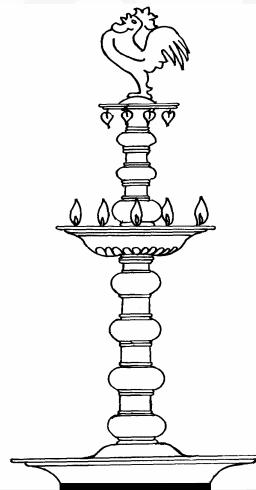


THE CEYLANKAN



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EDITORIAL



We have a First in this issue. Three members of the same family have contributed stories based on their childhood and beyond, relating everyday events in evocative terms. The most mundane of events take on a sparkle displaying a consummate skill with the written word. The oldest of the siblings goes back almost three score years and ten to his starting point.

The Devendras are not strangers to our readers, but for the first time we have Tissa (who I am told is currently recuperating after a heart by-pass surgery), fol-

lowed by Somasiri and their sister Ransiri all in one issue. Coincidentally, Tissa's book "On Horseshoe Street" is also reviewed in this issue by Prof Yasmine Gooneratne. To borrow a phrase from her "The reader who enters the world of Sri Lanka in the 1950s in the company of such a gifted story-teller as Tissa Devendra is fortunate indeed." We think this applies to other siblings too, but let the reader decide.

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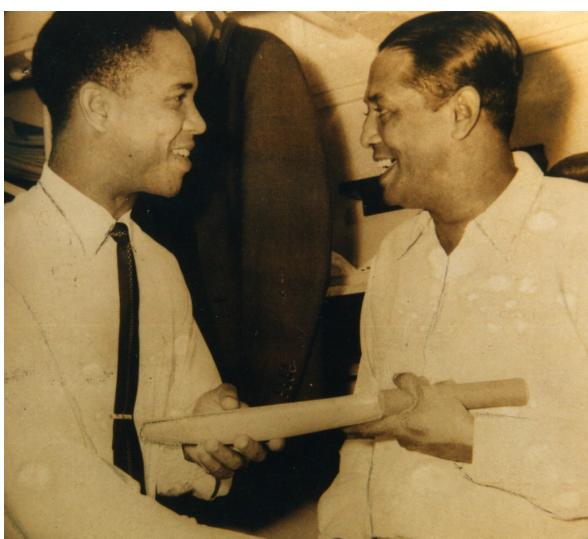


THE JUDGE.
[From a Sketch by John K.L. Vandort.]

Mahadeva Sathasivam, Playboy Cricketers and the Guinness Book

by Michael Roberts

Lankan cricket-buffs have recently been discussing the cricketing capacities of Mahadeva Sathasivam of the Tamil Union and Ceylon. I have never seen Satha, as he was widely known, bat. But my researches have revealed some facets of his career. And I happen to have beautiful sepia-tone picture of Garfield Sobers and Satha (see below) exchanging pleasantries in Lanka during the early 1960s. From the evident warmth of



Sobers & Satha
Pic courtesy ANCL

this occasion my conjecture is that this event and its rapport was rendered possible by stories conveyed to Sobers by the Barbadians in the West Indian teams that had toured Sri Lanka in the Sathasivam era – notably the three Ws. It is on record that Worrell considered Satha “the best batsman he had ever seen” (C H Gunasekara, *The Willow Quartette*, Colombo: Sumathi Publishers, 1996, p. 57).

In any event octogenarians and observers of that era make it clear that the debonair “Satha,” was twinkle-toes, all class and finesse as batsman. Indeed, folklore suggests that Ghulam Ahmed considered him the best batsman he had ever bowled to. The statistics provided by Jason in the Dilmah Forum indicate why. And before someone decries all this as park cricket, let me assure people that when the Muslims played the Rest of India in year whatever in the 1940s, they did so as Ranji Trophy champions. In

brief, it was the equivalent of, say, New South Wales playing the Rest of Australia after they had won the Sheffield Shield. In short, one had the best sub-continental cricketers on display.

So too did the Bombay Pentangular Gymkhana of the 1930s draw some of the sub-continental best. One needs to peruse Ramachandra Guha’s books to gain a sense of this world of cricket. The fact that some Ceylon cricketers were invited to participate was recognition by Indian cricket circles of the quality of a few Ceylon players.

As for Sathasivam’s capacities, let me add two conclusive illustrations. Firstly, he scored 101 runs in 1944 for the Rest of India versus the Hindus, the All-India champions in that year (even though he was technically unqualified – for he was a Hindu!). Secondly, he made a masterly 111 runs in difficult conditions against the full complement of Indian bowlers under Vijay Merchant at the Unofficial Test Match between India and Ceylon in 1945 and a remarkable 96 runs out of a total of 153 when the Ceylon side struggled against a visiting Commonwealth team on a rain-affected pitch in February 1950. As any cricket lover knows, it is a solid score when all around you fail that reveals the best batsmen.

So, as others within the Dilmah Forum have stressed, the foundations for Sri Lanka’s capacities were being laid in the 1930s and 1940’s. Young F C de Saram scored a brilliant 128 out of Oxford’s total of 218 against Woodfull’s Australian team in 1934; made 50 and 122 not out for the Rest of India vs the Muslims in 1937; and scored masterly centuries for the SSC when they played Madras and Baroda on their tour of India in 1945. Again the Ceylon Cricket Association’s trip to Madras to play South India in January 1947 was a triumphant occasion: Sri Lanka scored 521 for 7 with Sathasivam playing what many considered to be the finest innings ever seen at the Chepauk grounds up to that date, 215 runs in 248 minutes; and then dismissed the local side for 197 and 200, with RL de Kretser (off spin) and LE de Zoysa (right arm leg spin) as main destroyers. Ghulam Ahmed’s evaluation of Satha undoubtedly developed from his encounters with him on some of these occasions.

Fun and Games

Satha was also a superb ballroom dancer. In personality and panache he had so much in common with such cricketers as Sobers, Denis Compton and Keith Miller – both on and off the field.

These were young men about town, virile playboys, each a debonair Don Juan with a taste for wine, women and song. Legends grow around such men.

Neville de Silva picks up on one of these stories when he speaks of gallivanting Satha going out to bat and making a century after a night out on the town and without much sleep. His purpose, alas, seems to be a celebration of the generation yester-year and a belittling of the players today. Though I played cricket with Neville, I do not share this attitude and indeed, take exception to the disparaging tone of his essay and the whimsical insertion of irrelevant matter such as the con-job engineered by a Lankan handball team who beat the immigration laws to reach Germany. But that is of less importance than the issue at stake. The issue of discipline and fitness among cricketers must necessarily attend to differences in each era and its expectations. In the 1930s and 1940s cricketers had more leeway in their off-field activities and were not under public scrutiny to the same degree as in recent times. No more so than in Ceylon those days where the game was an amateur and elitist pastime.

Again, while old-timers and young pups may argue about the comparative batting and bowling skills of stars of the 1940s and those of 2004 till the cows come home, I believe that there is one field within which, on average, today's cricketers stand head and shoulders above those of the 1940s: that of fielding. True, there were natural athletes (Learie Constantine say) who were mercurial fielders. But the average level of athleticism and fine-honed skills revealed today surely exceeds that of the average cricketer of bygone days. It is because of this standard of excellence that critics frown on excessive drinking and fornication on match days. One could, of course, make an argument for fornication in moderation with a regular lover as being helpful. I go further: I affirm that it is as beneficial as exhilarating. One can be rendered purring-satisfied in ways that enable calm focus towards the fresh task at hand or, alternatively, one can be fired up for the new day. But a night of s...g (serially or otherwise) probably generates exhaustion. I have no experience in the booze field as I dislike the stuff, but I suspect that it is broadly true to say that excessive drinking slows the reflexes in the same manner as marijuana smoking. And as for hard drugs, I gather they do dull/skew the senses.

So one must attend to the legends about playboys

Satha, Sobers, Miller and others with some measure of reservation. Apocryphal tales are selective. They omit those moments when a night of revelry led to a dismal performance as cricketer. And especially as fielder. On the authority of a Barbadian friend, Joe Hoad, who played with Sobers, I am ready to grant that that guy's reflexes were so extraordinary that his fielding may not have suffered much after an all-night binge. But Satha? I suspect that he was a prima donna on the field, given to laziness even on the best days. [And subsequently Neville Jayaweera has confirmed this speculation: "Satha was a hopeless fielder, never chased a ball, dropped catches and all because for most of the time he was drunk."] So, his all-night revelry compounded his tendency to let his team down on the field. With the cricketer of today, whether Joe Bloggs or Joe Perera, therefore, cricket lovers have the right to demand moderation and discipline in extra-curricular activities. Too much is at stake nowadays. The libertarianism of yesteryear does not prevail to the same extent.

Ironies of Circumstance

In a controversial decision the Ceylon Cricket Association selected Mahadeva Sathasivam of the Tamil Union to lead the All-Ceylon XI when Bradman's team of Invincibles played a one-day whistle-stop game on 30th March 1948 when their P & O liner paused at Colombo as it vended its way to England. F C de Saram of the Sinhalese Sports Club was senior to Sathasivam and had been expected to lead. The contretemps and repercussions surrounding this decision is another story.

The story I relate is of a different order. Five years later, when Lindsay Hassett's team played All-Ceylon on 30th March 1953 while enroute to England, the captain was F C de Saram. And what of Satha? He was in jail charged with murdering his wife. Let me assure readers that Sathasivam was not the culprit. Indeed, he was acquitted and subsequent events have confirmed that it was a domestic servant named William who had been responsible – he committed another murder. Grapevine gossip suggests that the police authorities led by Sir Richard Aluwihare were directed by tunnel-vision. The thick respectability and prudery of middle class society at that time, a mixture of Victorian Puritanism and Buddhist reformism, encouraged some vengeful blindness. Satha had penetrated so many bedrooms that high society looked askance at the man.

There are other asides to this tale however. Australian journalists travelled with their team to cover the Ashes. Fingleton had been one of the journal-



Satha not guilty—flanked by his lawyers

Pic courtesy ANCL

ists who watched the Don and Satha toss the coin in 1948. He was present in Colombo in 1953 as well. And he had the savvy to discover that Satha was in jail and to insert this fact into his match report (see *Roberts & James Crosscurrents*, 1998, p. 83). Fingleton could not have foreseen a supreme irony: that the Ceylon captain in 1953 would also be jailed. F C de Saram had been a senior officer in the Army for some part of his adult life, and after he transferred to the Army Reserves as a civilian, he was drafted into military service during the troubled times of the early 1960s when the government had declared emergency rule as part of its struggle against the agitations of the Left. F C de Saram then became one of the leaders in a military *coup d'état* in January 1962 – as a segment of the elitist English-educated classes attempted to turn back the trend of populist nationalism which had brought the reins of government into the hands of forces representing Sinhala linguistic nationalism. Well, this coup was aborted at the eleventh hour because a leak (and what else could one expect in Ceylon!) disclosed their plans. F C was man enough to say *mea culpa*. So he spent the best part of the 1960s in jail till a legal technicality of the same order as the Bali trials in Djakarta and the Privy Council of UK's diktat saved his bacon (literally for FC liked his bacon and eggs).

