

thrive in music today", he says.

Sunil Shantha's effort was to move Sinhala music away from the Hindustani classical music which Big Brother-like was breathing down our necks. When Radio Ceylon, as the state radio service was then known decided to bring down a pundit from India to test and classify our singers, Sunil Shantha protested. The result was that the doors of Radio Ceylon were shut in his face. That was in 1952.

Sunil Shantha returned in triumph to the Ceylon Broadcasting Corporation in 1967 as the state radio service was then known under one of its periodic metamorphoses of name. In 1967 the CBC invited him to be one of a panel of judges which classified our singers. It was a vindication of his stand, for Sunil Shantha had always maintained that there were local musicians who were capable of doing it.

Today Sunil Shantha does not live by his music. He repairs radio sets to earn a living. During the long years of banishment from Radio Ceylon he also worked as a carpenter.

But Sunil Shantha is not disheartened. Though life has been hard for him he hopes that the coming generations at least will have a better time of it. "I hope one day that we will have a truly national music and our musicians will be as well-known abroad as Harry Belafonte, Pat Boone, Paul Robeson or the African Miriam Makeba," Sunil Shantha says.

But until that arrives for musicians in Sri Lanka somebody must look after them. And that somebody is the Department of Cultural Affairs.

Exhibition

The artist Tilaka Abeysinghe will be exhibiting about 50 of his recent paintings from Thursday at the Hotel Lanka Oberoi.

The slightly-built painter with a goatee beard was a pupil of Post Dominics Cantatori of Milan Italy and the great Mario Marini when he won an Italian Government scholarship to study painting.

The exhibition will be open to the public from Friday

The matchmaker

Who was it who waved the magic wand?

The English theatre has certainly reviewed. In the wake of "The Owl and the Pussycat" will come "The Matchmaker" which will be produced by Rohan Ponniah and will begin its run on Friday at the Lionel Wendt Theatre.

Did I hear somebody muttering something rude about "neo-colonial culture?"

Mettananda—fighter for Buddhist rights

Nemsiri Mutukumara

Lokusatu Hewage Mettananda shot into religio political prominence with the appointment of the Commission of Inquiry into the state of Buddhism by the All-Ceylon Buddhist Congress in 1954.

He was then heading the country's leading Buddhist educational institute — Ananda College which celebrated its 91st anniversary yesterday.

Twenty years earlier — on December 24, 1934 to be exact — he served the Buddhist Congress as its president for one year. After a prolonged silence he rejoined the congress to help make far-reaching recommendations that created a revolution in our society.

His critics call him a crusader. Uncharitably. Ten years after his demise, one would find Mettananda's biting invective was not without substance.

He was not opposed to any religion. Religion to him, was as essential to man as food to the mouth. What Mettananda decried and denigrated was irreligious and anti-religious behaviour in the name of religion.

With equal displeasure he looked down upon capitalism, communism and imperialism as vulgar, ignoble and base extremes that should be avoided. He scorned and frowned on attempts to commercialise religion.

He harboured no grudge against the Portuguese, the Dutch and the British or their descendants for preserving their identity, manners and habits and languages and their nomenclature by themselves. To him they were another race like the Sinhala and Tamil. They had a right to live in the Sinhalaadvipa, the land of their adoption, he believed, despite the fact they had come to "conquer and civilise the heathens" after their conquest and subsequent defeat, the descendants of the conquerors chose to live with the 'natives' from whom they learnt the art of using water in their daily ablutions.



Mettananda left no word in his vocabulary unused to inflict a crushing blow on the Sinhala people for aping imperialists. He branded as 'Thuppahis' those who robbed or borrowed or leased out Portuguese and Dutch names and paraded them proudly. He was unmercifully harsh on the Sinhala Buddhist Donas and Donas, Perera's and Silvans and Fernandos and the like. He looked at them contemptuously. He denounced them as decadent remnants of colonialism, mercilessly, publicly and forthrightly.

His mission was to salvage the identity of the Sinhala and the Buddhists from the debris of colonial imperialism. This he performed with a clear vision. He foresaw before anybody else could the gloomy future ahead of the Sinhala people due to the divide and rule policy of the imperial powers: the denial of educational opportunities; the plundering of their traditional homelands for commercial purposes and the discriminations shown against them in trade and commerce.

