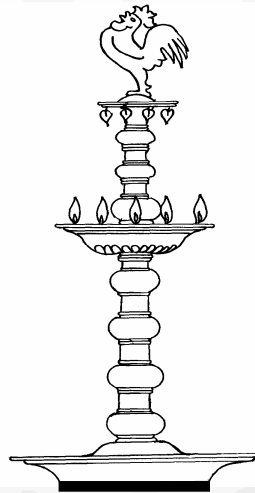


THE CEYLANKAN



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EDITORIAL



Talk about reminiscences & recollections, this issue has a fair share. "Lakshmigiri" the house on Thurston Road, featured in Journal 25 brought forth a fascinating piece "The Henley House Boys" compiled by a group of friends who had more than a nodding acquaintance with characters involved. It is indeed in the spirit of 'Ceylankan' to carry the thread forward and in this event transport the reader from just historical data to a living organism. Arguably most are dead and gone but their memories as recounted casts "Lakshmigiri" in a different light. Bricks and mortar come alive. And then Vama draws our attention to a 'little lassie' in Mrs St Clair's music group A mini chain reaction. A new comer to our columns, Geraldine de Saram Jansz's recollection of that venerable institution, Bishop's College is written with the passion of a teenage school girl but varnished with mature sensitivity. Has she been influenced by "Anne of Green Gables"? I wonder! Excellent reading, so she gains the lead article status. We hope other members will follow in the wake and enrich these columns, sharing their pet subjects either in prose or verse. We have not had much of the latter in recent months, so my friends get to it.

This being the month of Vesak, let us say, May All Beings be Happy.

19th Century Images



The Fiscal's Peon

from a sketch by John K L Vandort

BISHOP'S COLLEGE

A RECOLLECTION

by Geraldine de Saram Jansz

Non Sibi Sed Omnibus
Not for Self but for All

This is a personal account in which I recall a vibrant era in the annals of Bishop's College just prior to the turbulence that followed. Narratives, however, tend to take on a life of their own so it was with some dismay that I discovered at its conclusion that much had to be set aside, principally in an acknowledgment of my teachers, seniors and colleagues who through their extraordinary characters created a special ambiance in which to grow.

The history of Bishop's College - alma mater to all the women of my family - predates me by two generations while its future has already burgeoned forward another two. The period of my focus is between 1930 & 1943 when Sister Mary Kathleen, educator, leader, visionary, and a woman of outstanding character, was Principal. We were her girls and by golly! She was going to make something of us.

I desire more than ever to set both school and period against the lovely background 'Rambler' has evoked in his recent series, for Bishop's stands on the periphery of those same roads and avenues bordered by large cassia, jacaranda and flamboyant trees that when in bloom produced a vibrant canopy and carpet of gold, mauve and red over which we walked, were 'rickshawed' or driven back and forth

from school. At its General's Lake Road beginning just below Flower Road and thence east to Thurston Road, Flower Road connects Bishops's with Royal College where my brothers, Willie, Chris and John were students.

During these years the school premises encompassed the main buildings on Boyd Place and *Edgecote* the little house next door that accommodated the kindergarten (where my brother Willie was a pupil) and a domestic science kitchen. But when the

premises expanded in 1937, they included *Arncliffe*, the large house at the corner of Boyd Place and General's Lake Road - later renamed Peiris House, a tribute to Mrs. Maud Peiris a generous benefactor. A covered way connected the two buildings.



Portico entrance to Bishop's College

When I began kindergarten in 1930, classes were held in the assembly hall under the direction of Mrs Bob Van Cuylenburg who gathered her little charges each morning to the strains of Clayton's Grand March that she played on the piano. So impressed is this tune on my mind that despite the years I topple back into that class of long ago whenever I hear it played. Of the next event I have no memory but according to my grandfather, Dr. Gerald de Saram - for many years the school doctor and a great favourite with the Sisters - when he took me to school that first day I ran away and could only be persuaded to return if he set his very rotund form on a tiny kindergarten chair - very uncomfortable!! My companions in those days



Dr Gerald de Saram

were Eileen van Cuylenburg now Mrs Desmond de Moor and her brother Maurice.

Then there was the day that my usually quiet grandmother, Fanny Dassenaïke, Gerald's wife, announced that she had been a pupil of Bishop's College as one of its first thirteen students when it was known as Bishopsgate School located in Mutuwal; Colombo's residential district in 1847. Relocation of the school to Boyd Place in 1892 on the fringe of the Beira Lake was circuitous. From Mutual via



Sister Mary
Kathleen

Darley Road to its present site was made possible by Bishop R.S. Copleston's purchase of the Marandat in Cinnamon Gardens in 1890.

It was during this same time that the school altered its name from Bishopsgate School to Bishop's College - passing in 1895 into the

care of the Sisters of St. Margaret's East Grinstead whose convent just around the corner from Bishop's included an orphanage and St. Mary's School. All three institutions fell under the protective umbrella of St. Michael and All Angels' Church, Polwatte, whose large beautiful stone edifice has witnessed many gatherings joyous and sad of both my school and family.

As memory revisits St. Margaret's Convent I trail behind my grandfather and remember the delight with which the Sisters greet him; the circular driveway, the sun's glare on the stark white convent walls, the wide steps fringed by green potted palms that lead to a highly polished red floor, the large bell on its long cord with which visitors announced themselves - and the clean, clean smell of beeswax.

Bishop's, meanwhile, despite its convent format that operated under a mandate that the Sisters uphold the Church as a missionary institution, was never a cloistered establishment. Since its inception the Sisters' broader, more pluralistic attitude toward religion welcomed all races, classes, castes and religious persuasion bestowing early on their students a generous acceptance of all peoples. So it was with some surprise that I read in the school's 125th Anniversary Book that '*Nalini Wijewardena, a Buddhist was nominated head girl and awarded the Gold Medal for the Best All Round Student in 1938*' for as far as I remember her nomination caused not a ripple in the school, so benevolently had the principle of racial and religious assimilation been integrated. But much time and turbulence has passed under that bridge and so the nature of that contemporary report. Nalini, mother of, Ranil Wickremasinghe till recently, Prime Minister of Sri Lanka - lovely and ever gracious was my Chapman House Captain but had no qualms dismissing a member who disgraced her House with too many Disorder Marks - a predicament I, unfortunately, found myself in too frequently. Ignominiously dispatched, my friend and I comforted ourselves in the knowledge, the House could not win its matches without us and we would soon be redeemed. We were.

These memories I recall with immense gratitude for in cultivating our young natures beyond cruel and ignorant prejudice, the Sisters paved the way for the giant human interactions that are now required of us on a world stage - one they never could have envisioned.

As a Principal, Sister Mary Kathleen, proved a fair but strict disciplinarian, and to the delight of her students enjoyed a lot of fun and often was enthusiastically involved with the families of her girls. As to the first I remember the day I decided

against ever going to confession again and had to report my decision to Sister. As a High Church Anglican School all communicants had to go to confession on a Saturday evening prior to Sunday communion. My friend advised strongly against this saying I would get into awful trouble. But I did so; despite a pounding heart and all the Sister said was 'alright'. No questions were asked nor was there that feared explosion that could well have penetrated the walls of my home.

Recalling the Sisters this way the word I find most appropriate is "humanness" not humanity for theirs was a flesh and blood interaction that extended beyond professional vows. For example, when our parents decided to live in England for a few years and my grandparents found it difficult to take in all their five children, the Sisters took me into the girls boarding at Bishop's and my brothers Willie and Chris into a separate wing from where they attended Training College. Then - on the joyous occasion of my aunt Dorothy de Saram's wedding, she went to St. Michael's Church from Bishop's, her home during the years she lived with her mother Evelyn who was school matron at the time. In later years Evelyn joined the Sisterhood as Sister Theodora.

The highlight of the school year, of course, was Sister's birthday in November when she entertained all of us to a splendid feast of string hoppers and curries in the school hall. Ballroom dancing followed (girl with girl) to the accomplished playing of Gwen Mant who swung all the current tunes on the piano.

But then there were days when things went terribly awry. We awakened one morning during a Royal-Thomian match after the young bucks had disturbed us during the night driving up and down

Boyd Place cheering, singing and shouting the names of their favourite girls to find Sister in a frenzy urging 'thotakaran' (gardener) to hurry and white wash the graffiti the rascals had written on the wall; how they got in is a mystery as the large school gates were always locked at night.

And now to the teachers who, in complete accord with the school's esprit de corps dedicated themselves to moulding the minds and characters of their charges into all round individuals. Miss May Christofelsz who taught us geography still continues to walk beside me as I visit the faraway places she told us of in geography class but had never visited herself. The locks of the Welland Canal are a stone's throw from our home and having lived in the bitter cold of snow swept Quebec I understand only too well the need for the peaked roofs of medieval Quebec City. Niagara Falls is two pleasant hours away while faraway on Canada's east coast lies the Annapolis Valley and its orchards. Unfortunately a visit to British Columbia, did not include the Okanogan Valley, its orchards of luscious fruit. One of my oldest friends, Indrani Meedeniya (now Kirella), visiting Canada in the midst of a snowy winter also remembered those geography classes.

Seniors were treated to a Sunday walk after evensong at St. Michael's Church. Under the cassia trees along Turret Road their musky smell intensified by the damp heat - past Turret House, home of Col T.G. Jayawardene whose four daughters were all B.C. Gold Medalists, around the C.E.A. Dias home onto Alwis Place and finally around another corner onto Boyd Place and home. On these Sundays, dressed in our best long-sleeved silk uniforms, the school badge on our chests and white veils covering our hair we walked in crocodile fashion. Sometimes, unknown to

us Miss Christoffelsz would pass us on an evening drive which meant that next day we would know whether she was proud of us walking smartly in line or if we had slouched along like 'dhoby bundles' (laundry bundles), an absolute disgrace to the school.

Apropos the above, many years later as a member of a Canadian Church Women's Group whose topic for the day was 'mothers' we were asked to say something of our mothers. When it came to my turn my spontaneous response was that I had several mothers. Should we consider the concept of 'mother' as one in whose embrace we learn to develop into a mature womanhood? Her one hand pointing to an ideal in this instance 'not for self but for all' the other of correcting admonishment - mine was a natural and accurate response. Some of these 'mothers' I've mentioned here but others remain in mind and heart and I bless them.

And now to a teacher, who must remain nameless and for whom I have a curious, inexplicable regard. I feared her and because of this I disliked her; cold, sarcastic and easily riled it was she, nevertheless, who gave me a great love for the English language and though I frequently break one of her rules – as a concession to American English – never use 'and' to start a sentence I never break her rule of 'never use nice or nicely in a sentence'. How delighted she would be to know that the Stratford Festival is so nearby.

Then there were the Jayasinghe sisters, Doreen Keuneman and Phyllis Pieris who would enter the class with stern faces that let us know in no uncertain terms - don't start any tricks. By this time we had grown into a rowdy bunch overflowing with exuberant animal spirits that had moved us from the main building to the outer limits of Peiris House over the staff room in the fervent hope that we could be curbed. The

dilemma facing the school was that, this class stood out as the brainiest in the school. Its talented pianists and top netball and tennis players brought glory many times over to the school. (It made me so happy to read news in a previous Ceylankan of Mrs Keuneman in retirement).