This must surely be a record worthy of an entry in the Guinness Book of Records, or maybe, many pints in many an Irish pub. Two Ceylon captains who had the privilege of leading their country against the famous Australian cricketers both spent time in jail. Cheers mate

Oh! To be a Policeman

by Vama Vamadevan

As the son of a Railwayman myself, my father having been a Stationmaster, I enjoyed reading Victor Melder's article on the Railway (Ceylankan: No:32). I served in the Police in Sri Lanka, and this prompted me to go down memory lane of my own days in the Police. I propose to recount some of the funny situations we found ourselves in, whilst doing the strenuous day to day work, very often round the clock. There was no overtime and no bouquets either. The only reward was the hearty laugh we often had. Reflecting on our Police days, very often it was like watching a re-run of the two Ronnies.

The Ceylon Police, as it was known when we joined the service, had very hardworking, able and industrious officers at all levels who worked for a pittance of a pay cheque. What Napoleon said to a British Commander almost 200 years ago sounds true; "A soldier will fight long and hard for a bit of coloured ribbon". I sometimes wonder what we Policemen were working for – promotions?

There were many that joined the Police in the good old days without knowing a word of English. An Inspector once told me that when he joined as a Police Constable (PC) his entries in the Information book used to be written by other officers in English and he merely placed his thumb impression. Many of them learnt their English the hard way, mostly with the help of a dictionary. I know of one such Officer who rose to be head of the C.I.D. One officer made an entry that a witness was 'inclined to believe'. When the Officer-in-Charge (OIC), questioned him as to what he meant by 'inclined to believe' and said "either a witness knows or doesn't know, what is there to be inclined to believe?". The PC said that the witness was reclining on a sofa when he said so, and hence he noted down he was inclined to believe.

Ramanathan was a handsome young SI and reputed Ruggerite. He was OIC Galaha Police Station in the late 1950s. There were numerous petitions against him of assault. So the Superintendent, Carl van Rooyen called up Rama and said that this cannot go on like this and wanted some-

thing done about the avalanche of complaints. Rama, gave him an assurance that he would see to it and that the SP could rest assured that no more petitions would follow. The fatherly Van Rooyen was satisfied. True enough there were no more petitions for about two weeks. Then came a handwritten petition. It alleged the writer was the local Petition drawer and that he was assaulted and his typewriter taken by Rama and thrown into the river. This sort of summary solution to problems was not uncommon in those days gone by.

Even Judges overlooked a few excesses for the greater good. Sidney de Zoysa was an institution in the Police. He left behind a tapestry of legend. Accused persons were not treated with a velvet glove in those days – least of all by Sidney. There was this day when Sidney was giving evidence in the Tangalle courts as ASP-in-charge of the investigation in a murder case.

Magistrate: Officer, what made the accused person to hand over the weapon to you voluntarily?

Sidney: (Playing the role of a virgin in a brothel) When you speak kindly to a man sir, accused persons assist the Police.

Magistrate: (suppressing a smile) Thank you Mr de Zoysa for elucidating this point. (Loud laughter in court).

Chief Inspector Elmo de Silva was the Personal Assistant to Sidney de Zoysa at one stage and he figured out that the only way to survive Sidney's daily harangue was to pretend deafness. Every time Sidney rebuked him he would cup his ears with the palm and say "Pardon Sir". This routine took the wind out of Sidney's wrath making him more angry like a frill necked lizard. Soon, Sidney suspected that this was a ruse by Elmo and decided to test him. One morning he called Elmo to his office and whispered, "you can take the afternoon off". An elated Elmo promptly saluted him and thanked him for it. The cat was out of the bag.

Police witnesses were a slippery lot. They gave the legal fraternity as much as they took. There was this fatal accident in Horana Police station involving a Police Heavy Truck (H/T). One day the Inspector-in-charge decided that his staff needed a break from their arduous duties and organised a picnic for his entire staff. Just one PC did Reserve duties and was asked to hold the fort. The party was a success and everyone was well 'oiled' by the time they decided to return. On the

way back, the driver probably well past the alcohol limit, drove like a Kamikaze and went off the road at a bend. One Officer was pinned under the H/T and died instantaneously. In the meantime, the MP for the area had rung the Police station and wanted to speak to the OIC. He was told by the Reserve PC that every one was out at a party and that he was the only one at the station and therefore could not help him. At the inquest, the MP, a Marxist (that would be Karl not Groucho) the sort of person that most policemen would love to hate, was the star witness to prove that the vehicle went off the road after the officers had a party and not while giving chase to a 'kassipu' (bootleg) vehicle as alleged by the Police. After the MP gave his evidence about his telephone conversation, the whole case depended on the Reserve PC corroborating what the MP said. At the inquest the Reserve PC was put the million-dollar question. "Did you not tell the MP that the OIC and the whole staff were out at a party?" The Reserve PC coolly replied, "No your honour, I said the OIC has gone out WITH a party and not FOR a party". The day was saved for the Police.

Many former British officers remember their days in the Ceylon Police with nostalgia. Mr. Cartlidge, now living in Naucoso Bay, Columbia, Canada, wrote once to a Police magazine about the commonsense detection some constables used to make in Sri Lanka. A Dhobi's (washerman's) premises were burgled and uniforms of some British Army officers had gone with it. Constable Abdeen took up investigations and the prime suspect was one Pandyan, and the information was that he was just about to decamp to Colombo. Abdeen went to the Kandy Railway station in civvies and saw a milling crowd waiting for the Colombo bound train. Abdeen climbed a heap of mailbags and yelled out 'Pandyan, Pandyan'. A man responded and Abdeen got his man and recovered the stolen clothes.

During British times, the then Ceylon Police had its quota of eccentric officers just as in post colonial days. Some of them were good men, I mean good for nothing. Some were as nutty as fruitcake. Constable Jamaldeen was office orderly to one such eccentric officer. When an Officer from Headquarters went to this outpost Jamaldeen was inconsolably pleading for a transfer. He looked like death warmed up. The officer was asking for the reasons and Jamaldeen was not forthcoming with a satisfactory answer. When Jamaldeen was finally coaxed, he took the officer to a back room

door and showed some marks made by a pointed object on the door and said ‘all done by ASP Sir’. “So what about these marks”?, he was asked, and “what has this got to do with your transfer”? Jamaldeen reluctantly said: “I have to stand against the door while the ASP throws the knife”. Jamaldeen took six more weeks after his transfer to return to work.

Even on the street on foot patrol it is not all drudgery. There is always the lighter side to compensate. Come Easter and the fisher folk in Negombo have Passion plays going into the thin hours of the morning. In one such play, Roman soldiers were crucifying Christ. Mother Mary, played by a fisherman dressed as a woman, was crying inconsolably. Even the onlookers wept unashamedly at this touching scene. Then suddenly, the hammer from the Roman soldier’s hand slipped and fell on Mother Mary’s knee with a thunderous clank. The young fisherman, playing the role of Mary, sprang up on one leg in fury, shaking his fist at the Roman soldier and gave vent in picturesque sea front language, punctuated with descriptions of the female genitalia that would have made even a hardened sailor blush.

Talking of stage plays, there was a Sinhala version of Shakespeare’s ‘Othello’ being staged in the form of a ‘nadagama’ down Dematagoda. A very popular local actor played the role of Othello and could enact the suicide scene very realistically, plunging the dagger into his breast by craftily sending it down between his arm and chest. On the opening day he did not disappoint his audience. When the tragic climax arrived he did it perfectly and got a standing ovation, for the suspense was intense and realistic. After the stunned silence the audience shouted ‘encore! encore!’. The showman in the actor got the better of him and he could not resist this call. He rose again and stabbed himself again.

F.N.D.Jilla in his book *Without fear or favour* (2001) relates the story of how Halland, the IGP, was specially sent from the London Metropolitan Police to reform the Ceylon Police. It was thought, at that time, that the Police Department was drifting damaged and rudderless and virtually in a *cul de sac*. Halland, in one of his sweeping changes thought that more Englishmen should fill the rank of Superintendent. There were several English ASPs, and by a stroke of the pen, he promoted all of them as S Ps. G. A. K. Rockwood too was promoted over the heads of C.C (Jungle) Dissanayake, S.A.Dissanayake (Jingle) and R. E.

Blaze. Before Rockwood assumed Office, he reckoned that courtesy demanded that he report to the IGP before taking over his new posting. When Halland saw a not so English looking Rockwood, he almost fell off the chair screaming ‘What!! you are Rockwood, I thought you were an Englishman?’ Halland wasn’t aware there were Wadsworths, Ankitels, Shakespeares, Dickens, MacIntyres etc. among the Tamils.

Life was good in the Ceylon Police in the days gone by and effective service delivered to the public. The methods would have horrified the modern day human rights wallahs but it served the people at that time and served well too.



In the Forbidden Forest

by Tissa Devendra

Before Horseshoe Street hugged our family to its asphalt bosom, our home in 1937 was in Udwattekele – the ‘Tahanam Vanaya’- the Forbidden Forest of Kandy Royal Royalty, where the common man was forbidden to enter this demesne of the Dalada and Raja Maligawas - on pain of death. Colonial inroads had whittled away its huge extent and its sanctity. A road was carved into its very heart, scattered with charming bungalows and as was customary in that era, named after the wife of a now-forgotten colonial administrator – Lady McCarthy’s Road.

We moved into No.11, owned by an interesting old (or so she seemed to us children) Burgher spinster, Miss V, who had inherited two houses down a sloping hillside. We had to go down 83 steps to our house. I first went down these steps on the sturdy shoulders of Kadiravel , ‘our’ rickshaw man who gave us a ride to school in Palace Square and waited, like a fond uncle, to bring us back home safe and sound. Three of us were little enough to fit into his rickshaw. Although the eldest, only I qualified to being carried down the steps as I was just after an appendectomy – and step climbing was strictly forbidden till full recovery, as per Dr. Daniel Silva’s orders. Some 20 further steps down lived Miss V and her crazy sister ‘Aunty Nora’ in a house overrun with fowls (as chooks were then called) and foul with the stink of chicken droppings. Their overgrown garden was overrun with snails that slithered into their ill-kept house and became fair prey for Aunty Nora who stomped on them, providing us with a rather queasy spectator sport as snail shells crackled under her clogs. Their remains were the protein intake of their straggly ‘fowls’.

Green Fingers

Mother loved gardening and the flower beds in front of our house and the little terraces that bordered the 83 steps gave her ‘green fingers’ ample scope. This was a gardener’s paradise to her, after battling the heat and dust of Colombo – in spite of which she raised zinnias, stunning enough to be pictured in a striking crayon drawing which won a prize at the Ceylon Society of Arts and now graces our walls. Dahlias became her forte in this garden and the wild peppery scent of these

mini-cabbages of many colours waft into my memory when I recall that time. The centuries of leaf droppings enriching the soil and the gentle moisture of the evening mist that drifted up from the valley below were the main partners in her success as a gardener. Our home bordered a precipitous drop which, strangely, did not seem to bother my parents although, not very long ago, I had fallen down a hill and cracked my skull. They probably believed that lightning does not strike twice! (It did not.) Alongside that perpendicular slope, deep-rooted in the valley below, flourished a massive nutmeg tree and the fruits that fell from it gave us much fun. The pulp was too bitter to eat, but the large round seeds with their cob-webby tracery of mace, became our toys.

