

Memories of late K.G Amaradasa -an Ardent Tamil Literary Lover & Advocate for National Unity

Written by Written By: L. Murugapoopathy, Australia (Translated By Nivethana Achchuthan)

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“Some might say that if a Sinhala man marries a Tamil woman or a Tamil man marries a Sinhala woman, then national unity will be born. I don’t think so. If people of different ethnic origin get married, only the children would be born as a natural consequence” quipped Ven. M Ratnavansa Thero- a Buddhist monk much loved and respected by Tamil writers and community members alike.

Late K.G. Amaradasa is someone of similar calibre who also held the strong belief that national unity is not a one -way street. He is a remarkable man who learned and excelled in the Tamil literature and who pioneered the way in introducing the great Tamil national poet Mahakavi Barathiyar to the Sinhala people.

Due to the introduction of the controversial Sinhala Only legislation in 1950s and the promotion of Sinhala as a compulsory subject in the curriculum, a large number of Tamils who held government positions learned Sinhala and mastered that language. Many Tamil writers also proceeded to learn Sinhala literary forms and translated them in Tamil. Sinhala cinema and drama productions were also subject of Tamil literary critique. In contrast, there was little or no reciprocal engagement by Sinhala literary figures and community members with the Tamil language and its rich literature. K.G Amaradasa was one of the handful of Sinhala writers who deeply regretted this situation and recognized that it ought to change even as early as 1970s.

He was a man of resolution who acted on his preaching. He learned Tamil and was able to speak our language fluently. His Tamil pronunciation had the beauty a child ‘s utterances and he also had the dedication to constantly ask his Tamil friends for feedback so that he can improve his Tamil language command. The warmth and generosity of his character was something deeply endearing.

He made his entry into the literary world in 1957. Only gradually he grasped the bitter reality of

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the ethnic question unfolding at the time. He envisioned that preserving the millennium long Sinhala -Tamil relationships from the devastating political catastrophe is an utmost duty of each and every writer of that divisive era.

He embarked on translating many Tamil literary works and introduced them to the Sinhala readers through newspapers. As he commenced working at the Department of Cultural Affairs he became a friend of many Tamil literary figures and writers. It is said that "Friends are not born -they are created". The strong friendship that flourished between K.G Amaradasa and many Tamil writers was a living proof of this.

The sudden death of **Professor Kailasapathi** devastated Amaradasa. He wrote a moving tribute for his friend in Tamil which he titled as "Ayubovan My Brother!":

*"Along the ranges of Himalayas -there lies the impenetrable peak of Kailash!
So have I read in many books.
Its beauty and majesty compete with each other, and there resides the omnipotent Lord Shiva!
So have I heard as well.
To date, I have not witnessed that splendid sight.
Beyond the point of Kumari, in our holy land
There also lived a Kailash -atop the Tamil literary Himalayas
For 49 blessed years!
It cast its light, burning bright and rid the literary world
Of the misery of darkness in every fold and made life anew!
Alas! That Kailash was felled by a lightening blow and I am grief -stricken!
I wonder whether Lord Shiva resented a mortal competitor to the repute of his majestic abode!
My dearest friend, why did you abandon us without any warning?
Wander where you wish, but do not tread on Himalayas -your place is here and here only!
May your soul live on and serve this blessed land of Sri Lanka.
Be born and re-born for thousands of years- here and here only!
So that art and literature can live on and chant your name endlessly!
Until we meet next time-Ayubovan my brother!"*

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