In October 1937 there was a burst of a musical magic with the production of the Operetta Princess Ju Ju. My aunt Bobby, (mother's sister) - Mrs Jayetilleke to everyone else - was our singing teacher. Dramatic and colourful, it proved a shot in the arm for the school. Its principal players were Irene Edirisinghe (now Wanitunge) as Princess Ju Ju; Zoe Jayetilleke (Nightingale) the handsome prince; Nalini Wijewardene (Wickremasinghe) an ethereal Moon Goddess and Sheila de Soysa (de Mel?) as the magician who in a black kimono touched with red transformed her beautiful deep voice into an eerie, shivery wizardry...

The next piece of excitement surrounded the construction of the new kindergarten block in 1938 beyond the existing tennis court. Creamy white, modern for the times it was under the direction of Miss Vera Buultjens to whose care I took our youngest, chubby brother, Allan, each morning. Miss Buultjens whom I later met again in Canada was a lovely, gentle lady and her kindergarten children were fortunate to have her as their teacher.

Perhaps, it was, during these years also that the marshy land between the Beira Lake and the school boundary was reclaimed permitting the establishment of a sports field to hold our annual sports meet. Pat Samarasekera (now Corea) with her light body and enormous stride won every race in which she participated whilst a shorter Audrey Henricus would be off the mark like a bullet as did the equally adept Hussein sisters Alavi and Mumtaz who unwittingly proved to be my downfall.

Our father (Ged de Saram) whose 25-year quarter mile record had yet to be broken by Duncan White was a determined competitor and dedicated father who spent hours coaching his children in athletics. The fact that these sisters had bested me despite a Ramadan fast was too much for him so he turned from me in disgust to his sons who to their great credit brought him much paternal pride and satisfaction. Now to introduce two groups of girls who were with us for only a short time, until their early teens, when they were whisked away, never to be seen by us again. They were the Moslems who vanished behind their large white homes and curtained cars --and the English who were sent off to England for their education. Elizabeth Dowse was an exception. Her father, Dr. Dowse, head of the Fraser Nursing Home, at the approach of the Japanese decided with his wife to send Elizabeth to Kenya for its duration. We corresponded all through this time and continued our friendship as young wives and mothers until we left for Canada and she with her family to England. From her last letters I remember two interesting observations. One was how retired tea planters long away from England found their reintegration into English society difficult and consequently tended to live around Lewes, Kent where they were able to continue their planting associations. The other was how her father who retired to his home in Ireland could not settle there either and returned to Ceylon where he had lived so much of his life. I am unsure whether he died and is buried in Sri Lanka as was Rev. Senior of Trinity College. And last but not least we had one other smaller but more exotic group in the brothers Enver & Shums Didi, Maldivian Princes.

On prep nights when the moon was full the playing fields at the back of the school transformed into a magical landscape. The netball court on one side was shadowed by

two huge enormous kolipalanga (Madras Thorn) trees through whose leaves the moonlight filtered delicately. On the other, the tennis court would join the netball court to glisten white even as the lake farther back did the same. It was an enchantment that was enhanced by pianos at practice that filled the whole prep area with music and we were indeed lucky should Ada Canekaratne or Lesley Wickremaratne, advanced students, be at practice - and even better so if they played in duet.

For music-practice we had a roster, and besides pianos in their appropriate rooms there were pianos scattered all over the school and the occasion that I now recall was one that coincided with Sister Mary Kathleen's long illness. One evening I came across an unassigned piano in the domestic science room which was adjacent to the school hall, far from the protesting ears of the prep mistress. The courtyard overlooked Sister Mary Kathleen's room. After some superficial practice I started on my own repertoire - this time swinging Silent Night into many variations. **NEXT MORNING:** there was a loud demand 'who practised on the domestic science piano at such and such a time?' In a fit of jitters I admitted it was I. **THEN:** Sister wants to thank you for playing so beautifully. It was a relief so great that I felt I would go through the floor but thinking upon it later I was indeed happy to give Sister this pleasure for we were to learn too soon that she was suffering from cancer. She died shortly after on May 4, 1941 and is buried in Kanatte Cemetery.

I accompanied my mother to Sister's funeral at St. Michael's Church. Her open coffin rested at the foot of the chancel steps surrounded by wreaths. And though it seems strange I can still feel the impression of the wreath that got entangled in my foot as we approached the coffin. My

mother and I looked down at dear Sister lying so quiet inside; a veil covered her face just like that of a bride. Nancy Russell MBE - science, French and elocution teacher had this to say in the Anniversary Book 'to many of us Sister Mary Kathleen was and is Bishop's College'. Things changed rapidly after this. Sister Mabel had taken over as Principal in March of that year and in December as concern over the Japanese invasion grew more intense it was decided that part of the school be evacuated to Fernhill, Bahirawakande, Kandy. Meanwhile the Navy had commandeered the school buildings. The very best of that happy time at Fernhill was a mime production of the Merchant of Venice that our literature teacher, Joan Muller, produced as entertainment for our Ladies College hosts, evacuees themselves they now occupied Uplands, Kandy. While I cannot recall all members of the cast I do remember Joan Gratiaen as a fantastic Shylock. My role was Portia and I still get nervous at how close I came to spoiling it all by bursting into laughter should I even look at Joan. This is an event that seems to have registered on many in that audience of BC friends and only last December, on Gwen Tissera, of Ladies. It seems right that Miss Muller should know what an impression this production made on so many present.

Time, however, was swiftly passing as we completed our school years - when I received an unexpected missive from my father who made it clear 'that if I did not settle and pass the school leaving exam I was to make no mistake I was going to take it until I was fifty'. Very bad news indeed - but to his astonishment I passed.

1943 and our last school prize giving as students was held in the hall of the Girls' Friendly Society on Green Path. I was most humbled that the school I loved so well had chosen to acknowledge me. My one regret, and this despite the years, is

that it was not held in the hall of Bishop's College where the names of all the panel-prize winners that had gone before had looked down upon us over the years; some of these were close relatives; my father's cousin Leah Dassenaik; my own cousin Zoe Jayetilleke (Nightingale) who vied with her long-time classmate Yvonne de Witt (Herft) for class prize each year - and many, many others.

A final recollection is of our graduating class circled around Sister Mabel as she read from Frances Thompson's great poem the Hound of Heaven.

I fled Him, down the nights and down the
days

I fled Him, down the arches of the years,
I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways
Of my own mind, and in the mist of tears

I hid from Him, and under running
laughter, up vistaed hopes I sped,
And shot, precipitated,
Adown Titanic glooms of chasmed fears,

From those strong Feet that followed,
Followed after
But with unhurrying chase,
And unperturbed pace,
Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,
They beat - and a Voice beat
More instant than the Feet
"All things betray thee, who betrayest Me."



Leonard Woolf

by Vama Vamadevan

Leonard Woolf was born on 25th November 1880, the third son of nine children. His father, Mr. Sidney Woolf, QC lived in a middle class English family home in London. Leonard was from a Jewish family and has been described variously as a lean man, with a long hooked nose and ascetic lips. He wasn't particularly handsome; he had a face which would be a cartoonist's delight. He is also said to have been a quiet man who used to sit silent until others gave their views and opinions. He initially studied at St. Paul's School and later entered Trinity College, Cambridge from where he graduated in Classics in 1904. The same year he sat for the Eastern Civil Service Exam and was appointed a cadet in the Ceylon Civil Service (CCS).

This is the centenary year of the arrival of Leonard Woolf in Colombo on December 16, 1904. This occasion is being celebrated even in London by planting a tree in Tavistock Square, Bloomsbury

He set sail in November 1904 and arrived in Ceylon the following month and was attached to the Colonial Secretary's Office in Colombo. After a few months, he was first posted to the Jaffna Kachcheri. On arrival in Jaffna, he immersed himself in the study of Tamil in the hope that he can have direct contact with the people without a translator as intermediary. By February 1906, he was appointed Additional Assistant to the Government Agent (GA), Northern Province. During this posting he had a stint acting for the GA, Mannar. This is where he got an insight into the Pearl Fisheries that he supervised off the Coasts of the Gulf of Mannar. This experience came in handy in some of his writings in later years.

In his book *Growing* (1961) he gives some insight into his work in Jaffna and his contact with the people. His stay in Jaffna

was not without controversy, and he had very unpleasant encounters with some of the haughty elements in the town. His view was that Jaffna had 'too many over educated persons'. His

liberal views ran on a collision course with the caste-ridden society of Jaffna at that time. In one instance, when he saw a clerk spit on the floor he ordered him to clean the floor. The clerk belonging to a high caste was humiliated, because cleaning the floor was in his view a menial job, below his status as a high caste. Woolf believed



Leonard Woolf

in being a hard taskmaster. That made him a bit unpopular in Jaffna.

His next posting was to the Kandy Kachcheri, where he immersed himself, this time, in the study of Sinhala. Once again, his intention was to have direct dialogue with the people. He loved his stay in Kandy and developed a great respect for the ordinary man. The order by the Governor, Sir Thomas Maitland in 1808, requiring Government Agents to keep diaries was a boon for the history of Sri Lanka. Outstanding colonial officers kept detailed diaries that have in later years become a gold mine of historical source. This requirement was short sightedly dispensed with in 1941. Fortunately, by then there was 130 years of insight into the colonial administration. Members of the CCS also had a judicial role and this again brought them into first hand contact with the lives of ordinary people giving them an insight into the oppression that they suffered at the hands of officialdom.

Many of the Civil servants of the time spent their time partying, canoeing, going on shoots, elephant kraals etc, but there were also those of the ilk of Woolf who delved into the lives and problems of the ordinary man. Woolf had a spacious and accommodating mind, which he used to full measure to understand the problems of the common man. His scholarship also stands in bold relief against some of the academic phoneys of his time. He had an aversion for colonialism and imperialism and made no bones about it to the chagrin of his colonial masters.

Woolf was appointed GA, Hambantota after his term in Kandy. By the time he arrived in Hambantota he was well versed in his Sinhala and could read and write fluently. He could talk directly with the people, read their Sinhala petitions in their original content and interact with the people directly. It is said that some parts of his private diaries were kept in Sinhala and Tamil. This may have been his ploy to keep it out of the prying eyes of his colonial masters, for whom he had scant regard often verging on contempt on several issues.

About Hambantota itself, he was of the opinion that it was of greater antiquity than the Malay regiment. The name Hambantota means 'Moor Port' and perhaps goes back to a time when seafaring Arab traders populated it. It was his work and times in Hambantota that laid the foundation for his novel *Village in the Jungle* (1913), a book he wrote after his return to London. In view of the fact that this book was the result of the insight he got into the lives of the people it displayed his capacity to penetrate below the surface of village life

and this made the book such a remarkable one. He had an inward understanding of the outward facts that he brought out very succinctly in this novel. It is therefore no surprise that the same year (1913) it was reprinted twice. Again reprints appeared in 1925, 1931, 1951, 1961, 1971, 1981, 1992 and 1993. That is indeed a creditable record. This story was also brought out as a Sinhala film by the name of 'Baddegama', which was a box office hit, at the time. The Sri Lankan ex-pat community staged a play even in far off Australia.

His other books on Ceylon are *Stories from the East* (Hogarth Press) 1924, which has three stories: -

First story, is about a mixed marriage
Second story, is set on the Pearl Fishery in Ceylon. Third story is set in Jaffna.