Dog Doings

Having spent most of her life in the law-abiding confines of Colonial Colombo, Mother was a paragon of civic consciousness. Although Municipal inspectors rarely ventured towards the somewhat elite, and quite out-of-the-way, residences of Lady McCarthy’s Road, Mother insisted on buying a licence for Patch, our dog, hanging it round his neck on an impressive leather collar. She also naively observed the Municipal regulation that licensed dogs should only be let loose when muzzled, so that they could bite nobody. Patch was, therefore, duly muzzled and unleashed at night. It was, for Mother, a searing experience when a whimpering Patch came back badly bitten by the local curs that had enjoyed a field-day attacking this outsider who could not bite back. She lost faith in the infallibility of Municipal regulations. After attending to Patch’s battle scars she, reluctantly, gave into Father’s urgings and let loose into the unfriendly night, a now-unmuzzled Patch. He came back triumphant the next morning, battle-scarred but victorious over the mangy curs who mistakenly tried to attack him again. As time passed, we learnt that he had become the leader of the dog-pack of Udwattekele.

Snapshots

Around this time Father discovered the joys of photography and bought his first camera the German Agfa, unheard of today. He set about his hobby with enthusiasm having read its booklet of instructions. The family snapshots, as they were then called, of that period that yet bravely clings on to a tattered album, are an interesting record of his progress. The earliest show the family cheerfully grinning at the cameraman, but either out of focus or with somebody bisected. There was a fragile tripod on which he gingerly bal-

anced his Agfa, activated its remote controlled timer and rushed to pose with us – but the resulting snapshot guillotined him! Another picture survives of us children, me with a pop-gun, perched on a stuffed leopard, which had somehow found its way into our ‘ahimsa’ household. After all this experimentation, Father developed into a pretty good photographer. He invested in a Rolleiflex which he took along on his travels to little-known historic sites and used to effectively illustrate his newspaper articles.

Caravan People

Off-beat people intrigued Father and none more so than an elderly English pair, the Wrights (if I am not wrong !) who lived in a solitary bungalow deep in the forest. They had a unique vehicle, a motor caravan with bunk-beds, kitchenette and cutely curtained windows which we waved at as it passed us on its way for week-long safaris to distant jungly places devoid of rest-houses. One evening, Father called on this very English eccentric brother and sister, and had a long chat about their travels. I had tagged along and their conversation did not interest me as much as the antics of their mascot, a ‘rilawa’ (monkey) who was their constant companion at home and in caravan. I seem to remember their house as being on the shore of the darkly mysterious lake nestling in the heart of the forest. Somehow Father never got down to writing anything about this strange pair and all I have is a hazy boyhood memory of a tall, lean and withered Englishman and Englishwoman [the first I had ever met] looking rather like the pictures of Virginia and Leonard Woolf.

The Forest

We lived our life within the green immensity of the Forbidden Forest. Huge trees cast dappled shadows on the red gravel paths of our evening rambles. Gigantic trees reached for the sky while gnarled and sinuous lianas, like pythons, snaked down their trunks and lost themselves in the flourishing undergrowth of strange leaved plants sprinkled with exotic blooms of red and yellow. High up in the branches wreathed in trailing orchids, troops of chattering monkeys leapt from tree to tree. Chewing on ripe fruits, far beyond our reach, they grimacingly flung half-chewed fruit at us in response to our childish shrieks. The hum of cicadas and the occasional trilling of birds was constant background music in the forest. On moonlit nights, the eerie howling of jackals sent shivers down our childish spines. Occasionally we caught glimpses of a man with a sack who slunk off in haste as soon as he sensed our presence.

Before long we learnt that this was Mahatun, breaking the law by foraging for “forest produce” [in the officialese I used in prosecuting his ‘descendants’ some decades later]. He sold his surreptitiously gathered herbs, seeds and firewood to earn his livelihood. Far below, in the valley where our nutmeg tree was rooted, was the cluster of huts where Mahatun lived. Once in a while we saw a flustered crowd of villagers and heard shouts and cries signaling a raid on Mahatun by khaki uniformed Forest Officers. If he could not dodge them he surrendered in accustomed fashion, served his term in jail and promptly resumed the only ‘profession’ he ever knew.

Paradise is never forever. Sadly we left the ‘green aisles’ of the Forbidden Forest for an asphalt encircled house in the heart of the town. But its memory yet flowers in my imagination and dreams.

A letter to a young grand-niece

The Pot of Gold or The Boy Who Was Made a Man

by Somasiri Devendra

This is the story of your great-grandfather, Peter, and his sister, your great-grandmother Emily. It really starts with their parents: Simanhamy, their father and Sanchi, their mother, so I will start with them.

Simanhamy was a gemologist who was highly respected. His sister was married to Don Theodoris Weerasiri who had his own Jewellery firm. Simanhamy was a partner in the business, which was famous worldwide. They had won medals at international exhibitions in Europe and even in America. (One day, an American e-mail friend told me that his grandfather, who was master of a ship called the *Lottie Moore*, had bought an engagement ring from the shop of D.T. Weerasiri in Colombo and he has sent me photographs of the ring, which had been bought in 1897 and also of the bill of sale! Would you like to see them?)

Anyway, Simanhamy was very clever and made a lot of money but he was too fond of whisky. So, very often, he would come home after too many

drinks and fall asleep before he could even change into his night clothes. Sanchi, the clever wife, would then search his pockets. Because, inside them, she would find money, often find gold sovereigns. (These are almost pure gold coins minted in England which were, and are still, melted down to make jewellery. Simanhamy was paid in gold sovereigns.) But Sanchi did not use these to make jewellery for herself. She was collecting money as insurance against a time when they might not have enough money. So she collected them till she had a whole lot of coins. Then, one day, she called her daughter, Emily, to join her in a women-only secret. She had a clay pot which she showed Emily. "Now", she said, "Some day it might be that we will be in need of money. If not now, when you have grown up. So I want this to be a secret between you and me. I – no, we – are going to bury this pot so that, when the bad times come, you or I will know where to find the money." She showed the pot, which was full, to Emily who saw it brimful of shiny silver rupee coins (a rupee, in Sri Lanka, is a coin that is like a dollar in America). So the two of them went to a particular spot in the house, removed a brick from the floor, dug a hole, buried the pot, covered it and put back the brick. (Only, they did not put an "X" on it!).

Some time later, Simanhamy died. They were quite well-off even after that. Sanchi took over as head of the house and started to expand the house. It was she who completed the Galle house today, in 1913. (I told you that Punchi Achchi's second name is "Sanchi". She has the ornate wardrobe that used to belong to the first Sanchi. And – would you believe it? – that has got two secret drawers!). But soon after that, poor Sanchi also died, leaving the two children orphans (Emily may have been nine or 10 and Peter about seven or eight).

The really sad part of their life began then. They were looked after by an Uncle who did not really like them, but because they had money, which he could use as long as he looked after them. He was interested only in their money, not in them. So they lived with this Uncle and his wife for seven or eight years, till Peter was fifteen years old. Although they had had money when they were orphaned, the greedy Uncle finished it little by little. The houses and lands he could not sell. They were always being told that there was no more money to look after them. Then he would take a piece of the jewellery that Simanhamy had made for Sanchi, or Emily, and sell it.

One such day, the greedy Uncle and Aunt took a necklace of Emily's to sell it. It was a string of matched pearls that Emily had been given as a birthday present. She begged of them not to sell it.

"Oh! Please don't sell it!" she cried, "This is the last thing I have to remember my mother and father by".

But they only repeated:

"We can't look after you, buy you clothes, give you to eat and send you to school if we don't have the money."

It was then that Emily remembered the pot of money Sanchi and she had buried years ago.

"If you want money, I'll show you where it is – but you must give my necklace back to me" she said.

So the greedy pair followed her to the place where the money was. Emily knelt down, scraped round the brick and removed it, dug up the pot and stood up holding the pot up high. She could still see the silver rupees up to the brim.

"If it is money you want," she said, "here's the money!"

- and dashed the pot on the floor!

Her heart sank! It was not silver rupees that it was full of, but gold sovereigns that glittered and bounced and rolled all over the floor with the greedy pair scrambling after them. Sanchi had only covered the top of the pot with silver rupees.

Anyway, some good came of it because, for a couple of years, the children were looked after. But even a pot-full of gold can become empty soon if you don't look after it carefully. So there came the day when the last of the sovereigns had been sold and bad times began again. The children were going to school at that time and the fees had to be paid regularly. In those days, if you did not pay your fees, you could not go to school. The greedy uncle paid the fees only once in a way, and that also, not in full. So day by day, the money that he owed the school became bigger and bigger and one day the Principal of Peter's school called him up and said that he could not come to school again till he had paid the fees. Poor Peter! But Peter was not to be defeated. He

set out to see whether he could find some money. You remember the Galle house that Sanchi built? Well, that had been given out on rent and that was one of the ways in which money came to the greedy Uncle. (There were other houses, too, but this was the biggest.) So Peter went there, with his school books in hand, and asked to see the tenant, a Mr. De Silva. Now, Mr. De Silva was a very important man. He worked in the District Court as a Registrar and most people considered him almost a king! That day, for some reason, he was going to Courts late and was seated outside, in the verandah pulling on his boots. He looked at his young visitor curiously.

"Good morning, Mr. De Silva" said the visitor

"Good morning to you, too, young man, and what brings you here today?"

"I've come for the house rent, Mr. De Silva", said Peter.

Mr. De Silva paused. There was something funny here, and he wanted to find out.

"I'm sorry, son, but it is not due today and I don't have the money. But tell me.....why are you not at school today? You have your books with you – you should be in class. Have you been skipping school?"

Peter was not annoyed. He was a good student, and he was desperately sad.

"No Mr. De Silva, it is not that. I go to school every day. But..but today..today I was told not to come till I can pay my fees. That's why I came here to collect the rent."

Mr. De Silva was a strict but kind man, who had children of his own. He was determined to get to the bottom of the story.

"Hmmm.... I don't have the money to give you now, but come here tomorrow at this time and I'll have it ready for you."

Peter had nothing to do but go home. But Mr. De Silva found a lot of things to do. As soon as he went to Courts, he called all the people who worked for him and gave them special work to do. One person was to find out all about the greedy uncle. Another was told to find out about any other uncles or aunts of Peter and Emily. Still another was to find out the extent of property and wealth that they had. He, himself, telephoned

the Principal of Peter's school and checked the story about the fees. He learnt that the boy was a clever student who studied hard.

When he found out all that, Mr. Silva asked the District Judge whether he could speak to him privately. In the Judge's Chambers (which is the word for a Judge's private office) Mr. Silva explained the situation of Peter to the Judge and asked him for advice. The two of them examined the problem in detail and, finally, came up with an answer.

The next day – the day which changed Peter's life – Peter came to Mr. Silva's house at the correct time. Mr. De Silva was dressed and waiting for him.

