



Why do I call it a Sri Lankan ailment? It is for the simple reason that criticism is something that is normal in the Australian context. Any body and anything can be criticized. No one takes exception to that. Not so the ordinary Sri Lankan. He gets offended easily. I would rather use the feminine in discussing this evil, for it is more a she rather than a he that gets excited even on hearing about some word said about certain things and certain persons.

What are these certain things or persons? Religion comes first and foremost. Even there it is Buddhism that matters. You can say anything about another religion if you wish. Do not utter a word against Buddhism or any one representing it. That brings us to utterances about the Buddhist clergy. It does not matter if Buddhism and its clergy have withstood the onslaughts from all types of rivals and critics over the centuries.. It does not even matter if non - Buddhists say any thing unpleasant about Buddhism. If a Buddhist were to raise any doubt or a different opinion to the accepted pattern, then you are in trouble.

Who raises these objections? Is it the monks who are supposed to know more than the laymen? No. It is the very laymen who are not at all competent to judge whether some one is uttering a falsehood or not. Or whether that person is raising a genuine doubt or a question that calls for further examination and inquiry. The mere fact that some doubt has been expressed, is sufficient to raise a hue and cry. It is blasphemy and nothing less than that. How dare that infidel comes out with that question? It is utterly un-Buddhistic even to think of something like that.

The person who takes up cudgels on behalf of the clergy and the religion does not think for a moment that of all religions, Buddhism has the best tradition of accommodating criticism and debate more than any other religion. It does not matter whether it was the Buddha himself that admonished his disciples to accept any thing only after questioning and only if

one sees reason in what is offered to one as true and worthwhile. Do not accept because your teacher or someone in authority said it. Do not accept just because your elders tell you so. You must think for yourself, and accept what you see reasonable.

What is religion for after all? Is it just an ornament you wear round your neck? Or another type of embellishment to show the world that you belong to a special category of human beings? Or is it a process of purification that leads you to a state of development at

way. Later I learned that he had fallen out even with his kith and kin for trying to advise him.

Highly qualified and fairly talented though he was, his radio program continued in that rather insipid way till the day he quit. What is regrettable is that his stubbornness denied thousands of listeners the opportunity to hear some useful and interesting radio programs.

I am sorry to report that there are even younger persons in our radio programs who resent any type of advice or suggestions for improvement. They too suffer from the same ailment, i.e. the

other words, such individuals become a burden on society rather than worth-while citizens of democratic Australia.

Do we really need that?

This can apply to all other fields of activity in which we are supposed to deliver some service to the community. It may be writing, poetry, drama, painting, dancing, singing and many more. Whoever enters any of these fields would like to reach greater heights. Not that all achieve their goals. But they no doubt aim high. There is nothing bad about that. They should be given all the encouragement possible.

How far they go will certainly depend on the effort they put in, apart from their inborn talent of course. Even that talent has to be improved and refined. It is in this very process that criticism can and should play a vital role. Those impervious to criticism are unlikely to go very far.

The pity is that this Sri Lankan allergy to criticism is unfortunately widespread among our community, in both young and old. What we can do is to point out to them, that we in Australia are living in a country and climate

that is conducive to criticism and that people in this country are used to give and take criticism in the proper spirit, that is to make the best use of it whatever the motive of the giver is. It is up to us to make the most of the opportunity offered by this land we call home.



# ALERGY TO CRITICISM

## A PECULIAR SRI LANKAN AILMENT?

which point all existence has to cease, reaching the state of bliss we describe as Nirvana?

As far as Buddhism is concerned, my strong feeling is that unless we see and grab the need and opportunity offered to us by this life to start the process of discarding our defilements, we are certainly missing the bus. One may pin one's hopes on some higher power to deliver one to that exalted position of being completely free of all *kleshas*, that hinders one's progress. Or one may take upon oneself the responsibility of doing it oneself. He would then realize that he has to go through another equally important process of inquiry and discovery. It is not a case of discovering or reinventing the wheel, which the Buddha has already done for us. It is rather a case of our discovering our own abilities and shortcomings, so that we can devote all our energy in a meaningful manner towards the ultimate goal.

Unless we try and find out how effective our efforts are, we may be just repeating something that someone recommends, without realizing how we are progressing. This is where the process of questioning comes in - questioning ourselves, - questioning those that advise us. If one cannot face the questioning then one has to quit the job of advising.

Coming to the very question of criticism, what really do we expect from it? Or from a critic for that matter? Are we to treat those who criticize what we do and say as our enemies or friends?

Whatever they are up to, it is our responsibility to make the most of it. I have discovered through my personal experience that criticism offered with all the good will in the world, can easily be misinterpreted or resented. It was some fifteen years ago, that I wrote a lengthy letter to a long-standing friend offering some valuable advice regarding a radio program he was conducting. Although I sincerely believed I was doing him a service, I was shocked to find that my friend had taken offence. It took almost eight years for our friendship to come back to normal. More important than that is the fact that he never mended his ways, carrying on in the same old

incurable attitude of being perfect and beyond criticism. That is the ideal candidate for colossal failure. It is not the individual who suffers. It is the whole system, including the organizers, listeners, and even the general public, for they have to put up with non-cooperative, and non-caring members of their own community. In

Counterpoint  
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