The originals of this book are very rare, there are however reprints such as Leonard Woolf's *Diaries in Ceylon 1908 –*

1911 (Hogarth Press) London 1903. This book (the diaries) is the work in print of the official diaries maintained by Leonard Woolf while he was GA of the Hambantota District. It covers the period August 1908 to May 1911. The book has a preface written by Leonard Woolf.



Virginia Woolf

Woolf after returning to England in 1911 resigned from the Civil service and married Virginia Stephen in August 1912. Virginia, born in 1882, was a

writer of renown herself, and was Leonard's contemporary at Trinity. She was the daughter of Sir Leslie Stephens. Together, they founded the Hogarth Press in 1917. Hogarth Press published the works of Leonard and Virginia. Virginia's books such as *Mrs. Dollaway* (1925), *Between the Acts* (1941) and *To the Lighthouse* (1927) and a range of biographies, essays and criticisms plus a collection of letters

and diaries deals with the life, travels and work of the couple. Virginia caught the imagination of the women by enduring lines such as ‘women brought forth the entire population of the Universe’ she wrote in the Statesman. Leonard Woolf reached the pinnacle of his literary standing after his return to England. It wasn’t until he returned to England that he opened the vaults of memory of his stay in Ceylon.

Both Leonard and Virginia were fond of travel and travelled all over Europe by train including the Orient Express. At other times, they drove their Sun Singer or the more luxurious Lancaster (‘powerful as a tiger, smooth as an eel’) or the big American Hupmobile convertible rented in Greece. Their marriage came to a tragic end when Virginia committed suicide in March 1941, jumping into the Ouse River. It is said she drowned herself because she feared she was coming close to a mental breakdown. She had close to 30 books published and unpublished to her credit by then. After her death there were books written about her, including a recent award winning film. Virginia’s sister was the talented Vanessa Stephens.

Leonard’s sister Bella Sidney Woolf travelled to Ceylon to visit her brother. During this visit she met and married an officer Robert Lock in 1910. Lock worked in the Department of Agriculture and served as the Assistant Director of the Peradeniya Botanical Gardens. She wrote a few books on Ceylon, the best known being *How to See Ceylon (Times of Ceylon) 1914*. This book was updated in 1922 and was reprinted five times, the last as recent as 2002.

Among Leonard and Virginia’s friends were numerous luminaries of the time, such as, the author of the remarkable novel *Passage to India*, E. M. Forster. Forster, was encouraged by Leonard

Woolf to keep at his work when his enthusiasm was flagging and Forster records his indebtedness to Woolf in his book. In fact, Woolf and Virginia’s home became a meeting place for a circle of artists, critics and writers and this group came to be known as the Bloomsbury group. Many in this group were contemporaries in Cambridge, such as, John Maynard Keynes, Lytton Starchy, E. M. Foster, Clive Bell, Roger Fry, Thorby Stephen and his sister Vanessa.

Woolf returned to Sri Lanka in 1960, a sentimental journey for him to meet old friends, and see familiar places, he worked in and frequented. He met an 83 year old Peon, Aron Singho, who worked for him at the Hambantotota Kachcheri almost half a century earlier. Leonard Woolf died in 1969, and the last sentence he wrote was “It is the journey, not the arrival, which matters”.

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BEST ADVICE IN A LONG TIME

Q: Should I cut down on meat and eat more fruits and vegetables?

A: You must grasp logistical efficiencies. What does a cow eat? Hay and corn. And what are these? Vegetables. So a steak is nothing more than an efficient mechanism of delivering vegetables to your system. Need grain? Eat chicken. Beef is also a good source of green leafy vegetable, field grass.

Q: I’ve heard that cardiovascular exercise can prolong life. Is this true?

A: Your heart is only good for so many beats, and that’s it...don’t waste them on exercise. Everything wears out eventually. Speeding up your heart will not make you live longer; that’s like saying you can extend the life of your car by driving it faster. Want to live longer? **Take a nap.**

SAMOA

by Sandy Cowie

In January 2003 I went to Apia in Samoa (formerly Western Samoa) to do voluntary work by way of advising the National Bank of Samoa on banking procedures. My wife Nancy accompanied me and not wishing to be idle did some teaching at the Robert Louis Stevenson School.

Like Sri Lanka the tourism trade is of great importance. One of the top market hotels is Aggie Grey's, the founder of whom was widely assumed to be the proto type for the character "Bloody Mary" in James Michener's enormously successful book "Tales of the South Pacific".

There are two vague similarities with Sri Lanka. A popular dish with Samoans is curry. However, in no way would it compare with the beautiful curries of Sri Lanka.

The Samoans are a large race partially caused by their diet, which contains a lot of fat as in meat, which they love to eat, and taro, the local potato-like vegetable, which has high starch content. It is said that to ensure that Samoans will attend any function or meeting all you have to say is that food will be available!

Cricket as we know it is played on a small scale but much more popular is **KRIKAT** which is played with a triangular sided bat. No deft flicks or strokes are played. It is a case of lashing out at the ball with all one's strength. Consequently games are usually finished in less than one hour.

The Samoans are a very polite and religious people but get them on a rugby field and it is a different story. Whilst we were there a large seven-a-side tournament was held with teams of Samoans from countries other than Samoa participating. The previous year matches had been marred by frequent fights on the field. This year the prime minister issued a release to the effect he hoped that fighting would not happen again as it reflected badly on the nation. He personally attended the tournament for its duration and I hope he liked the rugby

that he saw as his message must have got across as no fighting occurred.

There are a few Sri Lankans working in the educational institutions on contract to the different universities. However, on going through the phone book of Samoa (not very big) I came across a **Liyanage**. It would be interesting to find the connection with Sri Lanka.

There would be no point in applying for a job as a postman in Samoa. There are no individual letterboxes and really there is no need as everybody knows everybody and the mail is collected at the village shop. There are only about six streets with names in the whole country and they are in the capital of Apia. Everything else is referred to by the name of the village of which there are plenty. The mail is delivered to the village store by a delivery agent, as there are no numbers on the houses.

Australian banks might like to borrow a procedure used at the National Bank of Samoa. On the staff of the main bank is an imposing gentleman by the name of Taitoa. He is a former international second rower and is the Orator or Commissionaire. There is a large customer base and limited computer access in the bank. This means that every day, but especially on government pay days the banking hall is choc-a-block leading to a waiting time of up to 45 minutes. However, at regular intervals to divert attention, Taitoa steps forward and in his oratorical voice proceeds to thank the customers for dealing with the bank, points out the various services and instructs them to ensure their forms are completed correctly. On occasions he might break into song, which is much appreciated by all, and calm reigns. No muttering about service here!

Nancy and I thoroughly enjoyed our stay in Samoa and would recommend it as a place to visit if you want balmy nights, sea sports and Polynesian hospitality especially during our colder months.



MOUNTAIN, RAIN CLOUD, TREE

by Somasiri Devendra

(On reading the late Pundit Gunapala Senadheera's doctoral thesis - 1995)

Some years ago I listened, fascinated, to Dr. Gunapala Senadheera speaking on various clues to pre-Buddhist fertility rites in ancient Sri Lanka. He talked about the frequent use of the prefix "Kala", "Megha-varna" etc. with the names of kings. These, he said, referred to the rain clouds that brought the crops their much-needed rain. He spoke of the *Arahat* Mahinda, on the day after the first night spent in the *Maha-megha-vana*, predicting that, in years to come, the spots he consecrated would become the sites of the *Ruwanweli-seya*, the *Sri Maha Bodhiya*, and the *Thuparama* and so on. The Venerable Thera could do so, said Dr. Senadheera, because the sites he consecrated, and thereby "converted" to Buddhism, were sites of conspicuous trees which were already being venerated and at which the Thera himself offered flowers: he was, in fact, tapping an existing reservoir of veneration. He spoke of the rocky heights and mountains, wearing rain-bearing clouds round their shoulders, where dwelt pre-Buddhist deities, later to become sites of Buddhist shrines.

My mind went back forty-five years ago when I, as a schoolboy, read an anthropological work, "The Mountain and the Tree", which impressed me with its account of how a pre-Christian, Druidical, mid-winter fertility rite was similarly converted to Christ's birthday, Christmas, complete with the fertility symbols of Christmas tree, yule log, mistletoe and all.

I heard the voice of my father reciting a folk-stanza sung by villagers on pilgrimage to Anuradhapura, in "Sinhale", to worship

the Buddha at the ruins of the great shrines and to pray at the *Sri-maha-bodhiya* - which, alone, was not abandoned to the "jungle tide" - for the favour of a son:

Gamey sitan payvy-payvy -Tisa vevata yanna yi
Tisa vevay rath-nelumay -Batta malu kannayi
Ethaena sitan payvi-payvi - Bo-maluvata yanni yi
Udu maluvay Bo-samudini -Pirimi puthek denna yi

("From the village have we come, have we come, here, to Tisa Weva
Here have we had our fill of the curried seeds of the red lotus
From here will we go, will we go to the Sacred Bo tree
Oh Lord of the upper terrace! Grant us the boon of a son")

Here was the link I was searching for: Buddhist shrine, tree worship, fertility rite.

Recently I had the chance of reading Dr. Senadheera's researches in their final form, in his doctoral thesis on "Buddhist Symbols of Wish-Fulfilment", now published in India by The India Book Centre, New Delhi. Here he goes farther a-field than in the lecture I had listened to. He deals with all the familiar - and not-so-familiar - "auspicious" symbols (*Magul Lakunu*) familiar to us in Sri Lanka as well as to Buddhists elsewhere in Asia. He delves deep into the origins of the symbols and finds them rooted in a core of symbols common to the whole of the land-mass of Asia and Europe and the islands adjacent. He discovers the Bo-tree in Bulgaria and ancient Thracia, and the "*Tri-ratne*" in the Samurai helmet. He finds the "*Makara*" in the "mugger", or Indian river crocodile. He sees the cart wheel behind the "*Swastika*". He sees the image of the Buddha, himself, being given an auspicious validity by placing, under it, a "basket" of auspicious objects in the shape of the "*Nidhana-gala*", and by covering the Footprint with such signs. And water, water he sees everywhere - in the "*punkalasa*", the Makara's "*tirigi-tale*" tail, the abode of the *Naga*. And bringing us firmly back to

earth, he sees the essential unity that binds the Moonstone - that assemblage of auspicious elements - to today's "*magul-poruwa*" and fire walking. For the most appealing and welcome thing about his research is that it shies away from the erudite, the esoteric and far-fetched explanation in favour of the simple, the obvious and the close-to-home. Anyone really interested must read this book: it is beyond me to summarise it.

What does emerge from reading his thesis is the conviction that all these symbols are not essentially Buddhist symbols but, as he calls them, "symbols of wish fulfilment" or, in lay language, symbols of prosperity. It is the "lucky" aspect that is common to them all. So, in paying our respects to them, we are going in search of good-luck; not in search of release from the cycle of birth and death. But, given the harsh realities of everyday life over these many centuries, is this not natural? Particularly in a rural agrarian society? (Or, even today, in the urban rat-race?) The symbols are so closely related to village life - the creepers that twine round the trees, the lotus in the tank, the buffalo in the paddy-field, the cart-wheel, the pot of water for the thirsty traveller, the giant tree (*Vanaspati*) spreading its hospitable branches to traveller and cart-bull alike, the flames from the fire in the hearth. Images of a simple village life "that has been, and will be again". No wonder they are recognised and accepted and have survived so long. And no wonder, too, that only a simple and down-to-earth explanation can make sense out of them.