"Son, I now know how difficult things are for you. I am sorry I did not know this before, because I could have helped. Now, we are going to do something about it. But you have to make me a promise. You must give me your word that you will study hard and that you will carry out all the other work I am going to give you. And you must promise that you will look after your sister well, even if she is older than you. Don't worry, I will be keeping an eye on you. Do I have your word? Hmm?"

Peter could only nod, silently. He was bewildered.

"Right. Now get into the carriage with me. We are going to meet a very special person."

And so, Mr. De Silva and Peter clip-clopped their way by carriage to the District Court. There, they went into the Judges Chambers where the Judge was waiting for him in wig and gown.

"Young man," said the Judge, "I've been hearing a lot about you. Now I want to hear all about this from you. Tell me everything from the time your mother died"

Peter was scared, felt very lonely and tongue-tied. But Mr. De Silva spoke to him kindly and, finally, he found himself speaking.

The Judge listened carefully. When the story was over, he said:

"Well, Peter, we are going to change all that. In future, you will not stay with your uncle. We have found that you have another uncle, a kind man though he is not wealthy. He has agreed to look

after Emily and you. But even a good man can become greedy if he suddenly gets money. So all your parent's wealth and property will, in future, not be controlled by this uncle, but by YOU. Today, even if you are only fifteen years of age, you are going to become a MAN. Now, Stand up!"

Peter stood up.

The Judge stood up himself, adjusted his wig and gown and assumed a solemn face.

"By the powers given to me under the Law, I hereby proclaim you a MAN. You will be responsible for your own future and you will be responsible for your elder sister. You will have to report to ME, in the Courts, how you spend money, how you look after your properties and how your sister and you are progressing in your studies. Do you understand? And do you agree?"

Peter nodded, nervously, "Yes, Your Honour" he said.

The Judge called for an impressive looking document and, dipping his pen in the ink-well, signed the document which proclaimed that Peter Dantanarayana, 15 years old, was a major in the eyes of the law.

"Good luck, Mr. Dantanarayana, and may God bless you," he said.

Peter and Emily were sent to the home of the kind uncle and the school was asked to take him back. He became a good student and a good manager of money. In time he went to University and graduated from there, and spent most of his working life as a teacher and Vice Principal of the school where he once could not go to because he could not pay his fees. Later he was picked up to go on a scholarship to Stanford in the U.S.A. Before he married, he helped his sister, Emily, get married and acted as the bride's father. Poor Emily, she died not long after. Peter married your "Galle Achchi" and had eight children, of whom the eldest is your own Achchi in Wichita.

Now that the story has been told, I must tell you how I came to know about it. Loku Achchi, Punchi Achchi and all the children of Peter did not know about it. They only knew that Peter did not speak to them about his childhood and the people in his family or even about the house he had grown up in. Then, one day in the middle 1960s,

we happened to be spending a holiday in Galle. Those holidays were great fun because there was a house full of children and the big dining table was full. Galle Muththa (Peter) was in a mellow mood, for some reason or other. Punchi Achchi and he were discussing the prices of fish and vegetables, because they both loved to bargain. I said that I couldn't be bothered about a small difference in prices. That got Muththa talking. "You can say that", he said, "because you did not have to live with little money. I am like this because I had to manage with little money. Listen....."

This was the one and only time he spoke about what I have made into a story.

He ended it up with an anecdote. When he was Vice Principal of Mahinda College, he had attended a Principal's Conference in Colombo. There he met the Principal of Royal College, Sri Lanka's oldest and most famous High School. He told him, "Mr. De Silva, you don't know me, but I knew your father. Long ago he picked me up in my time of trouble and helped me become the man I am. I am happy that I am able, today, to tell this story and to say 'thank you' to his son, also"

The Step

by Ransiri Menike Silva

It is only now that I realise what an indelible role that ubiquitous piece of manry...the step, has played in my life.

My first awareness of it was when I was about two years old and living in Udawattekele, Kandy. The row of steps leading down from the road to our house seemed insurmountable to me at that tender age. My most refreshing... in fact my only! memory is of sitting on the lower steps with my two brothers and sister sucking our favourite sweets "Cocoa Cigarettes" and old fashioned "Humbugs".

Cross Street, where we moved to from there saw us reduced to just one step between the verandah and pavement. Here we sat for lack of a garden and watched people go by, a most entertaining and educating pastime. It also inspired us to a new game of pavement hopping. Here we hopped from the road to the pavement, chanting "parapment" all the while. A missed step or wrong

call of “para” when on the “pement” or vice versa constituted an “out”. It was a most invigorating game! The inner wooden staircase provided my older siblings with innovative entertainment, my sole contribution being to roll down it whenever the chance presented itself.

The few steps to our house in Nawalapitiya had little time to play a significant role in our lives as we moved away from there quite soon. The only service they rendered was to permit us to enter or leave the house.

Shifting to Ratnapura from there, we moved to a rambling old “Walauwe” (a manor house) in Tirivanaketiya. It had an octagonal verandah encircling a similarly shaped drawing room. This had three entrances, each with its own set of shallow steps leading up from the garden. This soon became one of our favourite spots for chatting and dreaming, taking second place only to our perch on the guava tree. When the day’s work was over and as a prelude to a hot dinner, the whole family would gather on the unlit verandah each evening. Father on his ‘hansi putuwa’ (reclining easy chair) Mother on her favourite “G.O.H” chair, and we children scattered on steps of our choice. Conversation flowed easily and varied were the topics covered. We learned without being taught and absorbed knowledge from our parents’ experiences. They related childhood happenings and adventures. They told us about the early days of their married life and the hardships they had encountered. They shared with us their joys. These were neither traumatised nor glamourised but related as mundane affairs, and we learned to accept them as a natural part of our life. “Gama Katha” (tales from the village) from Kaledane, Galle, Father’s village were as entertaining as Mother’s tales of suburban Dehiwala of a bygone era. Interesting and humorous incidents from their childhood were repeatedly requested... but not the third or fourth hand ‘ghost’ stories although they fascinated us enormously. Mother also contributed local gossip..of the doings of the denizens of Tirivanaketiya which she had picked up from our neighbour Menike who drew water from our well for their daily use. We sang songs, English and Sinhala; old and new; folk and modern. We played verbal games.

What interested us most however were the stories of the earliest days of Nalada Vidyalaya. Father had been on the staff when the Principal had been Mr Jinendradasa, who had been notoriously unpopular with the students.. The staff together

with the students had once staged a ‘nadagam’ play and the humorous impromptu incidents had us in fits of laughter. Once some of Father’s former students at Nalanda visited us, an event that thrilled us greatly when we found that the often referred to ‘Nadagam Singho’ was one of them.

Father also taught us songs from this play and joined us in singing them while Mother kept time on the arm of her chair. They remain fresh in our hearts still, although sadly, our throats can no longer cope with the notes. We sat there till the air turned cool and the stars began to twinkle above. Fireflies flitted on the earth below like fairy lanterns and we chased them, trapping them gently in our cupped palms. Mother’s hedge of aromatic ‘sera’ (lemon grass) clumps kept away the mosquitoes and gentle breezes rustled through the coconut fronds that glistened in the moonlight when the moon was full. Night dropped suddenly and we went in to a hot meal and more talk round the dining table.

We had to move again. This time to Colombo, and the hustle and bustle of city life. The days of peace and leisure vanished like a dream upon waking up. Our life style changed but not our sessions on the verandah steps. We were growing up now and my childhood had taken refuge in memories. Additional friends and relative had moved in with us, but the three solid steps under the porch willingly accommodated us all. We sat there usually after a vigorous game of lawn badminton before going in. Father was now too busy writing books to join us. Mother was held in the grip of additional household duties. But our ‘sworn-to-eternal-bachelorhood’ uncle was there to enliven the proceedings. Old memories had no place here. They were shoved aside in favour of Colombo society gossip, ‘varsity news and the latest jokes in town. ‘Sing-songs’ disturbed the neighbourhood. Heated arguments...mostly about ‘cheating’ at badminton invited biting sarcasm...all in good humour. There was much noise and laughter but no serious discussions. That was reserved for the dining table when Father and Mother would also be joining us.

When we moved again it was to a house in Thimbirigasyaya

It had no steps.

It did not matter.

We did not need them now.

The family was moving on. The die-hard bachelor

uncle had found himself a wife and moved away. The “Junior Patriarch” (Tissa) had taken up his first job in far away Trincomalee. The next in line to the post (Somasiri) found himself in the salubrious environment of the University of Peradeniya. All the ‘hangars-on’ had completed their vital examinations and gone back to their own homes.

Life had changed for all of us... but only on the surface. All the hours we had spent on those much loved steps had not been in vain. The fun we had enjoyed and the lessons we had absorbed could never be erased. They would always remain in our hearts as an enduring tribute to our very special parents. The value of family togetherness that they had instilled in us had reached out far ahead to influence us on the steps we would take in our own lives in the future.

Cracked Pots

A water bearer in India had two large pots. Each hung on the ends of a pole across his shoulder. One of the pots had a crack in it, while the other pot was perfect and always delivered a full portion of water.

At the end of the long walk from the stream to the house, the cracked pot arrived only half full. For a full two years this went on daily. Of course, the perfect pot was proud of its accomplishments. But the cracked pot was ashamed of its own imperfection, and miserable that it was only able to accomplish half of what it had been made to do.

After two years of what it perceived to be a failure, it spoke to the water bearer. "I am ashamed of myself, and I want to apologize to you. I have been able to deliver only half my load because this crack in my side causes water to leak out all the way back to your house.

The bearer said to the pot, "Did you notice that there are flowers only on your side of the path? That's because I have always known about your flaw. I planted flower seeds on your side of the path, and every day while we walk back, you've watered them. For two years I have been able to pick these beautiful flowers to decorate the table. Without you being just the way you are, there would not be this beauty to grace the house."

Each of us has our own unique flaws. We're all cracked pots. But it's the cracks and flaws we each have that make our lives together interesting and rewarding. You've just got to take each person for what they are, and look for the good in them.

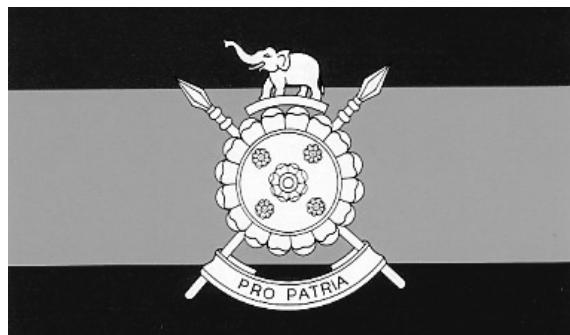
THANK YOU ALL MY CRACKPOT FRIENDS!

