

Let me start with a question to politicians in Sri Lanka. Has any of its ministers read or at least seen the masterpiece known as 'Midieavel Sinhalese Art'?

If any of them had any knowledge about it they would have no doubt prevented that great scholar being dumped in the modern pond called Nelum Pokuna.

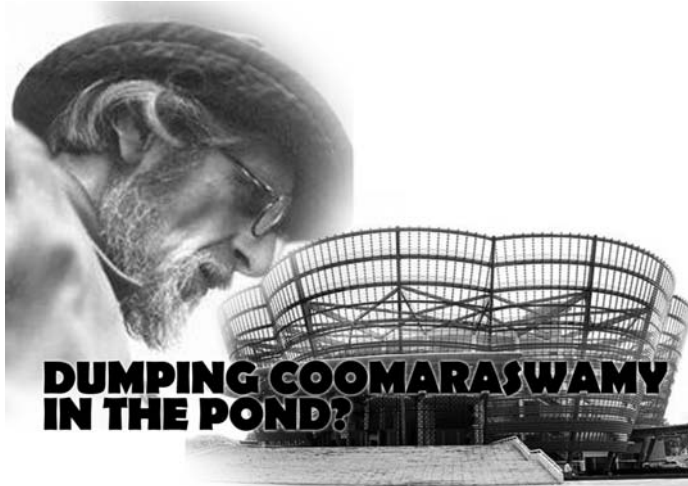
Who is the scholar I am referring to? Do the politicians know about him? Do they realize that Coomaraswamy was a scientist by profession and an art critic and expert by choice.

Leaving him for a while let us look at this pond into which he was dumped by Sri Lankan authorities. It is not something found in one of the ancient capitals but righty in the centre of Colombo, in the leafy suburb of Cinnamon gardens. Apparently it was a gift from the Chinese Government. Why wasn't it given some Chinese name? one may ask. Where did the Nelum Pokuna come from? There are no Lotus flowers around to suggest such a name. Even if that is justified, why go after the road adjoining it and hastily baptize it after the new Theatre? NELUM POKUNA MAWATHA?

What was the indecent hurry to change the name of the road simply because a new theatre has sprung up nearby?

For my simple mind none of these things look logical. Are we going round changing names because some event has taken place nearby? The best example that comes to my mind is the Bellia Kapapu Handiya along High Level Road, given to intersection after a man was beheaded at that place. That at least gives us the richness of popular imagination where the simple village folk use their natural ability to express what would go down as folk legends later. Nelum Pokuna or the Lotus Pond does not in any way give the people the foggiest idea as to what is to be found close by.

Having given my reasons for rejecting the new name wholesale let me go back to the earlier name of the road which these Pundits had apparently no respect for. It was at one time known as Green Path, a name justifiable because it is one the lovely greeny avenues one finds in the city. When a decision was taken to change it,



whoever did it took into account the services of the most respected and internationally known Sri Lankan Scholar Ananda Coomaraswamy. If I remember right Dr. Walter Mrasinghe had given ample reasons for the appropriateness of that name, among which was the fact that the Museum of Natural Sciences is also located down that road. That was in a letter he addressed to the editor of a Sri Lankan newspaper. What he did not stress for obvious reasons is the fact that the famous Art Gallery run at the time by the Ceylon Society of Arts is situated along this road.

Aren't there other Sri Lankans apart from Dr. Mrasinghe who are aware of the value of this great Sri Lankan? Perhaps he is better known and respected in a country like the US. It was in October 2006 that I had the privilege of admiring a plaque in honor of this Sri Lankan Scholar on the wall of the Indian Section of the famous Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. They still remember the man who was in charge of that section for a long time. Alongside the plaque were on display two line drawings by Ananda Coomaraswamy.

The naming or rather the renaming of this road was not done by the President, but no such change could have occurred without his approval or at least his knowledge. That raises a very valid question as to how things are done in the island of Sri Lanka. Is there a procedure to be followed in such instances? If so why was a man like Coomaraswamy ignored by those responsible for the naming? Has the country come to a point at which no heroes are recognized and respected? What type of future can such a country expect to build? Is it thinking of citizens with no knowledge of its history or respect for those who made that history possible?

Then again, coming to the question of President's approval or knowledge, one has to ask a very pertinent question as to what type of advisors the President has. I am pretty sure Dr. Mrasinghe is not one of them, although there seem to be so many Ph.D.s among them. How does one rate such a degree if they are ignorant of basic facts about the country and its past?