He found the panacea for all ills. It was in the field of education. He spelled out in no uncertain terms in his maiden speech as Congress President at the Galle sessions that the future of the people lay in the restoration of Buddhist education. His call to the Buddhists to rally round the Buddhist Theosophical Society, the pioneering organisation of Buddhist education was well responded.

For the first time in the history of Buddhism the Sinhala Bhikkhus committed to writing the sacred Tripitaka in Sinhala language on Sinhala ola leaf in the Sinhala village of Aluvihare. But in the very land

Sinhala Tripitaka was written. A Sinhala Tripitaka was conspicuous by its absence. That agitated Mettananda's mind. Under his presidency in the Congress, he laid the foundations for a Tripitaka Trust for the publication and the distribution of the Sinhala Tripitaka.

Along with him were elected two able lieutenants the former Prime Minister Dudley Senanayake as a joint secretary and the present Prime Minister, J. R. Jayewardene as an assistant secretary. Both of them were in their twenties. That was the time when the Buddhist Congress enrolled young blood every year. Such intelligent, honest and capable young men carried their mission with great aplomb and allowed others to succeed them without anchoring themselves to positions of power.

Mettananda's vision of a Tripitaka Trust bore fruit with Jayawardene playing a major role with Malalasekera in translating and publishing the Tripitaka in Sinhala though none of them had a hand in its distribution. Had Mettananda and Malalasekera been alive, they would have been shocked to learn that the Sinhala Tripitaka they brought out with much labour had been destroyed by white ants.

Mettananda was desperate. He was in a hurry. Time was running out. Before long something must be done to save Buddhism from the 'thuppahis'. The Buddhist Commission Report was his 'Magna Carta'. The Kotelawala Government failed to take note of the Buddhist Commission recommendations. When S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike pledged himself to act upon its recommendations in case he was returned to power, Mettananda threw in his lot with Bandaranaike. Incidentally, the historic meeting was held at the Ananda College on February 4, 1956.

After the Bandaranaike-Philip Gunawardhana coalition was swept into power in 1956, Mettananda reminded the MEP Government of its promises. Buddhist leaders associated with the Buddhist Commission were given various kinds of rewards — ambassadorial office, senatorships and such big time jobs. Mettananda could not be bought over. He struck to his guns and his cause. Bandaranaike called him a fanatic. His colleagues departed from the national struggle leaving Mettananda in the cold.

He took up the challenge. This time with more guts and gusto. When the Congress

abandoned and deserted its child, Mettananda adopted it. He formed the Baudhdha Jatika Balavegaya. Like the young hero, Dutugemunu collecting his dasa mahā yodhaya, Mettananda looked around for young men because the older generation had betrayed the cause. Young men in the top berths of Government and private sector rallied under the banner of the BJB.

In order to accomplish his task on behalf of the Buddhists he would even join with the devil and thwart the calculated campaign carried out by the Thuppahis and anti-Buddhist elements to annihilate the people's culture. He joined hands with Philip Gunawardhana. But his flirtation with Philip was short-lived.

Never undaunted, Mettananda came to the fray again. He supported Sirimavo Bandaranaike. Although he was in a mighty hurry, some people in the Sirimavo Government were sluggish towards Buddhist needs.

Mettananda became disillusioned. All those whom he supported in order to win back the privileges enjoyed by the Sinhala people during the time of the Sinhala Kings had failed him miserably. Those who rode to power with his help thought Mettananda was ambitious. Mettananda's was a different kind of an ambition. It was never self-centered. He shunned power and fame. His main ambition was to restore to his people their rightful place. In his dealings, private and public, he displayed a hallmark of sincerity. He was honest to himself and to the cause.

After his departure, the BJB died an unnatural death. Mettananda's BJB men received rewards from every succeeding government. His men forgot Mettananda. And his ideals.

As a young parliamentarian of the Jayawardene government pointed out that Dutugemunu the heroic king of the Sinhalaadvipa lived in every Sinhala youth, so does Mettananda live in every Buddhist who is not tainted with thuppahi culture.

In a historic coincidence three men whose lives are woven round the premier Buddhist school in the island which celebrates its 91st anniversary in the month of November, in which also falls Mettananda's day of death (November 1) and Malalasekera's day of birth (November 9). Ananda College stands as a magnificent monument to the 'fantastic fanaticism' of Kularatne, Malalasekera and Mettananda.

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