Dr. Senadheera is not chary of accepting the fact that popular Buddhism became a "Buddha-cult" with the personality of the Buddha replacing those of "devas" and "bandara-deiyos" who resided in the mountains (*Saman deviyo* on Sri Pada) and in conspicuous trees (*Kalu-devata-bandara* in the Sri Maha Bodhiya). As Buddhism "converted" pre-Buddhist shrines the displaced spirits and deities underwent "a sea-

change, into something rich and strange" and took up residence in Buddhist shrines; and Buddhists in search of wish-fulfilment found no difficulty in addressing their prayers to St. Anthony, Kalamma and the god of Kataragama. But I digress: I cannot tap the richness of detail in the book into this little space nor can I try to convey the exciting provocativeness of the material it lays open to the reader, should you only open your mind and be receptive.

Instead, I will try to share an idea that dawned on me. Have you not noticed the sudden efflorescence of the *Buddha-puja* all over the country? Sudden? "Yes", in that it suddenly acquired political patronage and purpose. But, "No", otherwise. *Bodhi-pujas*, like the poor, have always been with us. In many a temple today the *Caitya* and the *Budu-ge* are mere adjuncts to the main shrine, which is the *Bo-maluwa*. So the pre-Buddhist symbol, and attendant deity, have come back to settle, as comfortably as the "*Satara-varan-deviyo*", in the Buddhist shrine. So the wheel has come full cycle.

But, if wish-fulfilment is the name of the game, is it not better that we address our prayers to the Tree, rather than to the Man who received Enlightenment under it? After all, the Tree is the older symbol, the truer symbol of fertility, the older object of veneration - as old as the human needs and wants that are sibilantly whispered under its rustling leaves by millions every day.

Perhaps we need the Tree than the Man who meditated under it: who searched for the truth, not in the tree but within himself.

Perhaps we need to set the Wheel in motion once again.

Perhaps.





LETTER TO THE EDITOR.

I write in response to the Editor's note in the article FOUNDERS OF A GREAT MUSICAL TRADITION IN SRI LANKA, REMEMBERING MAJOR & MRS.W.G. St. CLAIR, in the Journal No: 25 (Vol: VII, No: 1) of February 2004. I can throw some light on the lassie in the second row from the left, in the second position, Lennie Sandrasagara.

Lennie was the daughter of Justice H.A.P.Sandrasagara who was a renowned Lawyer with a sharp and lyrical tongue with which he could lash out and lampoon anyone at will. He is mentioned by Leonard Woolf in his book *Growth (1961)*, in connection with an incident in which they both figured. He was a KC (Kings Counsel) whose ready wit and biting tongue kept the court house in stitches and the opponents scared out of their wits.

Lennie inherited her father's wit and was a *raconteur par excellence* in addition to an angelic voice. She had a passion for music and attended the Mrs W.G.St Clair's Student Orchestra regularly. She was a student at St Bridget's Convent, Colombo. Later, she married Dr. A.P. Sandrasagara, an ENT Specialist attached to the Children's Hospital. He set up the first paediatric surgical unit at the Lady Ridgeway Hospital, a first in Sri Lanka. Many 'Medicos' passed through his hands and are now eminent doctors in various parts of the world.

Lennie's musical and singing talents are continued by her children, Nirmala (Canada) & Padma (UK). My wife, Charmaine, is a niece, and lived at Lennie's home in Kynsey Road, while studying at St Bridget's Convent and she owes much of her own accomplishments to Lennie's guidance and the nightly sing-alongs.

Vama



The bloke in the bush

Since your editor semi retired into the rural part of Australia he has had to relearn a few things. Going from a computer background into plum farming he was confronted with a steep learning curve which he shares with readers below.

Log On - Make the barbecue hotter
 Log Off - The barbecue is too hot
 Monitor - Keeping an eye on the barbecue
 Download - Get the firewood off the ute
 Hard drive - Trip back home without any cold beers
 Floppy Disc - What you get lifting too much firewood at once
 Keyboard - Where you hang the ute and bike keys
 Window - What you shut when it's cold
 Screen - What you shut in the mosquito season
 Byte - What mosquitoes do
 Bit - What mosquitoes did
 Mega Byte - What Townsville mosquitoes do
 Chip - A bar snack
 Micro Chip - What's left in the bag after you have eaten the chips
 Modem - What you did to the lawns
 Dot Matrix - Old Dan Matrix's wife
 Laptop - Where the cat sleeps
 Software - Plastic knives and forks you get at Big Rooster
 Hardware - Real stainless steel knives and forks from K Mart
 Mouse - What eats the grain in the shed
 Mainframe - What holds the shed up
 Web - What spiders make
 Web Site - The shed or under the verandah
 Cursor - The old bloke who swears a lot
 Search Engine - What you do when the ute won't go
 Yahoo - What you say when the ute does go
 Upgrade - A steep hill
 Server - The person at the pub that brings out the counter lunch
 Mail Server - The bloke at the pub that brings out the counter lunch
 User - The neighbour who keeps borrowing things
 Network - When you have to repair your fishing net
 Internet - Complicated fish net repair method
 Netscape - When fish manoeuvres out of reach of net
 Online - When you get the laundry hung out
 Off Line - When the pegs don't hold the washing up

with thanks to the unknown compiler of the glossary

Ceylonese in the Big Smoke



by Malcolm Abayekoon

An American correspondent based in London said “New York is the Big Apple, London the Big Smoke.” In 1953 when I arrived in the capital of the British Empire there was quite a lot of smog around, caused by coal being burned in houses and factories. Having grown up in a country where there was brilliant sunshine almost every day I found the gloom depressing. There were days when Gabriel Stokes measure must have hovered around zero as visibility was down to a few feet. In the haze I met some good old boys and girls who had been living in England since the 1930s and earlier. In the August 2002 issue of *Ceylankan* I wrote about Edwin De Silva who had come to Britain in 1903. After that article appeared Edwin’s grandson Michael contacted me and we talked about his grandpa. He told me that when his grandfather was working at Veeraswamy’s a customer had given him an order for food and said “jaldi,” which meant make it snappy. Edwin had apparently picked up a menu, glanced through it and said “I am sorry; jaldi is not on the menu.” Having myself stood and waited at that restaurant I know how annoying it was when a pompous relic of the Raj used that word, it was as irritating as when they clicked their fingers to attract the attention of a waiter. I remember a mem sahib who clicked her fingers from below the level of the table top, in response to that a Ceylonese waiter went to that table, raised the table cloth, looked under the table and said to the woman “lost your dog, madam?” That old Thomian was asked by another snooty Ooty type why the punkah was not being pulled and he replied, “the punkah wallah has been made redundant, we now have

air conditioning.”

In the early 1950s there was no place in London where Ceylonese gathered, the students’ centre opened later on. There was however Simon Sinjo’s Ceylon Restaurant in Camden Town where one could not only have rice and curry but also meet folk from back home. The restaurant was in the parlour of the proprietor’s terraced house. He did the cooking, his English wife served at table. The food was excellent even though in those days ingredients were difficult to find. As far I know the only Asian grocery store in London was the Bombay Emporium near Tottenham Court Road. Now there are hundreds of Asian grocers with shelves full of all that is needed to prepare the food that is now supposed to have replaced fish and chips, which used to be the nation’s favourite dish. The chippie is getting in on the act with curry flavoured fish and chips!

In the West India Dock Road was another Ceylonese eatery called Hells Kitchen owned by Simon Perera. I briefly lived near there in an area where Jack the ripper had roamed! Whenever I went to that restaurant I saw old Ceylonese sailors hanging around the place, some came to eat, others to pass the time of day telling stories of the ships they had served on and the places they had been to. Simon himself had been a sailor. It was there that I met J. Vijayatunga the author of *Grass for My Feet*. He had lived in London since before World War Two. In about 1985 he returned to Sri Lanka and was granted Rs 250,000 from the President’s Fund to help him in his old age.

Arfeen Baseer, a Ceylon Malay had been an Excise Inspector in the old country and came here in 1914 to serve in the army. When the war ended he returned to his roots with his English wife, but came back to live in England a few years later. Ari as he was known was a charming man. He

lived near Paddington in West London where he was well known at his local. I once accompanied him to that watering hole where like some of the other regulars he had his own pewter tankard hanging on a hook. That was a rough area with its red lights and gangsters. I noticed that some of the men who said "hello Ari, all right mate." to my companion, wore dark pin striped suits and looked like they were not the type of people to fall out with; that could be dangerous for one's health!

Victor Dhanapala was a man about town who lived in grand style near Regents Park. Among his friends were some well-known film stars. Charles Silva was without doubt the most debonair of the Ceylonese in London. He is supposed to have moved in high society circles and that apparently included attending cocktail parties at 10 Downing Street. He was a dandy who sometimes dressed in Edwardian clothes. I once saw him strolling down Bond Street wearing a black cape over what could have been a Saville Row tailored suit, and for that little bit extra he carried a silver topped cane.

Facing Piccadilly Circus with its statue of Eros was Swan & Edgar. Outside that department store stood a newspaper seller, an old cockney sporting a cloth cap, donkey jacket, baggy trouser and hobnail boots. When it was cold the old fellow used to bang those whacking great stompers on the pavement to warm his trotters, the sound was like a horse on the trot. When he had other matters to attend to such as lubricating his tonsils at a local pub, Piyadasa a down south man took over. He was probably the first Ceylonese to sell newspapers in downtown London. I have vivid memories of that pint-sized man who used to shout, "piper, piper, evening piper." The little guy was rather partial to booze and was best avoided when he was in a Bacchanalian frenzy. They say if you need directions ask a newspaper

seller, Pideas as the locals called him had his very special way of directing people, and his gesticulation looked like semaphore signalling. His life had been quite an adventure; from a hamlet near Galle he had made his way to Colombo and found work near the harbour where he spent his free time looking at the ships, and dreaming about far away places. Determined to go to those places he had obtained a passport and after months of waiting managed to get signed on as a deck hand on a tramp steamer. He had served on ships of various flags and finally signed off in London. When not selling papers he helped out the costermongers at Berwick Street Market in Soho. Amid the hubbub of that busy place he could be heard shouting out "caulis, cukes, tatters, ripe toms." When the All-England Lawn Tennis Club tournament was on at Wimbledon it was "get your straws, sweet and juicy." I was there one day when a stylish woman with superior airs pointed at the punnets and said to him "I'll take two." "They are not for taking, that will be two bob," said Pideas as he handed her the straws. The woman turned a shade of strawberry red and paid up. The lad from down south had come a long way and had learned cheeky chappie market trader speak.

Old Carolis had been in England for a long time, he had a konde, (hair tied in a small knot at the back) wore tweed jacket and sarong, a semi-circular tortoise shell comb was perched on his head. He stood out in the crowd and was well known around Piccadilly, it must have taken courage to dress like that, but there were some advantages. I heard that he used to be offered a seat on a crowded bus being mistaken for a woman! When he died Charlie Silva, not the one mentioned earlier but the man who later owned the Sri Lanka Restaurant at Earl's Court, inherited Carolis's apartment, which was near the British Museum. Charlie told me the

ghost of the man with the comb on his head haunted that place! He was not the only Asian in downtown London with a konde, there was also Paul Denier, a Singhalese from Mauritius who worked as a pot man at a pub near Marble Arch. He told me his grandfather had settled in Port Louis in about 1900. He was a Heendeniya who changed his name to make it sound French. Over the years I have come across a number of people here who have difficulties pronouncing my name but I have never even considered changing it to something like Abercorn. A Mauritian - Singhalese speaking English with a French accent and working as a pot man in a London pub; that was unique!

