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Saman Kelegama: A silent, humble human being

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I burst into laughter when I saw Saman live on TV when the 1996 World Cup winning team played against the present cricket team to celebrate some event. President Sirisena was the chief guest and Saman was there as Chairman of Singer, the sponsor. He hardly spoke to the President; he only exchanged some pleasantries.

A foreign ministry colleague told me, "One could never find any fault with Saman. It is not possible for me to see him dead. I am not going to his house." I returned from Kurunegala early last Sunday, wanting to visit his house to pay my last respects to him and I, too, decided to attend his funeral at Kanatte instead. It is true we all go the way of all flesh someday, but it is not possible to come to terms with Saman's untimely demise, which has

shocked all those who knew him.

I met Saman last at a banquet hosted by the Nepali Ambassador to Sri Lanka, Prof Bishwambher Pyakuryal, in honour of the visiting Nepali President. We sat together, had dinner while chatting. He was shocked to find out that I had survived a mini stroke. He wanted to know more of what had happened. I did explain to him in detail about how I faced the situation and he listened very attentively. Of course we spoke of ETCA as well and he agreed to come on my programme, Pathikade, on Sirasa TV. I wanted him to tell our viewers his side of the story. Saman also wanted to help the Gammadda project carried out by News 1st, through Singer, which he faithfully served as Chairman. We both agreed to meet later. The Ambassador to Nepal was very happy to see Saman.

We often discussed with Saman about current affairs, politics and even people and shared a good laugh. He really enjoyed a good silent laugh though most people saw him as very thoughtful and serious. We had lunch together on several occasions and Saman was one among the fifty special friends and guests I invited to my 50th birthday. He was once very angered by contributions made by a foreign national to a Sri Lankan newspaper. He told me how misguided the foreigner was and he shouldn't be allowed to give a wrong impression on the Sri Lankan economy. He did give me the counterpoints, the real facts.

I wouldn't know how many of you knew Saman as a patriotic Sri Lankan. Patriotism is not about shouting or bragging about oneself or being seen on television bellowing rhetoric. It is about working for and standing up for your country. Saman was one such great patriot. He worked for the betterment of Sri Lanka in the field he knew with dedication. I have no doubt he inherited that quality from his father, the late Dr. JB Kelegama.

I burst into laughter when I saw Saman live on TV when the 1996 World Cup winning team played against the present cricket team to celebrate some event. President Maithripala Sirisena was the chief guest and Saman was there as Chairman of Singer, its sponsors. He hardly spoke to the President; he only exchanged pleasantries. Others would have sat next to the Head of State and talked. That was Saman Kelegama. I called him the following day and told him that I had had a good laugh watching him and the President. He asked me "Monawa Katha Karannada?". It is not out of disrespect to anyone but, that was Saman Kelegama the humble unaffected human being, who believed in the economy of the language.

Sri Lanka today is poorer having lost one of her beloved sons. Many of us will greatly miss that humble and charming human being.

May he attain the supreme bliss of Nibbana!

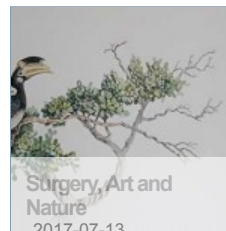
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