Of Duty and Honour: A History of the Ceylon Army (c.1949-1972)

Part 1

by *Sergei De Silva-Ranasinghe*

Shortly after the advent of formal independence on 4th February 1948, Ceylon now Sri Lanka, witnessed for the first time, the creation of a professional military establishment. With no professional army in the lead up to independence, the formation of the post-independence regular armed forces (Ceylon Army in 1949, Royal Ceylon Navy



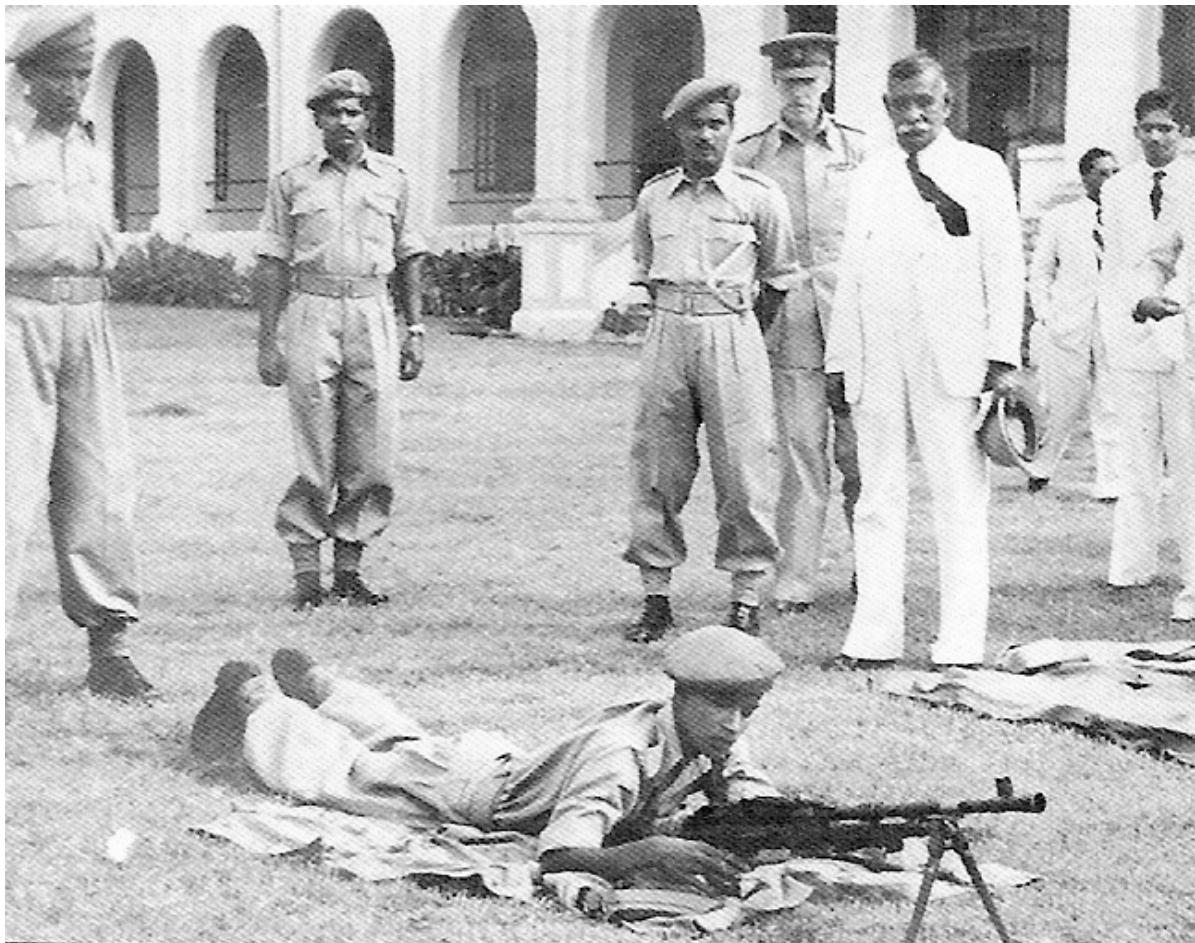
The First Army Crest (1949-1966)

(RCyN) in 1950, and Royal Ceylon Air Force (RCyAF) in 1951) was historically significant. The creation of the Ceylon Army (CA, note unofficial abbreviation) represented the first step in creating a regular force structure in Cey-



Current Army Crest (1972-to date)

lon. This article provides a brief historical overview of the first evolutionary phase, which lasted twenty three years, of the now fifty-six year old Sri Lanka Army and illustrates aspects from its foundation, organisation, role, composition, training and deployment, to its transition



The Prime Minister D S Senanayake together with top brass watch a training drill at Echelon Square

to a republican army. As will be demonstrated, this article also debunks the misleading popular conception that its primary function was of a ceremonial nature until recent times.

Formation

The greater part of the planning to create the CA began as a part of Ceylon's bi-lateral 'Defence Agreement' with Britain signed on November 11, 1947, when Ceylon attained Dominion Status. Although, February 4, 1948, marked the formal end of British Imperialism in Ceylon, British influence still held considerable sway, as demonstrated by the Anglo-Ceylonese 'Defence Agreement' of 1947. Apart from safeguarding British strategic interests, the accord gave British military advisors a significant role in designing the post-independence Ceylon Army (CA), as outlined by its first Commander, Brigadier Roderick Sinclair the Earl of Caithness (c.1949-1952): "There is already a close affinity between the Ceylon Army and the British Army. Many of the army's customs and regulations are based on those of the British Army, and all regiments and corps of the

Ceylon Army are now affiliated to corresponding British regiments and corps. To the British Army the Ceylon Army owes much of its formation." Under British auspices, the CA's reconstruction program continued until the tenure of the first two CA Commanders, who were British, Brigadiers the Earl of Caithness and Sir Francis Smith Reid (c.1952-1955) ended.

The CA and its reconstituted auxiliary the Ceylon Volunteer Force (CVF), formerly the Ceylon Defence Force, renamed in 1972 the Sri Lanka Army Volunteer Force (SLAVF), was officially sanctioned by Army Act No. 17 of 1949 on April 11, 1949, formalised in Gazette Extraordinary No. 10028 of October 10, 1949. As stated on October 3, 1949, by Ceylon's founding father, Prime Minister DS Senanayake (c.1947-1952): "By virtue of powers vested in me by Section 1 of Army Act No. 17 of 1949, I, Don Stephen Senanayake, Minister of Defence and External Affairs, do by this order appoint the tenth day of October 1949 as the date on which that Act shall come into operation."

The task of forming a new regular army from scratch, required feverish behind the scenes preparation and planning, as illustrated by Brigadier the Earl of Caithness: “The purpose and size of the force had to be decided upon, a Pay Code had to be drafted and receive Treasury approval, initial establishments had to be drawn up and the more important of the regulations written. At the same time plans for the future build-up of the Force had to be made – the methods of obtaining the necessary officers and men, the means by which they were to be fed, provisioned and accommodated, and the means by which they were to be trained. These and many other problems were those which had to be considered and solved in those early days.”

With the promulgation of the Army Act, the CDF headquarters was re-organised as Ceylon Army headquarters. The regular army's organisation began with the raising of the following units in 1949: 1st Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment/Ceylon Artillery; Ceylon Infantry Regiment, renamed shortly after as the 1st battalion CLI; 1 Company, Ceylon Army Service Corps; Ceylon Army Medical Corps; 1 Company, Ceylon Army Ordnance Corps; Ceylon Electrical and Mechanical Engineers; 1st Provost Company, Ceylon Corps of Military Police; Works Services, Ceylon Engineers; 1st Field Squadron, Ceylon Engineers; 1st Squadron, Ceylon Signal Corps. The reconstituted CVF units included: 2nd (V) Field Squadron, Ceylon Engineers; 2nd (V) Squadron, Ceylon Signals Corps; Field Plant Regiment; 2nd (V) Battalion CLI; 2nd (V) Company, Ceylon Army Service Corps; Ceylon Garrison Artillery, renamed the Ceylon Artillery in 1950; Ceylon Army Medical Corps (V); Ceylon Cadet Battalion, renamed Ceylon Cadet Corps in 1950.

Force Structure Consolidation

For the nation's politicians there was no sense of urgency in developing a modern military. The priorities of national development did not emphasise military spending, with no serious and foreseeable internal threat in sight. The protection contracted by the Anglo-Ceylonese Defence Agreement, provided an assurance of national security from potential external threats, as confirmed by D S Senanayake: “At the moment there is not the slightest doubt that we have the good fortune to be friendly with a power like Britain. Their friendship is our greatest security.” Under the Defence Agreement, it was also agreed to help equip, train and organise the CA with the

advice of experienced British Army staff officers, two of whom served as the first two Commanders of the CA.

In 1951 the embryonic regular army numbered a mere 154 officers and 1,955 other ranks. Its ancillary, the CVF, formed the continuation of the Ceylon Defence Force (CDF) approximating 1,500 reservists. At the outset of its establishment, the forecasted plan was to build a brigade size regular army of around 3,000-4,000 troops, a plan which did not materialise until the mid-1950s. The government led by D S Senanayake (c.1947-1952) recruited mainly ex-CDF reservists and Ceylonese who had served with the British Army during the Second World War (c.1939-1945) and the Malayan Emergency (c.1948-1960) to staff senior and mid-level officer positions, including Non-Commissioned Officers (NCOs).

Force Composition

When enlistments first opened, the nascent CA had a substantial pool of trained and experienced manpower to select from, as confirmed by the first Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Defence and External Affairs, Sir Kanthiah Vaithianathan (c.1947-1952): “The decision to raise our own army was taken shortly after the first anniversary of Independence in February, 1949, and it was then that I truly realised the vastness of the undertaking, which already had seemed vast enough. All we had on the credit side was some excellent material already existing in the Ceylon Defence Force, a volunteer body. Everything else had to begin afresh.” There were over 645 officers and 14,247 other ranks of the de-mobilised CDF from the Second World War. Furthermore, many ex-CDF veterans had served overseas as garrison troops in the Seychelles, Maldives, Cocos Islands. There were also many Ceylonese who had served with the British Army. Salient examples include the Ceylon Royal Artillery, and the Royal Army Service Corps, which itself recruited 7,000 Ceylonese into its ranks, with at least 4,500 who served overseas at various stages of the war. Some even had experienced frontline combat in these operational theatres. Therefore, the CA had the opportunity of selecting, into its ranks, the most competent and qualified manpower available.

The re-enlisted ex-CDF officers in the new regular army were updated with further profes-



D S Senanayake with the first batch of cadets at Sandhurst

sional training conducted in Ceylon until late 1951 by the British Army Training Team (BATT) advisory group. After initial training requirements were fulfilled, all were sent to specialist British Army training schools in the United Kingdom. Some senior officers were also sent to the British Army Staff College, Camberley and or even attached to units of the British Army of the Rhine to gain field experience.

In the senior ranks of the CA, the first five Ceylonese Commanders of the CA were of the CDF generation, Major Generals A M Muttukumaru (c.1955-1959); H W G Wijeyekoon (c.1960-1963); A R Udugama (c.1964-1966); B R Heyn (c.1966-1967) and General D S Attygalle (c.1967-1977). It was as late as 1979, when Brigadier T S B Sally, the last serving regular officer of the CDF generation retired from the army.

The only fresh additions to the post-independence army were newly recruited officer cadets and soldiers. The training of officer cadets was conducted overseas at the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst in England due to the absence of local facilities. In the early 1960's this policy shifted towards regional based institutions, such as the Indian Military Academy, Dehra Dun and the Pakistan Military Academy, Kakul.

