
Dr. Premasiri Khemadasa - a committed Sri Lankan who reached across cultural and generational barriers

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by: C. S. Poolokasingham SCOPP Deputy Secretary General remembers The late Dr. Premasiri Khemadasa, fondly known as 'Master', passed away at the age of 71 on October 24th at a private hospital in Colombo. He had been ailing for some time.

Recognising his contribution to the art world in Sri Lanka, the Government organised a funeral with state honours at Independence Square. Dr. Khemadasa's remains were brought in a procession from his home in Rajagiriya, taking almost two hours to cover the short distance with many thousands of his followers accompanying the cortege.

I was asked to give the funeral oration in Tamil, having known and closely associated with Dr. Khemadasa and his family over the last 15 years.

Dr. Khemadasa was responsible for launching a new era in Sri Lankan music, in much the same way as the likes of Mozart and Beethoven did in the European art world some centuries ago. He was most appreciated for his talent in composing Sinhala music, but his work in Tamil made a tremendous impact as well. Dr. Khemadasa wrote the score for three Tamil films that had record screenings in both India and Sri Lanka - Vasanthathil Oru Vanavill, Neelakadal Orathile and Melamkodu Thalikkadu. Sri Lankans of all ethnicities will never forget his music composition for the hit peace song 'Venpura' (White Pigeon). When I was the Sri Lankan Ambassador in Austria, 'Master' was the chief guest at our function to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Sri Lanka's independence. He composed Lord Buddha's song 'Parinirwana Mangalya' for a renowned Vienna choir, and the European audience gave it an excellent reception. Dr. Premasiri Khemadasa is only by producing more 'Khemadasas' that our younger generation can express the gratitude that we all feel at these magnificent achievements. The 'Khemadasa Padanama' or 'Khemadasa Foundation' is designed to do just that. Everybody who gathered and spoke at the funeral highlighted the contribution made by 'Master' to Sri Lankan music. But I wanted to refer to another part of his life, for many people do not know how he yearned for peace in our country. He was very sad and worried during the JVP insurrections that saw many thousands of Sinhala youth die, and his feelings were equally deep when Tamil youth took to killing each other and the young men and women of the Armed Forces. He always said that our younger generation were destroyed. 'Master' was a true ambassador for peace. As Maduluwa Sobitha Thero, chief incumbent of the Kotte Rajamaha Viharaya, said at the seven day 'bana' at Dr. Khemadasa's home on October 30th, when we say 'Master' it is only for him, just as 'Mathini' is always for Prime Minister. I have lost a good friend, and the country has lost a top music composer and a person who could reach out across boundaries of ethnicity, language and age. Dr. Khemadasa died on the third Friday of October, which is an important Hindu religious day, and his remains were cremated on another important Hindu festival that is celebrated all over the world - Deepavali - implying that the doors of heaven are truly open for him.

by: C. S. Poolokasingham Deputy Secretary General Secretariat for Coordinating the Peace Process (Courtesy : SCOPP) Mr. C. S. Poolokasingham Deputy Secretary General Secretariat for Coordinating the Peace Process Mr. C.S. Poolokasingham has been appointed as Deputy Secretary General, Secretariat for Coordinating the Peace Process (SCOPP) with effect, June 1, 2007. Mr. Poolokasingham, a senior career diplomat, received his Bachelor of Arts from Peradeniya University in 1972 and his First in Laws from Colombo, in 1975. He has held a number of important posts in the Foreign Ministry and overseas. He began as Assistant Director, Overseas Administration Division and Ministry Administration Division and thereafter was appointed Deputy Director, Overseas Administration Division. Mr. Poolokasingham after serving as Chief of Protocol for a number of years, was made Director West - Political Affairs Division and later Director General, Overseas Administration Division and Economic Affairs Division. He has also served in diplomatic postings abroad, Kenya, Kuwait, New York, Rome, Maldives (High Commissioner), Austria (Ambassador), Washington (Deputy Chief of Mission). His last posting prior to joining SCOPP was as Consul General (with Ambassadorial Rank), Consulate General of Sri Lanka, Toronto, Canada.