In those days there were not many Ceylonese women in England, the Grande dame was Pearl Saravanamuttu or Pearlie to those who dared. Also known as the Empress, she had I think married into the family who had some connection with the Colombo Oval at Serpentine Road. At a Ceylonese dinner-dance she commanded me to fetch her food from the buffet and pointing at her leg said, "make sure it is this piece of chicken." To have disobeyed that order would have meant a tongue lashing or worse.

Dr Dora Fonseka had her surgery in South-West London, there couldn't have been many from the old country in London who did not consult her about their ailments. Clodagh Jayasuriya who had been a Senator in Colombo, was here for a few years, during that time she resided at the Regents Palace Hotel, which was within sight of Piccadilly Circus. She must have been quite well off to stay there. After her return to Ceylon she married Maas D. Kitchilan who was a member of the Colombo Municipal Council.

In the 1950s there were only a few hundred Ceylonese living in Britain. The big event of the year used to be the party at Ceylon House on February Fourth. I remember at-

tending Independence Day cocktail parties when Sir Claude Corea was High Commissioner. I think most of the Ceylonese in London was present.

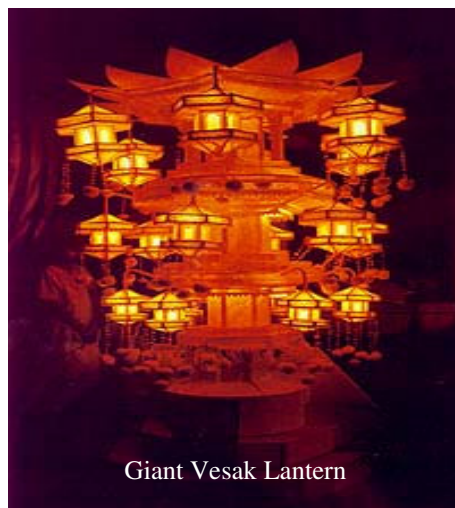
Now there are thousands of people from Sri Lanka living in England, the majority arrived in the 1980s. To cater to their needs there are restaurants, grocery stores, places of worship, cultural shows, old school reunions, fortune-tellers and marriage brokers! On the downside there are Sri Lankan gangs active in some areas of London, they can get quite violent. New York is still the Big Apple but London is no longer the Big Smoke; the Clean Air Act has reduced the amount of smog.

The old folk who I met when I first arrived in the haze have passed away, but memories of them linger in my mind.

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Giant Vesak Lantern

The Editorial Team of Ceylankan Journal wishes all its readers Peace & Tranquillity in this month of Vesak.
May All Beings be Happy

BOOK REVIEW



A. JEYARATNAM WILSON: *Sri Lankan Tamil nationalism: its origins and development in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries*. 203 pp. London: C. Hurst & Co., 2000.

The late A.J. Wilson was a distinguished Canadian-based political scientist whose previous publications concentrated on post-independence Sri Lanka. In this volume, completed about a year before his death, he seeks to 'explain and analyse the rise of Tamil nationalism in Sri Lanka'. About half the book is concerned with Sri Lanka under the British rule, and the other half with more recent developments. One chapter, 'Eelam Tamil Nationalism: an inside view', is contributed by A.J.V. Chandrakanthan.

This book represents the first attempt to provide a comprehensive historically-based account of Sri Lankan Tamil nationalism. It is based on little new research, but does bring together material from scattered publications, some of which are obscure. Wilson begins with nineteenth century cultural movements among Jaffna Tamils, which are portrayed as sharpening Tamil ethnic consciousness. He then turns to the elitist politics of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, especially the careers of the brothers Ponnambalam Ramanathan and Ponnambalam Arunachalam. He argues that these men served Tamils well until late in their careers, when the coming of mass politics led to new challenges that they were unable to meet. The narrative then moves on to G.G. Ponnambalam and his All-Ceylon Tamil Congress. Wilson argues that Ponnambalam did great service in mobilizing Tamils in the 1930s and 1940s, but that he too was left behind by events late in his career. One of Wilson's heroes is his own father-in-law, S.J.V. Chelvanayakam, who split with Ponnambalam and formed the Federal Party in 1949, shortly after independence. Chelvanayakam was the first politician to argue explicitly and consistently that the Sri Lankan Tamils were a nation with their own traditional homeland in the northeast of the island. For a long time, he did not envision an independent Tamil state. However, as Wilson's account shows, after 1956 the political and social position of Sri Lankan Tamils became increasingly difficult within the Sinhalese-dominated polity, and in 1976 Chelvanayakam, as leader of the new Tamil United Liberation Front, came out for independence. According to Wilson, Sri Lankan Tamils were reluctant separatists, who were forced into demanding independence by the insensitivity of successive Sinhalese-dominated governments in Colombo. He also points to pressure from young radical Tamil militants as a factor in pushing Tamil politicians to demand independence. Chelvanayakam died in 1977, and at

this point, with the escalation of violence between Tamil militants and the Sri Lankan state, Wilson's narrative becomes less measured and more fractured. Some topics, such as the negotiations between the government and Tamil politicians in late 1970s and early to mid 1980s, receive considerable attention, but there is little attempt to explain divisions among Tamils or any of the distinctive characteristics of recent Sri Lankan Tamil politics. The chapter by Chandrakanthan, which is more passionate in tone than the rest of the book, provides much of the coverage of the 1990s, and gives a sometimes vivid account of events in that decade.

Wilson writes within a worldview of Tamil nationalism. He believes that the Tamils in modern Sri Lanka always require a 'charismatic leader', and that the best Tamil politicians in both the colonial and post-independence eras are those who see their role as representing their own 'community'. His narrative is constructed to show that Sri Lankan Tamils have had no alternative to pursuing the goal of independence. His account of the beleaguered position of Sri Lankan Tamils in the decades after 1956 is by and large convincing, but his need to frame the narrative so that history supports the present Tamil nationalist struggle will mislead non-specialist readers. In the historical sections, the narrative is teleological, with events pro-

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gressing relentlessly towards the realization that Tamils really constitute a nation and that the Sinhalese will never allow them their rights within an all-island polity. Wilson does mention caste and regional divisions, but always as factors to be overcome by the Tamil leadership. In the more contemporary sections, Wilson's commitment to the cause leads him to avoid or dismiss many of the contradictions of contemporary Tamil nationalism. The troubled relationship between Tamils and Muslims, the position of the Up-Country Tamils, the remarkable use of children and women in the armed struggle, and the appalling human rights record of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam are all pushed aside. As a result, although this book has value for readers already well-acquainted with Sri Lankan politics, it is likely to mislead and confuse non-specialists without the background to understand its assumptions and its oblique references to some of the more troublesome aspects of recent Tamil nationalism.

John D. Rogers -Tufts University

Tales from the Plantations

Periya Dorai

by Brian Parker

As I came to the end of my six months 'Creeping' period and was just about to go off to my first appointment, my PD called me into the office for a talk. I hoped it wasn't going to be about the facts of life because I was aware how the birds and the bees went about their business. It wasn't, it was more about one's approach to the new job and he finished with "....And don't get on the wrong side of your PD's wife". His wife? what has she got to do with things? I was 18 and knew everything. It's funny to think that now 50 years on, I know nothing. I promptly forgot all his good advice and fell into all the potholes on life's road that he had tried to warn me about.

I had only been planting for about three months when one day at the club we were discussing the new world record for the pole vault set by the Rev. Bob Richards (around 15 ft. if my memory serves). My boss' wife then asked. "Does that pole thing help them at all?" "No." I said. "They tie it to their legs as a handicap." Everybody laughed except the boss and his wife. Next day he came round my division and pointed out a number of faults in my work and

'gated' me for six weeks. This meant that I was not allowed off the property under any circumstances; I could not go to town, the club or to have dinner with friends on the next-door property.

Later on I had a Ceylonese boss who liked to use his army rank when being addressed; I think he was only a captain in those days. He had a habit of using his binoculars to view my Division across the valley and if he spotted that the sprayers or forkers were not in strict regimental line he would send a note to evening muster telling me to dock a day's pay from the offending gang.

When I was Senior Assistant on one large property both the boss and wife were very kind to me but when a particular incident occurred I thought I might have over stepped the mark. One evening a friend, Nick arrived at my bungalow with a turkey in a holdall on the tank of his motorcycle. "Lets take it to the Jackson-Smales' for dinner." I thought it a great idea. The turkey must have been in training for the marathon because despite being well curried for hours it was as tough and indigestible as the proverbial boot. Next day on my rounds the boss' wife hailed me. Still picking the stringy bird from my teeth, I asked her what the problem was. "Someone broke in and stole one of my turkeys last night. Can you put word about and see if you can find out the culprit." It weighed heavy on my conscience and stomach for quite some time.

The next man on that property was as mad as a meat axe. The only time he ever came around the field was at 6 am or 6 pm. The Assistants would have to sit in the back of the Land Rover with his smelly dogs and the smoke from the Peacock cigarette that was never out of his mouth. He painted the inside of the factory with pastel shades of Walpamur; while the Assistants had to make do with lime wash in their bungalows.

I had one boss who was addicted to the bottle and it was very difficult to understand him when he rang the division to give instructions or find out what was happening. On his rounds he would stop and talk to various labourers in some unintelligible language that he thought was Tamil. The funny thing was the only time they could understand him was when he was nine parts full.

Almost all have passed on now, to some big tea estate in the sky, just leaving memories.



NUWARA ELIYA- ONE HUNDRED AND FIFTY YEARS AGO

*(This article on life in Nuwara Eliya around the 1850s was written by **Barbara Layard** in 1906. She was then one of the oldest residents in Nuwara Eliya. Miss Layard who lived in "Grimsthorpe" Nuwara Eliya, was born in 1834 at "Bagatelle" the home of her father Charles Edward Layard who was a Civil Servant. "Bagatelle" was later named Alfred House when it was owned by C.H.*



de Soysa. Layard migrated to Ceylon at the beginning of the 19th Century, and in 1804 married Barbara Mooyart daughter of the last Dutch Governor of Ceylon. There were twenty six children by the marriage; Barbara Layard was the last child by this marriage. She wrote this article for the Times of Ceylon Annual of 1906).

My first impressions of Nuwara Eliya were in 1848 when I lived at Oliphant Cottage with some of my relations who had rented it out for the season. The house is now Queens Cottage, and has been added to for the successive Governors who have lived in it, after the time of Sir Henry Ward, who made his residence at Rose Bank. The lovely pomaloe trees in front of Oliphant Cottage, with their profusion of golden fruit, were much the same then, as now, and the proprietors, our Chief Justice Sir Anthony, and Lady Oliphant used to occupy a small cottage which has long since been cleared away by the road side, bordering on the present Golf Course.

Lady Oliphant was one of my kindest friends and I spent many pleasant hours with her and her clever son, Lawrence, who was 4 or 5 years older than myself. It was in this year that Sir Samuel Baker and his brother John with their wives (two Miss Martins sisters) arrived to settle. They took up their temporary abode at St

Andrews, while the gentlemen were engaged opening up their lands at Moon Plains and Mahagastota, all particulars of which will be read in Sir Samuel's works. They were joined by their brother James, the only brother living now, and were the first brewers in Nuwara Eliya. The stone remains of the old water wheel used for the purpose is still to be seen near the stream at the turn off to Moon Plains. I recall a pleasant picnic there, when the fourth brother Valentine of the Ceylon Rifle Regiment, afterwards renowned as "Baker Pasha" was present. The beer was greatly appreciated by the troops then stationed up here, and by the few residents.

