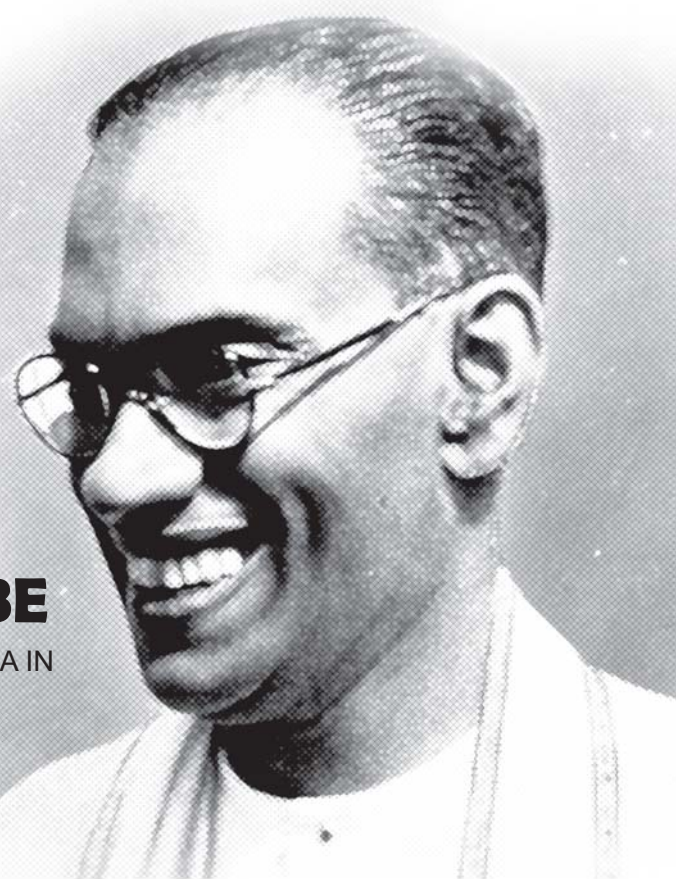


It is strange that the story of the assassination of Prime Minister SWRD Bandaranaike has been allowed to slide into the historical dustbin. That tragic and shocking episode is so laden with potent lessons for our future generations. The narrative, related pictures and souvenirs should be displayed in the Museum for generations of Sri Lankans to observe and think about. Here is a blind spot in our social consciousness. We ignore the need for preserving lessons of history and, therefore, we are in peril for having repeats. The JVP insurrection many years after, although not of the evil gene of the political assassination, also does fall under this category of collective memories that shouldn't be left to die. Such incidents spring from a wider social reality and an understanding that should be part of our political literacy.

Let's focus on the assassination that rocked Sri Lanka and the wider world. We

I kept questioning him. He presented a big book he had written, entitled, "The Palm of His Hand." This book of 429 pages looks impressive. I brought it with me and just completed finishing it. Unfortunately, only a few pages dwell with the assassination. However, those pages constitute a kind of authentic information on a major historical event in Sri Lanka's modern political evolution.

The lesson from the assassination constitutes a warning of what can come from Sangha politics. It is the same pattern with regard to all religions. Religions have produced a lot of evil that has troubled the world and it continues to do so today with the emergence of fundamentalism in Islam. Christianity had its cruel days during the middle Ages. Commenting on Hindu-Muslim violence in his time, India's first Prime minister, Jawarahalal Nehru said, "I am horrified by the spectacle of re-ligion." It now turns out that even



EVIL BEHIND THE ROBE

RE-LIVING THE CENTRAL ROLE OF THE SANGHA IN THE BANDARANAIKE ASSASSINATION.

must put it back into our social consciousness. My approach is to take the cue from an account given by a former and famous Lake House journalist: ECT Candappa.

ECT Candappa or 'Manny,' as he was called by his friends, lives here in Melbourne in Dandenong-the same suburb I reside. I never knew that until my good friend, former Lake House feature writer, Rane Ranatunge, coming down from Sydney requested me to escort him to visit the iconic man of Lake House. Manny seemed in every way like a king of the once proud tribe of scribes. At 86,

Buddhism, reputed as the 'world's most peaceful religion,' is also susceptible to evil use. The brutal treatment of Rohingya Muslims by Burmese Buddhists is not an isolated event. Social media often carries images of wild and hateful behaviour by monks on the rampage in Sri Lanka. Recently, a monk pounced on a Tamil Grama Sevaka in Batticaloa with threatening racist language. The Bodu Bala Senawa went on rampage against Muslims. All done in the name of religion by ordained monks. Watch the gestures of some of the so-called 'Nalaka Hamuduruwo.' Some prominent monks go about lying for politicians.