In the other ranks, ex-CDF soldiers dominated the NCO composition down to the rank of Sergeant. The training requirements for the CA's other ranks was fulfilled by the BATT within Ceylon. However, some soldiers attended specialist training courses in Britain, India, Pakistan and Malaya, now Malaysia, during the Communist insurgency in the 1950s, to train with the British

Army in aspects of jungle-craft and guerrilla warfare.

The social composition of the CA was ethnically varied, linguistically and religiously diverse and proved to be an asset to its multi-faceted role and near constant and varied operational deployment throughout the island.

To be continued

Note: This article was first published as a two part series in *The Sunday Times, Plus*, (Sri Lanka), "Onward March" (October 9, 2005), pp. 1 & 4; "An Evolving Army and its Role through Time" (October 16, 2005), p. 4.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Galle: As Quiet As Asleep

By Norah Roberts
Vijitha Yapa Publications (Colombo), 2005; soft cover (2nd edition)- 499 pages; SL Rs. 899/=



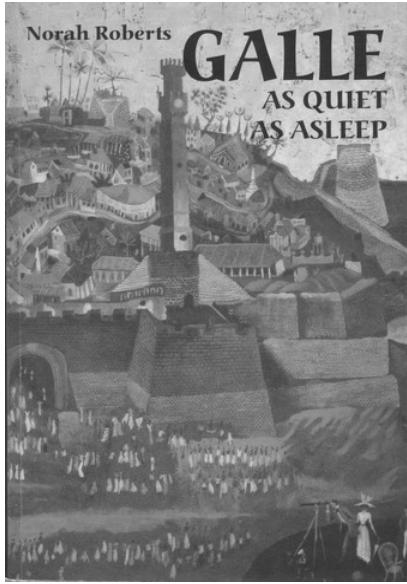
Never to be confused with the American best-selling romance novelist of the same name, Norah Roberts, who survived well into her nineties, was born near Colombo in 1907, one of fourteen children from several marriages of T. W. Roberts, an Anglo-Barbadian Ceylon Civil Servant, Oxford scholar and cricketer *par excellence* who became District Judge in Galle. After severe hearing loss in her late twenties drove her from teaching, Norah ran the Galle Fort Library (est. 1871) for four decades until she retired in 1982. I clearly remember first meeting Norah, then in her late sixties, one hot and humid morning in September 1973 when, as a newly-arrived V.S.O. English teacher at Richmond College, I paid my dues to become a member of the quaint old library on Church Street, next to the Fort Post Office. (Judge Roberts, then still alive in his nineties, had long migrated to England). It was only a couple of years before she finally "retired" in her mid-seventies that the tireless Norah (who never married) began her self-appointed Herculean task, never before attempted, of writing the "compleat" history of Galle from its earliest days.

It would dominate the next ten years of her life.

This is the long-awaited 2nd edition of Norah Roberts' resulting fact file of Sri Lanka's southern capital, first published by Aitken Spence Printing Ltd., Colombo in 1993. Thanks to Editor Michael Roberts, Norah's much-younger half brother and a newly-retired anthropology professor from the University of Adelaide, Galle *afluv-nados* finally have another "window of opportunity" to lay their hands on a Sri Lankan modern classic, for far too long out of print and virtually unobtainable. Dr. Roberts reveals in his preface that, because the original printers had not preserved the master copy of the 1st edition, its entire text had to be computer-scanned for this new edition. Definitely, then, this has been a labour of love, enhanced by the intimacy of some Roberts family snapshots added to the back of this new edition, in my view an inspired editorial decision. Photographer Dominic Sansoni's superb images of Galle Fort are an added bonus.

Another glory of this new edition is Prof. Albert Dharmasiri's red-and-gold front cover design, initially the brainchild of Sri Lanka's doyen architect and art historian, Ismeth Raheem: it depicts a fantastical 19th century Galle Fort, from the Australian artist Donald Friend's richly-colourful *City of Galle*, a six-metre-wide mural painted in 1961 for the Colombo office of Mackinnon Mackenzie & Co., P&O's long-time East of Suez shipping agents. (Readers will find Friend's complete masterpiece, showing the crescent-shaped Harbour filled with ships, reproduced on the book's inside front cover.) Evoking the "fair field full of folk" in the vision of the poet Langland's fictional Piers Plowman as he dreamed on medieval England's Malvern Hills, the front cover illustration perfectly complements Norah's own glorious gallimaufry of Galle characters, whom she describes as having lived in "a medieval town, overpowering in its beauty". To bring us back to earth, the publisher has inserted another, more realistic image, that unfolds from within the new edition's back cover - a truly startling panorama of the town's devastated bus station and cricket ground, with Galle Fort looming behind, photographed just after the December 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami.

As a "people's historian" who found her craft late



in life, Norah Roberts was really a soul-mate of the late "Grandma" Moses, America's famed octogenarian folk-artist – both autodidacts, their creations are similarly imbued with a purity of spirit, a freshness and bold vigour not always found among the trained "professionals". Donald Friend's description of his 1961 mural - *the design of it simple, the details unimaginably complicated* - applies also to Norah's own sweeping panorama of Galle. "The Devil is in the details", and in Norah's book sharp-eyed readers will notice the small inaccuracies that pepper the text, perhaps inevitably in a wide-sweeping chronicle that draws on such variegated original and secondary source material, both written and oral. As her brother Michael rightly comments, it would be the work of decades to correct them all. In the final analysis, however, it scarcely matters for - like Friend's mural - the ultimate product is *sui generis*, with an integrity all of its own.

The design of it simple – fifteen chapters in all, beginning with a poetic sentence that sets the tone of the whole book: "Galle is the capital of the Southern Province, a quiet town dreaming by the sea." Norah begins her saga with the Rama-Ravana legend about the origin of the low hills that surround the crescent-shaped harbour, and observes that no Sinhalese chronicle mentions Galle before the 12th century – never an ancient royal seat, it escaped royal battles. The visits of the Moorish traveller Ibn Batuta in 1344, and the Chinese general Cheng Ho in 1409, receive due mention, setting the stage for Galle's historic role as a trade emporium, if not actually the Tarshish of the Old Testament. The colonial Dutch compelled their retired marine pilots to remain in Galle, so fearful were they of precious information getting into the wrong hands. Norah tells us she once knew an old lady who remembered the dancing on the platform as the first train rolled into Galle Station in 1894! From sailing ships to pigeon-post, to an 1848 lighthouse shipped from London that burned down in 1939, to bustling Victorian-era hotels crammed with steamship passengers, to Sin-

halese *mudalalis* and Moorish gem merchants...Portuguese, Dutch and finally British invaders come and go. For Galle, as Norah reminds us, is "the heritage of not only Lankans, but of all mankind".

No dry compendium of historical events, Norah's chronicle is first and foremost about the *people* of Galle down the years, in all their glorious multi-ethnicity. Her chapter on the history of the Ceylon Moors (Muslims) is a salutary reminder, in these polarized times of "Duby" Bush and the "neo-cons", that Islam was once widely regarded as a far greater civilizing influence on the world than the Christian West. Who could ever forget her image of the gem dealer S.M. Naina Marikar, "slim, fair, gentle in manner", walking past the Fort Library on his way to work at the N.O.H., decade after decade, resplendent in his coat, sash and tall hat? Reading about the old Muslim families, I was reminded of gentle old Magdon Ismail, an elder whom I encountered during one technicolour sunset on the ramparts over thirty years ago, his prophet-like robe fluttering wildly in the brisk sea breezes as he spoke of Islamic philosophy. Or the little Muslim girls who peeped shyly through the curtains of covered bullock carts, now sadly disappeared from Galle Fort, as I rode along behind on my ancient bicycle.

For anyone acquainted with some of the old families of Galle, and wishing to know more, Norah's book will ever remain a goldmine of information – Ephraums, de Vos, Bartholomeusz, Ludowyk, the "Closenberg" Pereras, Amarasinghas, Dahanayake, Macan Markar, they are all here, and many, many more besides. It is indeed "a fair field full of folk". Many of these grand old families have long since departed Galle, their modern descendants scattered around the globe in the great Lankan Diaspora, enriching other cultures as they once enriched Sri Lanka. For them, especially, *Galle: As Quiet As Asleep* is a testimonial, à la recherche du temps perdu – but also a roadmap for what, one hopes, will be a better future for the Island that its late author chronicled with such boundless affection and optimism. Norah's final words perhaps best sum up this marvellous book's fiercely determined spirit: *Grow with me / The best is yet to be - "dear Galle"*.

Joe Simpson, April 2006

O Father Mine

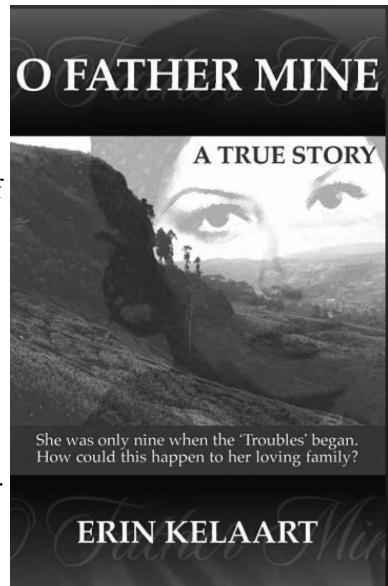
by Erin Kelaart (Published by A&A Book Publishing Pty. Ltd. Sydney NSW 2006) RRP \$29.95

Many books claiming to be true stories abound these days. So do some others leaving publishing houses that are composites of both fact and fiction. While some stand up to scrutiny, other books have been publicly proven to fall far short of what they claim to be.

Erin Kelaart's *O Father Mine* is a true story. I know that for a fact (sorry, no pun intended) because I knew the Kelaart family from my childhood days. For that reason, I was somewhat reluctant to review this book. Then again, who better to do it than someone who can vouch for its veracity.

While this is the story of the Kelaart family, the author opts to use fictitious names for the protagonists and some places. In a word from the author, Erin writes: "It was easier for me to write about the 'Roberts' rather than the 'Kelaarts'. That licence allowed me to distance myself, marginally, from the emotional burden of writing such a chronicle." Be that as it may. The book is written as a tribute to Erin's mother, Anne Victoria Kelaart who is 'Anita Rose Roberts' in the book. Likewise, all other members of her family have been given fictitious names.

Many people have pondered the question: why did Erin Kelaart have to bring in to the open such a personal family tragedy for the world to see? That is partially answered by the author herself when she writes: "the dream to tell her [Anita's] story has been in my heart for over twenty-five years." Upon reading the story, one may also discern that the author had a compelling desire to purge herself of all hurt and pain that plagued her life so that she could move into the future. Whether in the writing, she achieved that object or not is something only the author will know.



Both my wife and I independently read the book, cover to cover, at one sitting. That is what the book is like, the cannot-be-put-down-kind. It is a tribute to the author's writing skills. For a first time effort, Erin has all that it takes to hold her readers spellbound with her lilting prose that compliments the varying moods of the story. That is one of the reasons for the book's appeal.