On one occasion a coolie, while stirring up a mixture in a huge vat, slipped and fell in, and no one being present stood the chance of being boiled alive, but he miraculously succeeded in scrambling out, leaving his skin behind him. The two Mrs Bakers made him a bed of arrowroot and flour, covering him up with it from the air, and the man recovered. When someone later congratulated Sir Samuel on his excellent brew of beer, he agreed, regretting he could not boil a native in it each time.

Divine service used to be held in the Cutcherry, and one Sunday during the service, when I was present, we were all startled and the two Mrs Bakers terrified, at the appearance of the cook from Mahagastota who called out Mr William Gibson, Colonial Secretary, and Mr Frank Temple, the Government Agent. We afterwards learnt that John Baker, who had remained at home, in walking near the jungle, heard as he imagined, the browsing of an elk, and peering into the thickness saw a movement. He raised his gun and fired; silence followed. The underwood being very dense he returned home, and told the cook to go and drag out the elk, which turned out to be Mrs Cummin's horse keeper who was cutting grass! The movement of his cumbie over his head had

been mistaken for the ear of an elk. Many a time have I attended Sir Samuel's elk hunts at early morning, and seen the break of the sambhurs on the pass and under Keena.

Elephant Nook was so named by Mrs Acland who was living at Round Bungalow, one of the oldest houses in Nuwara Eliya. That must have been in the late eighteen thirties. She had walked all round the plain, being a good walker, and was close to home when she came upon a rogue elephant browsing on the small piece of marsh land on the jungle side under what is now the Naseby property. It was too late for her to trudge back six miles, so she courageously slipped off her shoes and glided past the formidable beast who fortunately did not scent her. I myself have seen an elephant browsing on the patna where now stands the fine tract of Scrubbs tea.

Talking of the Round Bungalow reminds me of the clever trapping of a cheetah by a small and savage native cow belonging to Mrs Justice Temple. We were aroused in the night by a great commotion in the cowhouse, and Tikiribanda as she was named, was discovered with her horns firmly impaled in the mud wall, imprisoning a large cheetah who had come after her calf. Fortunately the cow was not any the worse for the encounter. The cheetah's claws were against the wall and the quarters too close for any movement. A cheetah was once known to have come amongst a number of soldiers' children playing on the grass at the Barrack Plains, carrying away a kid, which it evidently found a more tempting morsel than the infant lying amidst the group.

Mrs O'Brien, the stout wife of a surveyor who was always drawn about in a bath chair (before the days of the rickshaw) was surprised by cheetah when passing under Rose Bank with her fat King

Charles spaniel running beside her. The cheetah carried off the little dog. Mrs O'Brien, on the spur of the moment, forgetting her obesity, jumped out of her chair, and rushed screeching after the foe, which promptly dropped her prey. And it was not many years ago when Mr Colls, now, I grieve to say, a sad invalid, on returning to his house on the Barrack Plains after tennis, saw a cheetah jump on to the road in front of him, below Uffington. He mistook the animal for a dog at first.

One of the most interesting incidents occurred to the Hon 'ble Justice Moncreiff and his lady when they were taking their afternoon drive round the Moon Plains, and saw a sight which many a lover of sport would have been glad to see. From the forest where the Forest department is now busy cutting firewood, they saw sambhur large and small rushing out into the open and then back again, and again emerging forth, to return back again. Then to solve the problem they observed a leopard stalking them, and no doubt it succeeded at last in securing one of the young ones. I could tell numbers of cheetah stories but I must stop here, only adding that the finest specimen of a cheetah, or leopard, I have ever seen, was one Mr Neil Campbell shot not 8 months ago- which had killed two or three of his fine cattle, and which returned to feed on his prey at 2 o'clock next day, when he was speedily dispatched.

Nuwara Eliya was an expensive luxury in those days, and quite an undertaking. We had to drive all the way, and it took 2 or 3 days from Colombo to get here. As there were no shops, our provisions and clothing, etc had to be sent up by cart, 3 carts at 5 pounds each at least, while house rent was high as 20 pounds a month. No clubs, no tennis, no outdoor games but oh! how we enjoyed ourselves in those primitive times. I heard Sir Samuel Baker say on his last visit here, that the improvements distressed him. He loved Nuwara Eliya in the more uncivilized state, as he had

first known it. There were only half a dozen letting houses- on the Badulla road the Tin Bungalow of Kellow's, Cotton's Cottage, Mrs Cummins, now called Lebanon, Barnes Hall, and later Plaisance built by Mr Frank Saonadiere, now the Club, Shamrock Cottage, and Oliphant. People are under the mistaken impression that the Kellows and Cottons were some of the settlers brought by Sir Samuel in 1848; but they were here before. Those brought by Sir Samuel were handsome old Fowler and his wife and lovely daughter, Mr and Mrs Harding, Mr and Mrs Mee, and drunken Pearks who drove the English carriage against the overhanging rock at Ramboda, throwing it over the side and injuring the English horses, which had to be destroyed. The stream, which I am told measured 221/2 miles, ran twisting and turning, in curious shapes, through the boggy plain of less than 2 miles as the crow flies.

Looking down on it from the summit of "One Tree Hill" it had the resemblance of a dissected map. Sir William Gregory who loved Nuwara Eliya and who did so much towards its improvement converted the stream into a lake by constructing a dam at the outlet over the "Ladies Waterfall". There is a curious cutting in the bank, readily seen from the road near the bridge, made I am told, by John Baker with intention to divert the waters of the lake into a fresh channel through his land. Government refused to give him the price he asked for his land, but they conceded at once as they saw Mr Baker was seriously meaning to carry out his threat.

The present Doctor's bungalow was occupied in the early 1840s by Dr Maclise, a brother of the celebrated artist, and I saw the walls of the sitting rooms covered with life size scenes from Shakespeare, sketched out with the aid of only a charred firestick. These, as also Mrs Samuel Baker's clever chalk drawings, copies of Landseer's on the wall of the old Mahagastota bungalow, have long since disappeared.

BOOKSHOP AND WEB RESOURCES

BOOKS/MAPS/COLLECTIBLES

This column is a regular feature for the benefit of members who publish works, and others who wish the Society to sell material on their behalf. No charges apply to members but donations will be gratefully received. Others pay a handling charge of 10%. Please e-mail the editor if you wish to take up this offer.

Through my Asian Eyes—S Pathiravitana—Godage International Publishers (Pvt) Ltd, 2003 paperback xii + 400 pp, \$ 15.00 + P&H. Contact Sumane Iyer (02) 9456 4737 or email: sumane@cicon.com.au

Armageddon or Brave New World?

By Christie Weeramantry. Published by Sarvodaya Visva Lekha, 173pp, AU\$ 12.50 + \$ 2.50 f&h. Contact Jay Fernando 03 9841 0192.

Without Fear or Favour by F. N. D. (Freddy) Jilla. Memoirs of a retired officer of the Sri Lanka Police Service. Published by Vishva Lekha 2001, 625pp \$25.00 + \$4.00 p&h. Call Homi Jilla (03) 9804 5316

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Celebrating Sri Lankan Women's English Writing 1948-2000 - by Yasmine Gooneratne Publisher: Women's Education & Research Centre, 58 Dharmarama Road, Wellawatte, Colombo 6 Paperback, 451 pp, price SL Rs. 850/- Contains bibliographies, documentation, and analyses of the writing of some 70 Sri Lankan women authors.

Please note p&h is within Australia only, overseas postage quoted on request.

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THE HENLEY HOUSE BOYS

The Raconteurs

The following notes have been compiled by a small group of Sri Lankans now resident in Australia, after reading the article in Ceylankan Journal 25 of February 2004, titled “The People and Homes on Thurstan Road and Cambridge Place 50 years ago” by “The Rambler”. Some of the stories related here, tend to confirm to some extent, the old Ceylonese saying that “the wealth created by one generation, is best enjoyed by the next, and wasted away by the third generation”.

One of our members had his memory jogged by a mention of A.J.R. de Soysa’s “Lakshmigiri” in Thurstan Road, for many decades past, owned by the Adamjee Lukmanjee family into whose hands it fell, following a mortgage default. A.J.R. (Richard) de Soysa was the second son of C.H. de Soysa, the famous philanthropist. He was the second low country Sinhalese nominated to the Legislative Council in 1916, by the British (the first was S.C. Obeysekera), overlooking James Peiris and Dr Marcus Fernando who were intellectually versatile and educated at Cambridge University and Kings College Medical School respectively. The official comment was that A.J.R. “could not put two words together”, a quality highly valued by the colonial government who did not want their boat rocked.

A.J.R. married Mary, daughter of Linda-mullage David de Silva, a wealthy arrack renter who lived in “Henley House” a large bungalow which stood on the premises now occupied by St Bridget’s Convent. Oral family history suggests that Mary was “more than a little mad”, a trait displayed by some of her descendants as well. Mary de Silva’s brothers were

known as the Henley House Boys; notorious for their love of fast women, slow horses, and hard booze. They were all reared as the spoilt sons of a wealthy man, and having inherited fortunes, ran through their money, dying poor and in one case penniless. Mary also had one sister, Josephine, (Josie) whose daughter Renee married Dr Cyril de S Wijeratne, a well known medical practitioner in Galle, and a son P.C.W. Peries (Percy) who was partner in the estate agency business, L.J.M. Peiris and Co whose senior partner Leonard was married to A.J.R. de Soysa’s daughter Bella.

Leonard and his brother Bertie were the sons of Sir James Peiris. They were educated at Tonbridge School in England, and Cambridge University. Leonard, throughout his life epitomized the “kalu sudhha” or brown sahib, talking with an exaggerated English accent and adopting such affectations as employing a “dressing boy” – a sort of valet. He was a Warden of St Michael’s Church and socialized with many of the British community in the island. Bertie in later life “went native” changing

A CORDIAL WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS



Mages & Grace Magesvaran
Carlingford NSW

Sabaratnam & Sita Selvadurai
Hornsby NSW

Lalith & Irene de Soysa
Glen Iris VIC

Malini & Shanti Shantikumar
Glen Waverley VIC

...who have joined since publication of Journal 25

his name to Deva Surya Sena and wore the national dress. Their mother, Lady Peiris, was also affectingly English, and someone who was at Cambridge with Leonard recalls having tea with him in his rooms, together with other English friends, one of whom remarked “my god, who is that extraordinary woman?” on seeing a dark woman in western dress complete with large hat. She was Lady Peiris! She was known for talking about such things as “the dear white cliffs of Dover” in totally Ceylonese company.

The Henley House boys were Henry, Charles, Edwin, Michael (always known as “Sitti” from his second name Sirciacus), John R, Emmanuel, and Aloysius. Henry was the first cricket captain of St Joseph’s College. He and his wife had no children, so they adopted their cook’s daughter who they named Dora. She received a good education and married Stanley de Zoysa who was the Finance Minister in S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike’s first cabinet.