It is only society that can curb and prevent such occurrences. A politically illiterate society is fertile ground for this kind of extremism. Thus, the social consciousness of our people should be alerted about this reality so that a culture of rejection develops.

he is in a wheelchair. He beckoned us to sit along with him. "Don't worry about my wheelchair," he remarked. "If Roosevelt could run US from a wheelchair.?" Manny exuded a most genial smile mixed with self-assurance and composure. What a marvellous memory he has, Rane observed, upon noticing how Manny related details of his life and times as a journalist.

One episode about which he unfolded his memory was that of the assassination of Sri Lanka's Prime Minister, SWRD Bandaranaike. Immediately after the assassination, Manny went to the Prime Minister's residence, to hospital, and to other relevant spots for investigation "When I went to meet Dr PR Anthonis (the surgeon who operated on SWRD), he initially got angry about my intrusiveness.

I was quick in mind to realise the importance of Manny's findings-which were contemporary and not second-hand- and

Manny Candappa's account relives the assassination and something of its prelude. Apparently SWRD didn't care about any special security. He had only two cops to guard him at residence. Manny describes the very morning of the assassination. The Prime Minister was in the verandah customarily greeting various people in who had come to meet him. In the course of his many greetings SWRD "turns to the other monk who is seated at the other end of the verandah,..... Somarama is oddly dressed as a Buddhist monk belonging to his particular sect in that his saffron robe covers both his shoulders, instead of one as is customary. In fact, it had aroused the curiosity of several others waiting to meet the Prime Minister.....The Prime Minister turns to Somarama, greets him in the customary manner with folded hands. To his and everyone's surprise the monk rises from his seat, an exertion that Buddhist monks do not make for anyone, everyone else

including royalty being below that of the Buddhist monk in rank....The next surprise comes split seconds after, when Somarama draws forth his right arm from beneath the robes to disclose a re-revolver from which he fires, explicitly from the hip, and hits the Prime Minister's wrist at point-blank range.... while he is yet bending low, startled and aghast by the outrage of a Buddhist monk car-rying a gun and assailing his person while he is yet in the act of paying homage, the gun barks again, and again he glimpses the red line of fire... This time the metallic intruder has entered his torso, just under his armpit, and he feels it slide under the second rib with almost surgical cunning....the bullet slices through his spleen, crushing his right kidney and shattering the ninth rib before it escapes unimpeded to lodge in the opposite wall....The Prime Minister (the monk's) growls of anger as he spits out obscenities...Another shot rings out for the fourth time.. and a bursts of exploding obscenities...., the monk, now frothing at the mouth,, turns his revolver callously and injures a hapless school principal who has come to meet the Prime Minister."

(Sirimavo) sees, before her terrified eyes, her husband bleeding all over, staggering into the house from the verandah...seeking support....Behind him is the monk, still with the smoking revolver in his hand, stooping forward, still pointing the revolver at her husband."

Candappa's report points out how several times SWRD implored from all around him not to hurt the assailant

monk for, he said, "he was stupid and ignorant." An ironic behavioural contrast between the laity and the monk!

In the early pages of his book Manny Candappa points out how Somarama was part of an iceberg of conspiracy. The central figure had been Buddhharakkitta, the Chief monk of one of the richest temples in Sri Lanka. Buddhharakkitta had been fond of money and power. He had an amorous relationship with the country's first woman Minister, Vimala Wijewardena. Wimala was the monk's former patron, later turned protegee. Buddhharakkitta had been responsible for making her a Minister. Manley, South Asian Bureau Chief of the New York Times, hearing of the monk as a powerbroker visited the island at the time to meet the monk. He was escorted by one Wijesinghe, referred to as the local correspondent of what appears to be Lake House referred to in the book as "Clarion." Buddhharakkitta's first appearance before Manley is described thus: "He was clean shaven and to-tally bald. He was opulent and rotund, and his head, too, was globular. His dark eyes were sunken in fat and he flashed a toothy smile. He was clad in a sparklingly white teralene shirt, black teralene trousers." "You like a scotch and soda, bourbon or rum...or beer?" the monk, asked Manley. Photographs of important VIPs were on the wall and a huge symbol of the hand representing the SLFP.

Buddharakkitta, in the course of the conversation, claimed that without him Ban-