortable level. The Absolute Star at the centre simply lovessuch lowly sorts because the latter will obey. The primary requirement is obedience and not input ability because the overall objective at the center is the rape of the country's resources under the mask and rhetoric of patriotism. If not for the liberalization introduced in the mid-seventies and consequent growth of the private sector that replaced the socialistic state-control of the Sirima-LSSP era, the country would have been unre-

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