Henry was a very generous man, and Chief Justice Sir Francis Soerits, in an address to the boys of St Joseph’s related how he lost a valuable book when he was a poor schoolboy, and it was replaced by Henry out of his pocket money.

Charles ended his days living in Negombo: he had a large family, and one of his sons Frederick was a journalist who became Editor of the “Times of Ceylon”. Another, Douglas was principal of St Sebastian’s College, Moratuwa. The best known of Charles’ sons was Kenneth, who played cricket for both St Peter’s and St Joseph’s, as a dashing left hand bat. He was a good golfer too, and played several Internationals for Ceylon. Kenneth was in the Excise Department and married Lorna, daughter of the wealthy S.R. de Fonseka. The marriage however was dissolved after many years on the grounds of non-consummation. Edwin married a Miss de

la Harpe his companion of several years, and worked, albeit at a small Pettah broker’s. John R married Helen McCarthy who was previously married to Justice Walter Pereira and by whom she had one son Aelian Pereira, lawyer and later judge. Helen was the daughter of an Irish father and English mother. By her marriage to John R she had three children, Ray, Lorna, and Theresa. Ray captained the St Peter’s College cricket team in 1937. His father John played in the first St Joseph’s College cricket team in 1896 under his brother Henry the first Josephian cricket captain. Lorna was Ceylon’s first beauty queen, and married Francis Amarasuriya of the Amarasuriya family in Galle. John R was a Broker for the British Ceylon Corporation, and also managed some of the estates owned by the family together with his brother Henry.

There was another Henley house brother who died young, and whose name is lost in the mists of antiquity. He had two sons Frank and Kingsley, the latter being a well known eye surgeon with equally well known intemperate habits, and who changed his name to Deva Aditiya quite late in life. His son was the first Sri Lankan to become a Conservative Party M.P. in Britain, and is believed to be the first South Asian member of the European Parliament.

Sitti was perhaps the best known, or more accurately, most notorious. He had considerable charm, and to his dying day always wore a well tailored suit and tie. In his youth he cut a considerable dash, being a superb horseman who rode in the “gentlemen rider” races, and owned smart cars when cars were a rarity. He was an inveterate gambler and a quarrelsome drunk who in his later years was a “one pot screamer”. As a wealthy young man he had two close friends, Wilfred Peries who married Doris de Silva (daughter of his brother Emmanuel) and Harry de Silva

who married A.J.R. de Soysa's other daughter Daisy. Supposedly, it was at her high society wedding that the song "Daisy Daisy." was first played in Ceylon, and the couple actually left on a bicycle made for two! However, before too long she ran away with a very handsome, rich Englishman, an Old Etonian, said to be a "remittance man", by the name of Hulme-King. It is believed that he purchased a very good 300 acre coconut estate, named it Daisy Valley, in Mawatagama, and lived there until he died. Daisy's family had little to do with them, and neither Harry nor Wilfred ever spoke to Daisy again. The relatives always referred to King as "nodhoking"- a derogatory exclamation in Sinhalese.

Sitti taught Wilfred to ride and to drive around the large circular driveway at "Lakshmigiri", A.J.R.'s house. Wilfred and Sitti's nephew Percy Peries (son of his sister Josie) were chief among family members who gave Sitti money on a regular basis, when he was down and out, until he died. Sitti had a mistress Mona Orr, by whom he had three children, Charlabelle who became a nurse and worked at the Joseph Frazer nursing home when it was for Europeans only, Charles Percival, and Christine. Mona Orr came from a perfectly respectable family and was doubtless dazzled by the young Sitti. Wilfred bought a ring and had them married to legitimize the children. Sitti was also supported by Leonard Peiris, who married his niece Bella, but he treated him with great condescension, so was abused by Sitti behind his back. Sitti was always made welcome in Wilfred Peries' house and had Christmas dinner there for decades. He had great tales of the old days when he accompanied A.J.R, wife and two daughters on a trip to Europe, pre World War 1 where the women were presented at Court. Sitti carried emergency funds in gold sovereigns, in a money belt worn under his clothes. A.J.R. purchased a posh car, a Siddeley

with a 5 tone musical horn, and had a European chauffeur to drive it in Europe. A.J.R. had a huge appetite and could easily eat a whole duck. At breakfast, he would polish off quite a lot of ham followed by a variety of hot and cold dishes.

Sitti owned and raced horses, and was an inveterate gambler, which addiction led to his financial difficulties. His friends and relatives contributed to pay his annual subscription to the Ceylon Turf Club, and he never missed a race meeting, having cadged a few rupees from here and there. In his later years he barely had any money on him, and he walked enormous distances and thought nothing of footing it from Havelock Town to Cinnamon Gardens. For some time he shared a room with some old acquaintances in Moratuwa, and travelled to Colombo daily by bus or third class rail.

In later years he had a room for which he paid at the Colombo 3 house of Sam Peiris. Sam and Sitti were not above a bit of free loading and would turn up together for social occasions where they knew that both would not be unwelcome, and stagger away pie eyed at the end of the evening. Sam had an elderly Ford Prefect, and he, Sitti in tow, arrived unbidden at the engagement party for the daughter of a prominent Colombo 7 family, knowing that there would be liquor aplenty. Unfortunately Sam left his lights on, so when the time came for the drunken pair to leave the car would not start. So they decided to give it a push start, but who would push it was the question. History records one was at the front, the other heaving from behind, and the car, consequently going nowhere !!

Sitti was not really an unreconstructed drunken villain, but had his good points, such as open handed generosity on an occasion when he won a big treble at the races. He was good company, with an un-

rivalled knowledge of horses and dogs, and a great ability to restore old silver, leather, and antiques.

Sitti's son Charles Percival, known as "Charlie" had little education but was exceedingly handsome, well spoken, and with oceans of charm as also his father's dress sense. He launched himself into the world at the age of 18, getting a job as a ship's steward, and after some travels, settled in London where he had no regular job, but lived by his wits. Generously treating his friends at the best restaurants when he was financial, and touching them for small handouts when he was not. This was in the early 50s, and Charlie found that he could prey on women, particularly rich, naïve Americans. One young woman took him touring in Europe in her Alfa Romeo and after a while he vanished with her car and jewellery, but so much in love was she that no charges were brought. Not long after, he arrived back in Colombo, as the London police had their eyes on him, and for a time he made a living selling forged high value US dollar notes. Inevitably he fell foul of the law and had his passport impounded while inquiries were made. His father knew Sir John Kotelawala, then Minister for External Affairs, so called on him with Charlie who stayed in the waiting room while his dad implored Sir John regarding the passport. Sir John too was not a man who forgot his friends of earlier times, and picked up the phone, ordering the passport returned. His next visitor was a Buddhist monk wanting help with foreign exchange to go overseas for medical treatment, and showed Sir John the US dollar notes he had purchased from the nice young man in the waiting room! Charlie went back to London where he was jailed for fraud, re-offended not long after his release (during which he married an English girl) and died in jail, reportedly having taken his own life.

Christine, Sitti's youngest child qualified

as a doctor, married the tennis player Selvadurai, and later migrated to Canada where the family has done well. Her son Shyam, won a Canadian Literary award for his first novel "Funny Boy", and is a recognized author.

The times and social conventions were kind to people like Sitti, and they did not descend into the depths, but were kept alive and to some degree happy in reduced circumstances, having once enjoyed life at the very top. Christopher Peiris who was a grandson of Sitti's brother Emmanuel, and probably remembered by some of our members as a young tea broker at Forbes and Walkers, was an alcoholic and died of cancer, in his early sixties, at the beginning of 2000. He always maintained that the curse of the Henley House Boys fell upon him.

...another Book Review



COUSINS. By Chitra Fernando.
Sarasavi Publishers.
207 Pages. Rs.250.00 in Sri Lanka

Reviewed by Shelagh Goonewardene

Towards the close of Chitra Fernando's novel "Cousins", a historical event is mentioned, the JVP insurgency of April 1971, this takes place in the foreground of the lives of her fictional characters. Reading the novel in April 2004 then becomes an instructive experience with a certain edge to it for the JVP has made history again by emerging as a major participant in a democratically elected government. While the novel is chiefly concerned with the making of the life choices of two cousins, Amitha and Veerani, and examining the consequences of their taking widely divergent paths, the reader is also made aware of the economic, social and political forces that are at work in the background against which their lives are viewed. They are caught up in the process of the larger changes that are taking place at this particular juncture in the history of the country, which culminated in the insurgency of 1971.

We first meet Amitha, the central character of the story as a young child of privileged parents who live

in the town of Kalutota, for which, read Kalutara, the writer's own birthplace and childhood home. There is something idyllic in Amitha's early days, surrounded by loving family members and close friends with all the security of a comparatively affluent traditional Sinhalese Buddhist home. The peace and stability are fatally disturbed by the sudden illness and death of Amitha's father. She is still protected from the shock by the love and support of her mother, grandmother and other close family and friends, but this direct experience and awareness of the Buddhist concept of impermanence has made its initial impact, and gradually becomes part of a psychological and spiritual perceptiveness which accompanies her development into womanhood.

Amitha and Veerani proceed to their university days at the western-oriented Peradeniya campus of the 1950s. While their lives are pleasant and fulfilling with their studies and extra-curricular activities such as taking part in Dram Soc plays, they are aware of students who come from poorer, rural homes whose urgent focus is on the jobs that they aspire to have as the main reward of their academic studies. Relationships between those who are the western educated elite and those educated in the mother tongue are somewhat strained. As Kushlani, a member of the former group, sees the situation: "...Sinhala culture versus European culture, nationalism versus colonialism, 'Maname' versus 'The Insect Play'."

What the writer depicts very accurately is the difference in attitudes and expectations between people who belong to the different classes that make up society. Resulting in the difficulties that inevitably sour their interactions with each other, leading to the discontents that simmer among those who are less privileged. This is highlighted again and again in incidents that are sensitively framed and effectively transferred to the printed page with Fernando's characteristic delicacy and craftsmanship.

Amitha and Veerani, with their student days now behind them move into the next stage of adulthood: choosing their respective paths in life. This is a major theme of the novel which is concerned with the process of growing up and finding one's vocation in life. Veerani chooses the conventional woman's path of marriage, home and family life in the upper reaches of society to which she has been born, and begins to exhibit certain complacency. Amitha also chooses a path that has been traditionally chosen by independent-minded women, that of a teacher and by virtue of her qualifications becomes an academic on the staff of the University at Peradeniya. Her choice however is influenced by

her consciousness of the social and political events taking place in the country and a strong individual response to them. She is eventually compelled to change direction, because of this, forsaking the possibility of marriage and academic distinction. Her path is a more dedicated and austere one, that of following her vocation as a writer. Complacency or self-indulgence will never be her lot.

In the inward perusal of her own nature and the values and beliefs that she has nurtured and been nurtured in, this vocation is her own way to happiness. She reflects: "The really important thing was not happiness but a ruling passion. Did not such a ruling passion save the poet, the visionary and the saint from the abyss of habit and routine by renewing them again and again?" It is clear that spiritual and altruistic elements have played their part in her choice which is rooted in a strong moral purpose.

This is a serious novel which depicts change, in the lives of individuals and in the life of society but there is also a sharply observed and loving commemoration of a certain way of life which held sway in the period between the 1940s and the 1960s in the small country towns of Sri Lanka, such as Kalutara. Fernando's linguistic skills enable her to capture the way people speak with an unerring ear and so her dialogue is delightful to read. Her ironic sense of humour adds to the reader's enjoyment. She writes well within her own experience and perhaps this is why there is no convincing character who has a passion for politics pictured in this novel. We can sense the need for political change but there is no indication of what form it could take.

