



STEP BACK IN TIMER

'Oh Bin Kundo, Do dance with us. When you dance I too will join you in that dance.'

01. An ox made of a coconut frond
At the end, the pittu would be destroyed either as a result of a fight or just in fun. Bin Kunda cannot keep quiet and is always active. We call him to perform with the usual refrain which runs like this.

02. Come and dance with me, you little creature

First the head has to be shaped with two cuts on either sides to indicate its position and a few cuts to show its feet too if wanted,

In a way it is easier to make. The housewife gets up early in the morning removes the husk from a coconut and scrapes it. Mixing the coconut with the rice flour that she left ready overnight, she gets ready with a pot of water kept on the hearth to boil. When the water is boiling, she keeps the mixture in a cylindrical device on the pot so that it gets cooked.

It all ends in a good spirit though.

it is enough fun to make the pittu, and their refrain which calls for kompittu to be cooked also go to show that eating was never thought of.

It is there that my playing in the clay began. This initial exposure to nature was popularly called playing in the sand. It was no building castles on the sea shore or in some huge space. It was on the sandy compound in front or behind the house.

Let me begin with the to most common games we played Let me step back seventy or eighty years; back to the tiny village I was born in; to the rural setting I grew up in; to the environ-

ment that nurtured me as a child.

03. Making pittu

Once the mixture is put down from the hearth, most of it is immediately devoured by the little ones who are gathered round their mother eagerly awaiting the hot food. Only what was

kept aside by the lady would be there for the rest of the family.
Our next step is to tie it with a cord, some kind of rope, with which we can take it about.

STEP BACK IN TIME

Taking our ox and showing it of is what we enjoy now. There would always be some competition in this That is another of our games. The head has to get another addition which makes it a real ox. We get someone to cut a round piece of a coconut shell in the shape of a half moon Then we fix it to the top of the head by beating with a stick or a stone. Now our ox is more attractive with its horns giving it more strength.

The little ones would leave with a few coconut shells left by the mother. Once in the compound, these shells become the cylinders into which they pour the flour to make pittu. No flour or coconut for them, depending on what they can get from the compound itself, which is ample stocks of sand.

The only consolation is that we get tired of it in no time and the innocent creature is left free after some time. That brings the game

to an end.

The sand is filled and compressed with the help of a stone or a heavy stick. Remove the coconut shell, you get a real pittu, only difference being their inability to replace the real pittu. No one bothers because no one tries to eat that stuff.

This insect lives a couple of inches below the ground level. We dig our compound to get at it. Once uncovered, we do not let it go. Now it is our turn to make him dance for us. We also dig a small pit about the size of an upturned coconut shell into which we introduce this creature. He has no way out and has to obey our orders.

Two most common eats for breakfast in a village home are appa and pittu. Although appa is commonly known as hoppers, pittu has no such name. We are again in our compound. This time we have discovered a different object to play with. It is a tiny little creature called 'bin kunda', a small insect, harmless and excitable.

We take a raw frond of a coconut tree and select the topmost part for our operation. Cutting a piece of about two feet we turn that into our own ox, with our decorations and additions.

LONG HARD ROAD AHEAD

Prime Minister Julia Gillard is facing the toughest test in her political career. Winning that test is very very difficult, perhaps more difficult than she ever imagined.

Will she make it? It is anyone's guess.

Someone on twitter had said that Julia Gillard should have gone knowing that the public did not want her. On the other hand, there was one who said she has a grand opportunity to get rid of the dead wood and reform the party. It is true that some of those resigning were paid their use-by-date.

However the situation is not that simple to be treated lightly.

Power is a magnet, and also a big motivator. It drives people in different and devious directions. Political power can be the most dangerous of all powers. It is controlled only in a democracy. We are fortunate to be in such a country and feel safe even if Julia Gillard wins again. Her victory is the most unpredictable event in the current situation.

She has chalked four victories so far. One was when she suddenly took on the sitting P.M. and her boss, Kevin Rudd. Second was the General Election which she just managed to scrape through. Third was when Kevin Rudd took her on. The fourth was the easiest because no one contested. If one calls her power-hungry, one ought to remember that her power was given to her by her followers, and not arrogated by herself arbitrarily.

It is not a case of keeping power, but a struggle to put the house in order and correct herself as necessary, before further erosion of public support destroys all chances of victory.

I am one of the many Sri Lankan Australians who would like to see Julia Gillard back in power. At the same time, we realize that her problems are not easy to overcome. To put in a brief list, they are:

1. carbon tax
2. asylum seekers
3. mining tax
4. media restrictions
5. last but perhaps more important than the others, is her image problem.

It is generally accepted that carbon tax has not affected the ordinary Australians or the industry, but the opposition keeps hammering on it day in and day out, giving the impression that it is the biggest threat to the economy. Why does not the government make it clear once and for all, so that

Tony Abbott has no ammunition left.

Julia Gillard has been rather shaky on the asylum seeker issue, from the day she made that sudden and ill-advised announcement about East Timor. It is high time this type of ambivalence is got rid of.

Why not clear the air about the mining tax, which again is being brandished about by the opponents.

Julia Gillard has to get over the negativity that the press is very cleverly manipulating to undermine her efforts to do whatever she plans in the interest of the masses. Is she talking too much? Or is she getting the wrong advice? Did she again make a blunder by fixing a date for the election?

Whatever she announces now looks just another election sweetener. Some mistakes cannot be corrected now, but let her and her supporters realize the immense problems that have to be tackled before victory is even imagined.

As I write this I read in the papers sharp comments such as 'Julia going hopping mad'. This is proof that she is up against a hostile press in addition to the hostility from the opposition, which of course is no surprise. Tony Abbott is at pains to grab what he lost at the beginning, when the two of them were wooing the independents to come to power.

What the P.M. must not ignore is the constant barrage of criticism and negative comments from the press or even the public can have on the mind of the ordinary voters. It is a pity that a woman who has shown her metal as a powerful speaker and debater, is being painted as some incompetent novice buy those trying to destroy her. If she does not take these things seriously at least her advisors ought to take note of them and put things right.

A new cabinet is being selected right now and hopefully it will consist of some real talent, that would help her to put across the Labor message more effectively. The opposition as well as the press will no doubt try to tell the people that a new cabinet is going to be a disaster and nothing will come of it.

Less rhetoric and more action, must be the focus of the government, without being misled by its own 'blindfolded' followers and cheer groups.

Let us hope that the P.M. is no more insensitive to criticism and is willing to correct herself without showing a bold face as usual. It is high time that she realizes the gravity of the situation calling for drastic changes and meaningful action.



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