Another is the profound sincerity in the telling of *O Father Mine*. From the first page, the reader knows the words are pouring out straight from the heart. The author feels every word she writes. Kelaart portrays all the emotions that were part of Rina's (as the author calls herself in the story) daily life. Wonderful childhood joys in the midst of a loving family are brought to life. The self-blame and disconsolate sadness of infant sister Cecily's death of a heart condition, the enormous enigma of their father, Ben Robert's somersault from love to hate that baffled Rina and her siblings are agonisingly conveyed. The torture of seeing the heart searing anguish of a wife and mother broken and battered by a father turned alien is so real. Baffling results that occult practices can bear upon unsuspecting people (Ben becoming the victim of a charm set by a jealous woman friend of the family) makes the reader wonder, is this for real? The reader can empathise with Rina's hurt of total rejection by her father. Then, Rina, as someone with much love to give, finding only heartbreak at every turn makes the reader wonder why she didn't focus her caring elsewhere. Indeed, the entire gamut of the emotional zeniths and nadirs of life is infused into this tapestry of tragedy.

This is also the story of Rina's own unfulfilled attempts at romance and relationships. Fractured or broken relationships seemed to be her share in life. In Nimahl Singram, a married man with children, there loomed a semblance of permanency. That too, after several years of separation and reconciliation, finally ended in a hopelessly painful breakup.

The author imbues much colour into her story as she vividly recalls numerous places in London where she spent several painful and fleetingly blissful years with Nimahl. She is most evocative in her recollections of the country of her birth, especially Colombo and its surrounds, descriptions that are woven expertly, without intrusion into the story stream. These sharp sketches will rekindle fond memories in the minds of all those with Sri Lankan affiliations.

In a colourfully fetching cover, *O Father Mine* will get you thinking. It is a well-constructed narrative that will find you enthralled because it is also a genuine portrait of family life in Sri Lanka in the late 1950s to the early 1970s.

O Father Mine can be obtained from the author by phone: (02) 9631 1011 or mobile: 0405 345 134. Cost per copy, if mailed to you, will be \$33.50

This review appeared recently on www.ozlanka.com

Doug Jones

The Australian -Asian Connection...

Our readers will recall that in Journal No. 31 (Aug '05) we carried a book review of "The Changing Face of Electoral Politics in Sri Lanka" by Emeritus Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya. We would now like to draw your attention to a recent working paper authored by Prof. Jayasuriya : "The Australian - Asian Connection: from Alfred Deakin to John Howard", the text of which is too lengthy for reproduction here but available on the web at

<http://rspas.anu.edu.au/asarc/>

Given that so many of our readers come from a quite anglicised strata of Sri Lankan society, who have therefore fitted easily into business and the professions here, the acute observations in this lengthy paper will appeal, covering, as they do, perceptions of how Australians and Australian governments see themselves in an Asian context. Bruce Grant, a former Australian Ambassador to India made a prophetic remark that "Asia remains the most likely catalyst of Australian civilisation". This statement is completely at odds with Foreign Minister Downer's one time view that Australia had no wish to be part of a new regionalism such as portrayed by Mahathir of Malaysia and others, which must now be rethought in the light of willingness shown by John Howard very recently to be a member of the East Asian regional conclave! These contradictions and the question of what constitutes "being Australian" are very thoroughly explored by Professor Jayasuriya whose paper concludes with an extensive bibliography.

Tony Peries

UNFORGETTABLE CITY

Tissa Devendra, *On Horseshoe Street*
Vijitha Yapa Publications. Colombo 2005

The sub-title of Tissa Devendra's magical book – 'More Tales from the Provinces' – indicates a kinship with an earlier work in which the author provided entertaining glimpses of his life as a young civil servant working as the Government's agent and representative in districts outside the capital. Stanley Kirinde's cover for *Tales from the Provinces* captured most vividly the perplexity of the inexperienced administrator attempting to resolve the problems brought to him by the petitioners who surround him in the Kachcheri.

On Horseshoe Street takes the reader further back in time, to Devendra's childhood and adolescence in Kandy, and the two-storeyed house on Laadan Veediya in which he lived with his parents and three siblings over sixty years ago; not quite far enough to recall the blacksmith's forge or the waiting horse carriages from which the street derived its original name. By the time the author's family came into residence, carriage horses had been replaced by cars; and though the age of romance had gone for good, there was enough happening on the street, a step away from the veranda of their house, to provide instruction and plentiful entertainment. Accordingly, the cover of Devendra's new book carries an evocative picture by Chandramali Mahaikam of one regular caller at the house on Horseshoe Street: the seller of coconut husks for household fires, with his bullock cart and his patient bullock. The family's *kussi-amma* ('not yet an endangered species,' says the author wryly) makes her selection from the back of the cart, while four fascinated children observe from the vantage point offered by the trellis screen the process by which 'the market came to the veranda'.

Following the husk-seller would come the baker with a basket of freshly baked bread, cakes and buns poised on his head; and after him the vegetable-seller with her wobbling tower of green vegetables, the 'old Thamby' with his basket of fresh eggs packed in sawdust, the curd and 'moru' man, and the vendors of fruit. The milk-man came by daily on his bicycle, as did that 'great purveyor of luxury', the Chinaman with his bundles of linens and silks, fans and ornamented combs, and the bookseller, a mobile source of second-hand reading matter. Devendra recalls a vendor of traditional lacquer objects and antique jewellery. There were, besides, the



beggars to whom the children of Horseshoe Street were encouraged to give alms, the orange-clad pilgrims on their way to Kataragama, religious processions to watch – Catholic, Muslim and Hindu; and above all, the glory of the Perahera itself unfolding before their enraptured gaze, with its elephants, dancers, drummers and chieftains.

Devendra's opening chapters cast a potent enchantment over the rest of the book. School-days at Dharmaraja College, the fascination of 'Rockfist Rogan', hero of the British comic books, the equipment of the kitchen, the visits to the doctor on Trincomalee Street, the visits from the dhobi, the wondrously varied headgear of Burgher ladies attending church, the exchange of sweets and sweetmeats at Christmas and at Sinhala New Year, the influx of British 'evacuees' and troops as war came to Singapore, the 'bioscope carts' that distributed handbills advertising coming attractions at the Empire and Wembley cinemas ... It is all there, recorded by an alert observer with a lively sense of humour and more than a touch of nostalgia –

To my eternal regret I never did see the sequels to the handbills' exciting preludes of the 'full serials' of Flash Gordon and such intriguing Indian films as Toofan Mail and Vanaraja Carson (Bombay's portly answer to Weissmuller). The sound of the last tattoo has long faded away, and the last 'bioscope cart' has trundled away to the Great Beyond. Musing in tranquillity half a century later, I dream of a Kandy that is gone. Ruefully I remind myself that, while I remember that unforgettable city, the city no longer remembers me.

But, as might be expected of an author with a career of over forty years in Sri Lanka's public service, there is more to enjoy in *On Horseshoe Street* than tender boyhood reminiscences. His work took Devendra all over the island, to Badulla, Trincomalee, Anuradhapura, Nuwara Eliya and several other stations, and wherever he went it is evident that he was quite as interested in the human 'stories' he encountered, as in the official facts he recorded in his log books. I would very much like to relate some of his 'tales' in this review, but have decided to practice restraint: as with all good stories from the pen of a good writer, they are best savoured on the page. The reader who enters the world of Sri Lanka in the 1950s in the company of such a gifted story-teller as Tissa Devendra is fortunate indeed.

Yasmine Gooneratne

Yasmine Gooneratne's third novel, The Sweet and Simple Kind, is set in Sri Lanka, and is scheduled for publication in 2006.

Growing up in a Southern Village in the 50s and 60s

Part 6

by Siri Gamage

This was a time when well known figures such as Osmund Jayaratne, Ediriweera Saratchandra, K.N. Jayatilleke, Hettiarachchi, Shelton Kodikara, Ashley Halpe, Gananath Obeysekera, Ralph Pieris, Laksiri Jayasuriya, Michael Roberts, Leslie Gunawardene, Sirima Kiribamune, Berty Gangadhara (now Gajameragedara) K.M de Silva, C.R. de Silva, H.M. Goonasekera used to teach and head departments in various faculties. Professors like Hettiarachchi were in full academic gown during lectures. Most lecturers did not do this. Many of the professors and senior lecturers had obtained their postgraduate qualifications from Britain or USA. I read history (Indian), economics, and Philosophy (western) for my first year. Lecturers like Kiribamune, Jayatilleke displayed an enormous amount of knowledge in their lectures as they had done doctoral or postdoctoral studies on the subjects. Lecturers other than those teaching Sinhala or Buddhism had a difficult time in translating subject matter to Sinhala. Often the words they used created laughter among the students.

During my 3rd and 4th years I prepared myself for a special degree in Sociology. This was the time I took up residence in the Hilda Obeysekera hall. At this time Sociology was restricted to a handful of English speaking ‘kultur’ students from well to do families in Colombo and Kandy. There were seven students in the Sinhala medium and three in the English medium streams. Some professors like Obeysekera used to give lectures only in English. The department itself was located in a beautiful two-storey bungalow just above the Arunachalam hall. The classes were very small and friendly. This was in contrast to large arts degree classes in the general degree stream held in the arts block. As the lectures were two hours we were even served a nice cup of plain tea during the break. Sathaiya – an up country Tamil who was the office peon made tea and served us. After the lectures we would run to the main library and read recommended books and journal articles, which were

in English. As someone who knew only a few words of English at the time I entered the University, this was quite a challenge. I had to work twice as hard and take private tuition in English. This was in addition to classes provided by the university for students like me.

Reading books and articles about the societies, cultures and sociological issues not only in developed countries like USA and UK but also tribal societies in Africa and other regions opened up another world to us. Social issues facing Sri Lanka were kept firmly in a comparative perspective. We learned to contextualise our own problems using the discipline specific jargon and research findings.

In the early 1970s with the arrival of Sunimal Fernando, a Cambridge graduate to teach and head the department a significant turn in the teaching of sociology occurred. He used Sinhala language to teach a course in social stratification in a unique style. This was also the time when reputed professors and lecturers such as Obeysekera, Malalgoda, H.L. Seneviratne, and Ralph Pieris etc. left the department opening the way for several young graduates including myself to fill in the vacancies. University graduates who passed out from Peradeniya in the 1950s and 1960s had a unique reputation for being all rounders. This reputation started to wane in the 70’s

1970 general elections took place when I was in the university. The enigmatic leader of the J.V.P (Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna) Wijeweera made his appearances on campus around this time and his group supported the 1970 coalition government on the promise that the new government would address unemployment problem of university graduates. Wijeweera was an eloquent speaker. He used to talk for about 3-4 hours at a stretch at public meetings some of which were held on campus. These speeches were critical of existing government policies, the capitalist economic system, inequality in society, Indian expansionism and the need for a social transformation by way of a revolution. Wijeweera articulated the grievances of the sarong wearing average Sinalese and gave expression to the same. Those from lower rungs of society had not only felt cheated by their political leaders, they also felt discriminated by the well-to-do

strata. He was an elusive figure as the government was hunting for him from time to time. By 1971 there were many followers of Wi-jeweera. The clique at Peradeniya campus included some of my contemporaries. Those young minds were persuaded by the force of his argument, eloquence of his speech, and the criticisms of the existing social and political order. When the call to arms came in April 1971 some of my colleagues were ready to heed the call. A few of the contemporaries were killed during the disturbances, some were imprisoned, and others escaped arrest. The campus was closed for a long time. While trying to get home one day in a hired car with several colleagues we saw several corpses on the Colombo-Kandy road even before we reached Kegalle. When I returned home several weeks later, about twelve young people including my classmates from Walasmulla Maha Vidyalaya had been killed at the Walasmulla Police station the previous night. At this time I decided to go to Gampaha and stay with a boarding mate of mine and pursue my sociology studies, though in a disturbed state of mind. Every day and night for several months we would hear stories of police and army brutality towards suspected young people in Gampaha and surrounding areas. It was a time of great upheaval and uncertainty. A group of young graduates and unemployed youths was challenging the social and political order and the state reacting with even stronger measures. Many found themselves in rehabilitation camps at Sri Jayawardenepura, or Weerawila. This event paved the way for an ideologically similar yet ethnically different political movement in the north with the emergence of the LTTE and other paramilitary groups. The trigger for JVP uprising was the broken promises by the newly elected coalition government and the arrest of its cadres by the security forces.