The book is prefaced by Yasmine Gooneratne's comprehensive Introduction which tells the story of how this novel came to be published, a story that is worth knowing to all those who value Chitra Fernando's work. There is also a very useful and succinct account of the main facts and significant influences which inform the writer's life and work.

Chitra Fernando died in 1998. Long before that, she had received recognition as one of the finest writers of English fiction, especially of short stories, that Sri Lanka has produced. Her years in Australia strengthened and enhanced her gifts as a writer. She always told friends that while Sri Lanka shaped her soul it was Australia that gave her the freedom to write. Few expatriate writers have enriched the country of their birth to the extent that she has with the literary legacy she left behind.

Touch my life with the magic of thy fire..

Rabindranath Tagore 1861-1941

SYNOPSIS OF MEETINGS

Melbourne 7th March 2004

The Chairman, Dr. Srilal Fernando, introduced the speaker, Mr. Gerald Cooray, who had a long and distinguished career in education in Sri Lanka being a Cambridge graduate who taught at Royal College at one stage, and later was lecturer in History and English at the Maharagama Teacher Training College.

His subject was a significant book which is little known or remembered today but which he felt was a landmark event in publishing which deserved the attention of a contemporary audience.

In 1967 Mr. I.M.R.A. Irriyagolle who was the then Minister of Education in the UNP government headed by Dudley Senanayake made a historic decision. His idea was to compile a history of Education in Ceylon. The actual book was named *Education in Ceylon: A Centenary Volume 1869-1969*. Although the title suggested that the period covered was a hundred years – the scope of the book actually took in education in the country over two thousand five hundred years. It was published in 1969 in three volumes in English, Sinhalese and Tamil and contains over 100 chapters and more than 1300 pages. It came to be referred to as the ‘magnum opus’ of the Minister.

The Minister created a separate department within the Ministry to carry out the project of compiling the book and seeing it through to publication. Mr. U.D.I. Sirisena who was the Deputy Director of Education was named Editor-in-chief and Chairman of the Centenary Committee. Mr. Cooray was chosen to assist him and seconded from his teaching position at the Maharagama Teachers’ Training College to the Education Department, to work on the project.

In seeking contributions from eminent writers in the country, Mr. Cooray had interesting and sometimes entertaining experiences which he re-told for the audience’s edification. These experiences were many, so he limited himself to encounters with Mr. Irriyagolle himself, Mr. Sirisena and Dr. S. Paranavitana, the famous archaeologist. The latter became a good friend as a result.

The book was a special event as it featured contributions from a galaxy of luminaries of the time including E.W. Adikaram, Dr. Paranavitana, Rev. H. Ganawasa, Ananda Guruge, D.H. de A Wijeyasekera, C.M. Austin de Silva, Rev. Edmund Peiris, H.A.J. Hullugalle, J.R. Jayawardena, S.F. de Silva, G.P. Malalasekera, Gamini Corea and E.R. Sarachandra. The writers displayed a richness of spirit in their willing collaboration on this significant educational and cultural project for the benefit of the nation.

The different chapters contained a wide range of subjects such as:

Beginnings of the Sinhalese Alphabet, Architecture, Art and Sculpture, The learning of Pali and Sanskrit and its Influence on Sinhala Trends, Science and Technology, The Portuguese influence on the Study of the National Languages, Dawn of a New Era, Pearl of Great Price, Pirivenas, Archaeology, Museums, Mass Media

The book was launched by the Prime Minister, Dudley

Senanayake at a special ceremony and distributed to the main schools and libraries in Sri Lanka and to foreign institutions. However, as a SLFP government came into power in 1970, it dropped out of sight very quickly. Mr. Cooray felt that all efforts should be made to encourage the government of Sri Lanka to publish a new edition. He had accordingly written to Ranil Wickremasinghe, the former Prime Minister, and received an assurance that the request would be examined, and had been referred to the Ministry of Human Resource Development for a comprehensive report to be submitted to him. A spirited discussion and canvass of opinion among those present culminated in a proposal that the Society should officially write to the Prime Minister of Sri Lanka giving its support to publication of a new edition.

The second part of the meeting was devoted to the launching of E.C.T. ‘Manny’ Candappa’s book, *The Palm of His Hand*. The book was introduced to the audience by me in a short speech and duly launched. Manny was called upon to speak and he described the circumstances in which the book came to be written and the different people, including Mrs. Sirimavo Bandaranaike and Dr. P.R. Anthonis, whom he made a special trip to Sri Lanka to interview. This was very interesting background material to a prospective reader. The meeting ended with Manny signing copies of his book purchased by enthusiastic buyers. The evening concluded with the usual convivial tea and socialising.

Gerald Cooray drew the winning ticket for the raffle prize which was won by Darnley de Souza. 59 people attended the meeting.

Shelagh Goonewardene

Sydney 22nd February 2004

Sena Atukorale former Director Headworks Mahaweli Authority delivered a lecture on Irrigation works in Sri Lanka Ancient and Modern.

Sri Lanka has a history of irrigation works and development going back well over two thousand years. The speaker focused mainly on the irrigations works that were augmented by the Mahaweli Development Project undertaken by the Sri Lanka Government from the early 1970’s to the late 1980’s. He alluded to several different types of schemes, such as Storage Schemes and Diversion Schemes.

Among the earliest storage schemes is Basawakkulama, a city tank of Anuradhapura. It was previously known as Abhayawewa, and was constructed by King Pandukabhaya in around 430 BC. The area around Anuradhapura at that time was the recipient of only 50 to 75 inches of rain annually, and since it was “The King’s Country”, it was known as Rajarata. A major challenge in Rajarata was the securing of adequate water for paddy cultivation. Subsequent reservoirs such as Tissawewa (307 BC), Nuwarawewa (first century BC), and Nachchaduwa (commenced 866 AD) contributed to addressing this challenge.

The Kalawewa reservoir of the fifth century AD was a fine example of technical skill in that it conveyed water to the city tanks along a fifty two mile canal (Yoda Ela or Jaya Ganga) having a gradient of at times less than one foot per mile – a marvelous feat of surveying for that period!

As the reservoirs increased in size a major issue became erosion at the sluice due to the force of water emanating therefrom. This gave rise to another technical masterpiece, the "Bisokotowa", or Valve Pit. Sinhalese engineers could lay claim to having invented the Valve Pit more than 2,100 years ago! Examples of diversion schemes are the Elahara Minneriya Yoda Ela, and the Minipe Yoda Ela. These anicuts, or canals, served to connect irrigation schemes and divert precious water as required for paddy cultivation. The Minipe Yoda Ela for instance diverted and regulated the Mahaweli Ganga at Minipe. Exactly how this anicut was built across the mighty Mahaweli Ganga at the beginning of the first millennium AD is a mystery. The rock masonry dam raised the water in the river to enable the left bank canal to receive much needed irrigation water, thus also regulating the flow. Such patterns of irrigation existed for over a thousand years until Mahaweli water was diverted to this region in the late 1970's, thereby assuring farmers of an uninterrupted supply of water, resulting in self sufficiency in rice and other subsidiary foods like chili, onion, cow pea, green gram, soya, gherkins etc for the whole nation.

Coming to modern times: studies were carried out in 1958 on the Mahaweli Project by USOM and the Canadian Hunting Survey Corporation for a complete utilization of the water resources of the Mahaweli Ganga as a multi purpose project for irrigation, flood protection and hydro power. The UNDP appointed the FAO to carry out the surveys. The final report together with the Master Plan to be implemented over a 30 year period was completed in 1969.

After his victory at the polls in 1977, President J.R. Jayawardena accompanied by Minister Gamini Dissanayake, after immersing themselves in the project details together with all the Engineers and Administrators involved, including the speaker, posed the challenge: could the project be done in six years? The unequivocal response was yes, provided the funding and equipment were forthcoming. This resulted in a chorus of appeals to the international and donor community, which resulted in a massive flow of aid for the completion of the project – by then known as the AMP, or Accelerated Mahaweli Project. During project work, the remains of an ancient dam and sluice virtually mirroring the proposed new structures were discovered beneath the Maduru Oya Scheme, posing the enigma how did the ancient Sinhalese engineers of the first century BC locate the site and execute the work which their modern counterparts had used so much modern equipment, including aerial photography, to discover?

Chris Piachaud

For the benefit of members, a full transcript of Sena Atukorale's lecture will be published in Journal 27

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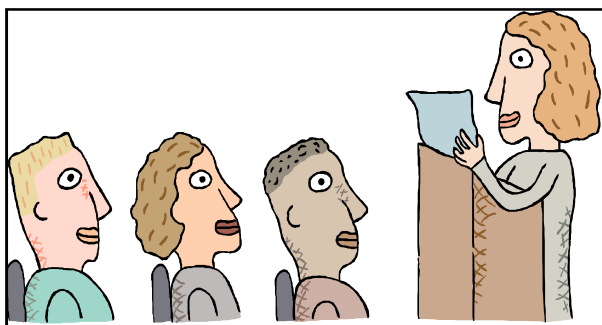
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NEXT SYDNEY MEETING

Sunday 6th June 2004 at 6.30 p.m

**Tony Peries former CEO and Chairman
of George Steuart & Co**

will speak on:

"Some aspects of commerce
in the late 19th & 20th centuries
in Sri Lanka"

followed by

**Jayantha Jayewardene, Managing Trustee
of the Biodiversity & Elephant
Conservation Trust of Sri Lanka**

who will speak on

"The Biodiversity of Sri Lanka".

Hornsby Bowling Club

22, Waitara Avenue
access only from Alexandria Parade

Meeting will be followed by a light supper. Volunteers offering plates please contact Social Convenor Chandra on 9872 6826

RSVP Hugh 9980 2494, Chris 9498 2158

NEXT MELBOURNE MEETING

TO BE ADVISED

How to become a member of the Ceylon Society of Australia

Contact Rienzie Fonseka
25 Clanwilliam Street Eastwood NSW 2122
Ph: Int +61 2 9874 0146
E-mail: winston@secura.com.au
and request an application form

In search of speakers

The committee would welcome nominations of knowledgeable and academic persons to speak at our regular meetings, both in Sydney and Melbourne. You may have friends, relations who live in or visit Australia. Our calendar for the year is February/March - April/May, September/October and November/December. Dates can be arranged to suit availability of eminent speakers. Please contact President Hugh Karunanayake on 02 9980 2494 - fax 02 9980 7630 or
E-mail: karu@idx.com.au

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"THE CEYLANKAN" is published quarterly. Every effort is made to print material that is relevant and correct, but we do not take responsibility for errors. The editorial committee would appreciate if inaccuracies are brought to its attention. Original material is sought, preferably of an anecdotal, historical nature, but any material will be considered provided it contributes to the Society's ideals of being non racial, non-political, non-religious, and non-controversial.

Where applicable, contributors are requested to annotate bibliographical references to facilitate further research & study by interested members.

The Editorial Committee of THE CEYLANKAN, at its discretion, now accepts advertisements for products and services suitable for our members. Those related to genealogy, antiquarian and contemporary books, maps, art, memorabilia, and other collectibles are welcome. For further details and rates please contact Publications Officer Mike Udabage at Int + 61 2 9902 2774
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