



Appreciation: Professor Sudharshan Seneviratne

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It was the fall of 2011. The island nation of Sri Lanka was at a crossroads in the recent aftermath of the horrendous internal conflict that had resulted in the loss of tens of thousands of human lives. One quiet morning, I recall reading an excerpt from a speech at a meeting held at my alma mater, Ananda College in Colombo, which appeared to have every reason to acknowledge the historic moment, as it had produced numerous persons who had risen to defend the country over the preceding three decades. One could sense the joy and relief in the minds of some audience members. The speaker, Sudharshan Seneviratne, who held the academic title of a distinguished professor, did not appear to appeal to the victor's mindset. He seemed to rise above the moment to lay out a vision with inclusivity at its core. He built his thesis on the firm foundation of genuine intercultural respect and trust, passionately providing illustrations from the living history and life experience to lay a road map for the country, and to instill a sense of duty and responsibility in its citizens.

I was awestruck by the visionary appeal of the speech. Here was a gentleman who dared to raise the threshold of cohesiveness, based on facts, life experience, and a broad appeal to humanism. His words carried the charisma and weight of vast learning and professionalism. After reading his speech, I knew I wanted to get to know this person.



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Little did I know that life would transpire in such a way that I would get to know him personally over the next few months.

My acquaintance with Professor Sudharshan Seneviratne began when he returned to the United States for a sabbatical academic year at Macalester College in Minnesota. I discovered that we shared a mutual friend. One Saturday, he phoned me to introduce himself, and our friendship began to flourish.

As I learned over the next few months, he was an exemplary student at Ananda College. He was the Head Prefect and the rugby team captain, and His subsequent academic work and research in India and Peradeniya earned him the role of an authority in Sri Lankan archaeology and heritage.

I saw academic tenacity in Professor Seneviratne. He was respected for his expressions both in speech and writing. He cherished mentoring the next generation of archaeologists and was proud of his students. His command of language went beyond the horizons of Sinhala and English. I recall a friend expressing surprise over Professor Seneviratne's fluency in the old Tamil language.

Professor Seneviratne was a strong proponent of racial harmony, a lifelong belief reinforced by his academic findings. He was humbly thankful for the opportunities to contribute to the nation's heritage through his leadership roles in the restoration of Jetavanaramaya and Galle Fort.

Looking back, I was privileged to know him. We were close enough that I could call him by his first name, even though I was younger than him by several years. Despite his numerous accolades, he was humble at heart. His respect for the elderly was touching, and his care for children was heartwarming. Sudharshan left us early, leaving me to yearn for the many discussion topics we were not able to talk about. I learned many life lessons from him, and for that, I will be forever grateful.

May his samsaric journey be blessed!