



Mangala Samaraweera: An Appreciation

25th, August, 2021, Mangala Samaraweera was a personal friend and a friend of CPA. He shared our vision and dream of a Sri Lanka in which all of its peoples would respect each other and strive together for the peace, prosperity and reconciliation, our country desires and deserves. Like us, he believed in the Rule of Law and the equality before the law for all citizens without fear or favour and like us, he spoke truth to power, standing defiantly against the mudslinging and hysteria of his detractors.

I knew Mangala before he entered politics, in his Art Centre Club days basking in the Bohemian ambience of the place and in the liberalism it nurtured. I remember conversations with him and Chanaka Amaratunga on the fundamental principles of liberalism and once he became an organizer in Matara, his amusement at his constituents commenting that he was humble enough to wear his father's trousers and not an example of the recent fashion, an area in which he excelled and revolutionized too. We weren't always on the same page politically, especially over the violent excesses of the infamous Wayamba provincial election, but we always remained friends.

His political achievements are many. Every Sri Lankan owes him a debt over the privatization of Sri Lanka Telecom, an enduring legacy of organizational skill and political acumen. In the field of human rights and reconciliation he was the champion first of the Mothers Front, empathizing and demanding justice for the victims of violence and then the Sudu Nelum Movement, which reached out to the grassroots about the ethnic conflict and the need for meaningful devolution. Likewise in 2015, his authorship of the four mechanisms for transitional justice- the Office for Missing Persons (OMP), the Office of Reparations, the Truth and Justice Commission and the mechanism for accountability. Only the first two have been set up but Mangala did not lose his searing sense of priority with respect to the other two as well. He spoke out, freely and candidly about the violations of human rights and democratic freedoms and when he retired from parliamentary politics, he devoted himself to spreading the message of rights and freedom, toleration and diversity to all. Right through to the end of his life, he believed in a Sri Lanka which was a functioning democracy based on the principle of Unity in Diversity.

As the Minister of Posts and Telecommunication, Foreign Affairs and Finance, respectively, he left behind a legacy, which no other politician can claim to have. As a politician he came to espouse and to defend liberal democracy, in word and deed in a way in which no other politician has. As a human being he was mischievous, generous and committed in every sense of the phrase to the *joi d'vivre* of life and living.

As my friend and as the friend of CPA, I am indebted in having known him and will always remember him in the words of Bernard Shaw, saying:

You see things and you say "Why?" But I dream things that never were; and I say "Why not?"

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