



Bamdaranaika, in 1964, that some six or seven M.P.s were bought over by the opposition leading to the fall of her government. She had a clear majority in the house unlike the current woman prime minister of this country, who operates with a wafer-thin majority. The cost of buying an M.P. at the time was mere Rs. 50,000. The son of one such defector is now sitting on the opposition benches. He followed his father not for money, but to teach the president a lesson. Such instances of teaching and learning lessons too are common in Sri Lankan democracy.

Unlike its Australian counterpart, Sri Lankan democracy also can boast of colorful elections preceded by an equally colorful campaign which would produce a number of deaths plus innumerable fights. Numbers vary from election to election. The campaign itself is a spectacle to watch, its rallies offering the public a cross section of Sri Lankan culture. Most attractive color is yellow, seen on the stage of any party. Apart from the party started by Buddhist monks, sometime back, these monks are a regular feature in all party rallies. The politicians on their part try to make capital of the religion of the majority. Whether they believe and practice it is immaterial. Before and after an election Kandy turns out processions of politicians making their way to Malwatta, to offer their gifts and respect to the Chief High Priest of the main group of monks known as Siyam Nijykaya. He on his part liberally doles out blessings to any one paying respect

that way. One wonders why so much emphasis is placed on this trip by politicians. Only guess one can make is that both this monk and the politicians think Sri Lankan voters can be duped by such magic.

This contrasts well with the Australian situation where the parliament begins sitting each day after the speaker reads some quotation from the scriptures. The M.P.s as a rule would be seen attending a church service before a new session. With all this ritual and prayer, no priest is seen meddling in the affairs of politics. They know their role and place in society and keep to that. Sri Lankan democracy on the other hand, is bound to be incapacitated if monks are not brought on stage.

The rent changes introduced to the constitution in Sri Lanka provoked quite a lot of criticism from both local and overseas observers. Most important among the charges made was that Mahinda Rajapakse was paving the way for dictatorship. The amendment approved by parliament allows him to contest the presidential election a third time. He has to convince the voters that he deserves to be given a further opportunity to continue his good work. The obvious fact is that as incumbent, he would be on a better wicket than his opponent. Apart from that the worrying situation is that the major party in the opposition is incapacitated due to its internal squabbling whereas it ought to be paying attention to its responsibilities as a credible alternative capable of frustrating the attempts of the president.

That is Sri Lankan democracy for you. It is more colorful.

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