

The Sangha in Sri Lanka has had a most dignified history with many erudite and scholarly preachers and writers adorning the scenario in great distinction. On the other hand, a relatively few wayward Buddhist monks have had a most tarnishing influence on the public image of this noble institution of the Theravada. The latest to fall comes from a surprising quarter.

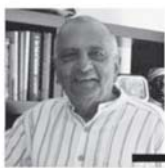
Previously, we ghastly stories about the monks of the Bodubala Sewa (BBS). The Chief is quiet after his arrest and bail out. One sees no more 'Sinha Le,' posters since Gnanassara was brought before court. However, from a most unexpected quarter we hear of the trapeze acts of a once authentic monk who enjoyed a big following as a preacher of note.

I would have expected huge public protests over the arrest of Revd Uduwe Dhammaloka. But nothing came—even from among the Sangha or the Mahanayakes. This is indicative of the monk's waning public reputation. Earning and keeping public respect is not a one-way street.

Revd Uduwe Dhammaloka, indeed, once had a big and venerated following. This is not a case of Gnanassara. For many years, however, his flock began raising eyebrows over stories that reached their ears. Questions were raised hush hush about his getting too concerned about grooming himself—applying face cream and doing facials and all such glittery things. Such personal idiosyncrasies typically lead to a multitude of other canards and gossip. The monk was demanding a prestigious car to go for bana, people observed. It was a mandatory requirement



REVD. UDUWE DHAMMALOKA UNDER A CLOUD



**Making
Sense**
**Shyamon
Jayasinghe**

that he should be provided with a special microphone that transforms his voice into something ethereal and divinely soft. It was also rumoured that the car he travels in had special electrical light effects that represented the Buddha's halo or budu

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The provocation for this article, however, were not any of those charges about the once holy monk but his recent strange performance in suddenly charging that the late Revd Maduluwawe Sobitha did not really die of natural causes and that he was in fact murdered!

Hey! This is news to all of us. It was no secret that Revd Sobitha was advanced in age and that he had been battling with an acute onset of diabetes, heart ailment and other chronic associated ailments. The government had, with the monk's consent, dispatched him to Singapore for special treatment. And now, after months of the passing away of Revd Sobitha we have

our cherubic and smiling Revd Uduwe giving us a different narrative: Revd Maduluwawe Sobitha—the prime mover for change of the Rajapaksa regime and the installation of a yahapalana government—had been, according to the new narrative, disappointed about the course taken by the YP government of Maitripala Sirisena and Wickremasinghe. The YP government, therefore, in true Rajapaksa style, engineered Revd Sobitha's death. We are relieved that Revd Uduwe did not say he saw Ranil or Sirisena taking a cup of poison to give the ailing venerable monk. The latter's death had been crafted in subtlety!

It surprises one how Revd Uduwe Dhammaloka didn't bother one bit about the hopeless timing of his accusation. The timing was so bad that the motive of the charge is made self-evident. The Revd accusing monk had just been arrested on charges relating to keeping a baby elephant in his temple at Allen Meethiniyarama. He was later bailed out.

This monk has long been observed as a clever self-marketer. We have referred above to his funny idiosyncrasies. They aren't mere extraordinary habits. They can be viewed as being marketing devices employed to impress and to create a glow about him. Here, again, when he was arrested and taken in the police van he recited gaathaas and vowed not to react in retaliation. He wore a perfect appearance of metta or loving kindness to one's enemy. As though the compassionate Buddha was taken in the police

van!
We are deterred from commenting on the charges relating to the court case.

However, as a frequent visitor to Allen Meethiniyarama Avenue I remember residents relating to me how Revd Uduwe Dhammaloka virtually took over the old temple gifted long ago by a White lady called Allen to the then residing monk for having cured an eye disease that had afflicted her. It is a multi million dollar patch of forest in the heart of Colombo. Residents told me that Revd Uduwe, who had then the blessings of the former lawless regime, came in a security-flanked four-wheel drive and just rode through the property like Lord Mounbatton. Hey presto the property was his! We know the previous regime was so efficient.

The path that led a once good and authentic monk to where he now is as an accused in a court case is a standard lesson to the whole Sangha. It was his involvement in active politics and in the political power game of lay politicians. Power simply corrupts. To stay in power one has to be liberal about the truth and lie if possible. Politicians world-over are in a deception game. Politicians in Third World countries like our own thrive on mega-deception. Few rise above that and to the level of statesmen. What Buddhism doth one have if one is prone to engage in duping and deception?

Revd Uduwe Dhammaloka's explanation for the elephant episode is that someone had just dropped off the baby tusker in his temple and that he was, in fact, looking after the helpless, orphaned animal. It is

well-known how unwanted cats and puppies are dropped off in temple places by their owners. Wonder who has unwanted baby elephants that can be offloaded like this in temple premises!

The other thing is that Revd Sobitha's disappointment had been over the Sirisena-Wickremasinghe government's decision to invite Rajapakse's men into cabinet. Revd Sobitha was until death backing the YP government. If Revd Sobitha was, as stated by Revd Uduwe Dhammaloka, assassinated such a dastardly act must have arguably been done by Rajapakse's men of whom Revd Uduwe was a crony.

Prime Minister Ranil Wickremasinghe, while attending a religious ceremony on the 16th of March reportedly made a veiled criticism targeting Revd Uduwe Dhammaloka.

Here's the report:

"Praising the conduct of Ven. Indrarathana Thera of Hiddelana Sri Maha Viharaya, PM Wickremesinghe said there had been no allegations that the Nayake Thera had sold elephants to other monks. Ven. Indrarathana hadn't been accused of using state power to take over temples in Colombo, PM Wickremesinghe said, adding that he was not a monk who had obtained money from gem dealers. "He has led an exemplary life as a true Buddhist," PM Wickremesinghe said, adding that Ven. Indrarathana, the President and others, including him, did not apply cream bought from the UK and France."

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