To put a really blunt question, what are they advising the President on? Is it on his dress code or his travels?

I am not actually interested in that type of advice. My worry is that the country is depending on so-called advisors who do not measure up the requirements of their 'beloved' land. In other words, a country must necessarily have an intelligence that is capable of giving direction to its growth and development. It true that scientists, engineers, and doctors are necessary. So are the nurses and laborers. But in the overall picture, a set of persons capable of giving direction to the whole operation of government and keeping peace within the country is absolutely essential. Arguably it is that type of work the advisors to the President or the government are supposed to do. It is the utter failure of that class I tried to point out earlier.

The unseen and perhaps unappreciated role played by artists and art-lovers is not noticed in the normal course of things, but must necessarily be emphasized in this context. Let me take the reader to the situation in Sri Lanka back in 1971. No serious study appears to have been done on the sociological aspects of that youth uprising. It is in my view national duty ignored by those responsible. Most of the schools and educational institutions were targeted by rebel leaders hunting grounds where the prospective cadres can be gathered and trained. One educational institution remained almost untouched. It was discovered that the students interested in arts were not easy prey for the preachers of the revolution. This simple fact goes to prove one basic truth, which is that a person who appreciates art is a better man who values his environment and social ethics. That is the type of citizen a country should have for it to progress and be counted among nations as a worthy partner in world affairs. My main fear is that this type of individual is

being slowly but systematically thrown out and simpletons are given their place. I say this knowing the seriousness of my statement, but I have no other way to put it directly. The very simple omission of offering correct advice on such an important aspect of Sri Lankan culture goes to prove the damage these people are doing to the country and its President.

Why I have been going on about this issue at length is that it points to a continuing pattern of ill-advice and wrong direction on almost all national decisions and strategies. This brings us to the most significant achievement by the Rajapakse government that almost changed the course of Sri Lankan history. I say almost because it stopped short of achieving that goal. That failure was no doubt due to the parties that were advising decision-makers. Once the Tiger terrorists were defeated, the government was in a strong position to bring about necessary changes to the country's constitution and the administrative set up. The entire country was behind their President after his historic victory. He could have asked the people to make any sacrifice for the sake of their motherland and they would have willingly obliged. No party which has been attacking the government could have prevented such support and enthusiasm.

But such opportunities once given must be



must be made use of wisely and without delay. Both these aspects were sadly lacking from those calling the tune. No wisdom was displayed by them and delay was the most recurrent feature in everything they appeared to be doing.

There were two things they could have immediately set about upon. One was to sort out the long-drawn out question of the Tamil minority, the language and decentralization of administration. Both are issues that could have been tackled together, given the people's preparedness to support the President in solving the rest of the problems facing the country. An all party conference that is still n being talked about ought to have been called immediately and if that was done, it would have given results long ago, at least one year back. But in real terms, that conference has not taken place so far. Who was the culprit? Who was responsible for that? Why was no progress made so far on this vital issue? The government failed on another important aspect, that of getting true representative group to speak for the Tamil minority leaving out the TNA which has all along being speaking on behalf of the LTTE. Only achievement the government can show the world is the LLRC and its report which too is gathering dust.

The top-heavy administrative machinery that was installed by J.R. with a cumbersome load of governors, chief ministers and a plethora of politicians running around accompanied by another load of security officers at a very high cost to the public could have easily sorted out if the opportunity was made use of. At least one advisor ought to have told the President that decentralization does not mean moiré politicians, more security and more vehicles, but real decentralization of administration. That they could have told him can be done without politicians ordering government servants on things they themselves do not understand.

Either with their advice or without it, the

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ECC Foundation proudly presents veteran film maker "Udayakantha Warnasuriya's" latest (17th) cinematic creation "SENASURU MARUWA" will be screening at Dandenong Reading cinema. The film will feature Channa Perera, Lucky Dias, Sheshadri, Buddhika Jayaratne, Veena Jayakody, Ajith Weerasinghe, Indika Ginige, Senaka Wijesinghe and Thanuja Dilhani. The story is based on a script by the late Tissa Abeysekara. Senasuru Maruwa, a tragic story that revolves around an unusual business deal entered into by two friends and how it affects not only them but their peaceful family lives too, is the seventeenth direction of Udayakantha.

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