The Peradeniya experience was unique for me and my colleagues as young intellectuals. We learnt new knowledge, perspectives, histories, disciplines and social issues. We also secured a new identity as Peradeniya graduates in sociology. Our predecessors –though limited in numbers- had occupied reputed roles locally and abroad. We started to look at social, economic and political cultural issues of Sri Lanka through the lens of sociological perspective, which es-

(Continued on page 24)

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. Please e-mail the editor if you wish to take up this offer.

Distant Warriors by Dr Channa Wickremesekera
Perera Hussein Publishing House, 217pp, Fiction.
Rs 450 contact www.ph-books.com

Kandy at War—Indigenous Military Resistance to European Expansion in Sri Lanka by Dr Channa Wickremesekera—Manohar, 228pp. Contact www.manoharbooks.com

On Horseshoe Street by Tissa Devendra Vijitha
Yapa Publications, 238pp, Rs 499. Contact www.vijithayapa.com or www.srilankanbooks.com

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

Please note P&H is within Australia only, overseas postage quoted on request.

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www.erols.com/arbs [Asian books]

(Continued from page 23)

sentially meant comparative perspective within a framework of western theory. Our identity as sociologists allowed us to keep a distance from average arts graduates or those doing special subjects such as history, Buddhism, or Sinhala language and literature. As Martin Wickramasinghe used to say, we were also culturally uprooted. With the appointment to a lecturing position in 1973 the process of this uprooting and alienation from my village – Ethpitiya – started its journey. A high value was placed on the study and teaching of western theories, concepts, and research findings as compared to researching and writing about my people's own histories, cultures, ways of life and dilemmas. While the materials for research was Sri Lankan stuff they were made meaningful or otherwise only from the perspective of western theories and concepts by using positivistic or so called scientific methodology. We were almost denied the opportunity to articulate our own theories and concepts. Sadly this trend continues even up to this day. The practice is supported by the research money pumped into the country by numerous sources. Often I wondered about the role our education plays in destroying Sri Lankan indigenous identity. Cultural uprooting was simultaneously associated with western cultural imitation.

Those who went abroad for higher studies came back with several status symbols apart from the PhD. These included new and expensive shirts, trousers, umbrellas, and cars. In some cases, new hairstyles and an acquired English accent were also included. Material symbolism of the new status was equal to, or more important than the academic acquisition. The local or Indian degrees were not comparable as those doing these degrees lacked the material symbolism. None came back with western partners - reflecting the contradictions of the time.

Early 70s was characterised by shortages of food and other essential items due to the import substitution policies of the Sirima Bandaranaike government. As a result large number of children from disadvantaged backgrounds used to gather outside the dining hall in Hilda Obe-syekera hall at meal times. As the students had a habit of not eating the bread crust, piles of these accumulated on the table. These and other remaining food was taken by the children

most of them barely clad in dirty clothes.

In 1970 there was a clash between the soldiers and students on campus. The education minister I.M.R.A. Iriyagolla allowed a large number of soldiers who were scheduled to take part in the Independence Day celebrations in Kandy to lodge in the University gymnasium against the wish of the students' council. Some soldiers who came by train got down at the Sarasawi Uyana station and marched down to the campus while students were shouting abuse. Some came in trucks and went to Ramanathan hall to meet with female students. The truck drivers did not observe normal university rules when turning or reversing the trucks. Branches of well protected trees were broken when driving or turning vehicles. Authorities should have known the danger of culture clash between two specific groups of young men and women –one with books in hand and the other with guns in hand. The resulting clash developed into a major conflict and finally the soldiers had to vacate the campus. Nonetheless it was a tense time for the university students – almost a prelude to the events to unfold in April 1971. There were rumours at one stage that the army was going to attack Wijewardene Hall students. As a precautionary measure we at the Hindagala boarding house spent a night on top of the hill behind.

This concludes Series 1 of Siri Gamage's biographical sketch. More to follow in Series 2. Ed



"Native Saloon Bar" circa 1910 notice
'Wyatt Earp' second from left?

Letters:

More about 'Airflow crew quarters'



Dear Roger,

Here is a message from Brendon. The 'mansion' regarding which you are seeking information (on page 14 of the May issue of the Ceylankan) might very well be India House, the residence currently of the Indian High Commissioner. Alternatively, it could be the Eighty Club.

Best, Yasmine

Dear Yasmine,

Thank you very much for this information. Someone else suggested that it is the residence of the Indian H.C. But is it possible to also specify the location - i.e. street and suburb?
Kind regards, Roger.

Dear Roger,

India House is situated on Munidasa Cumaranatunga Mawatha (former Thurstan Road), Colombo 7, with "College House" on one side of it, and the University of Ceylon cricket grounds opposite. It was originally part of the de Soysa estate, owned by Charles Henry de Soysa. There is a book about India House, published three or four years ago by the Indian High Commission, which Brendon remembers reading in his own copy: there is a reference in it to the fact that during WWII the house was owned by a bank, State Bank of India(?), and was occupied by British services personnel.
Good wishes, Yasmine

Dear Yasmine,

These observations - especially about the building being owned by the State Bank of India - tie in with Tony Peries' recollections. Regards,
Roger.

...and about Veeraswamys

Dear Sir,

Malcolm Abeykoon's article in the Feb '06 issue was both amusing and informative so I thought your readers may be interested in my own recollections of Veeraswamy's dating from 1971. Incidentally, I remember them advertising in "The Ceylon Daily News" of the late forties indicating they had a 10 shilling cover charge, a "heavy hit" for that time.

In April-June 1971, I visited London (from Colombo) to call on the business associates of George Steuart & Co. Ltd. of which I was then C.E.O. The Company had for many decades been agents for a sterling plantation company, The Estates & Agency Co, which owned a South Indian tea estate, as also Dunsinane estate in Pundaluoya, then one of the biggest (1600 acres) in Dimbula. Many sterling plantation companies at that time were being cheaply acquired by speculators, as shareholders dumped the stocks for fear of nationalisation of assets in Ceylon and The E.& A had been bought by a Mr. Kapur, an Indian entrepreneur resident in London who then owned Veeraswamys, largely avoided by Ceylonese as they could obtain better value elsewhere! Kapur lived in a handsome apartment on two floors of a building in Grosvenor Square and his office was there too: a telex machine sat in the well-furnished dining room. I was invited to lunch by him and the meal commenced with an excellent soup followed by Smoked Salmon, and whitebait, of which I partook liberally, Sri Lankans being currency paupers who welcomed a free meal. To my surprise, a full rice and curry, brought over from Veeraswamys then arrived; luckily my younger digestion was able to do justice to all this.

In 1980 Srinivasa and I went to Europe, our first overseas trip from Australia since our arrival in 1973. After some jaunts on the continent we arrived in London, looking forward to a curry meal and as we were living in W1 we wound up at Veeraswamys still with its original kitschy décor. It was reasonable fare, not too overpriced but we did not go back as better value was to be had elsewhere.

Fast forward to late 1999 and we were again in

London for a long stay following my retirement. On previous visits we had invited all those who entertained us to dinner at a London restaurant: our friends were now older, living further away and reluctant to come to London at night so we decided on a Sunday lunch. Passing Swallow Street around 6.30.p.m.on a Sunday, after a day of drifting around, mostly on foot, we saw Veeraswamy's commissionaire in his uniform and thought we'd try the place as a possible venue for our lunch. We were wearing runners, not very well dressed and lacked a reservation so despite the lack of other diners we were told a table was not available. We suspected that was merely a bit of snobbery so aptly described by Malcolm, still prevailing 5 decades later(!) but seeing that the décor and waiters were now reflective of the 20th century, we spoke to the Maitre' D about a "quote": as soon as he found us likely to spend a biggish sum on a party, a table was made available. He was southern European and save for two Thai boys, all the wait staff were Spanish or Portuguese. We did have our lunch party there: the food was good, not too expensive and the occasion a great success particularly because not one guest had been to Veeraswamy's before!

Tony Peries

In lighter vein....

High Finance

Did you know Noah was the best ever Finance Expert ?

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A matter of perspective

A man asks God, 'God, what do a million years mean to you?'

God answers, 'A million years are merely a second to me.'

The man asks, 'God, what do a million dollars mean to you?'

God answers, 'a million dollars is like a penny to me.'

The man asks, 'God, can I have a penny?'

God says, 'Yes you may ;- wait a second.'

Synopsis of meetings:

Melbourne 21st May 2006

The Chairman Dr. Srilal Fernando introduced the speaker Professor Granville Dharmawardene, former Acting Vice Chancellor of University of Colombo and the former Chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission of Sri Lanka. The subject of his talk was "Rebirth".

Dr.Dharmawardene brought to bear his vast experience on the history, scientific aspect and the theoretical explanation of rebirth. He sought answers to the questions, what is rebirth? Is there a scientific explanation? He investigated the topic and discovered that he can scientifically prove rebirth is true. The speaker dwelt on scientific aspects of rebirth rather than the religious beliefs.

The origin of rebirth is as similar to the origins of human beings. Early humans believed that 80 years (life span of a normal human being) is a short period for existence to be meaningful. Rebirth provides a longer existence in the earth bound life. Archaeological excavations have produced evidence of burial rituals provisioning the deceased in his/her next life. Early philosophers like Pythagoras, Plato and Socrates studied and supported the concept of rebirth but Aristotle rejected it. 1500 years ago, Roman Emperors Constantine and Justinian banned the subject. Classical science too rejected concept of rebirth 400 years ago because science was limited to tangible items. In 1975 Theosophical Society in U.S.A. endorsed the phenomenon of rebirth. Edgar Cayce in U.S.A. could enter into a trance and delve into peoples past lives and discover reasons for problems encountered by them and find solutions. As a result more people began to believe in rebirth. After Cayce's work the concept of rebirth and its free discussion revived and more research was conducted in U.S.A. Books were published all over the world based on people's first hand accounts of rebirth. In the eastern world people believe strongly in rebirth.

Classical science identified everything in the universe as perceptible to five senses: the visible/tactile. Dr.Dharmawardene conducted research on invisible/conceptual aspect of the universe such as consciousness. Examination of this is beyond the five senses. Rebirth belongs here and therefore is beyond the perceptible limits of

classical science. Two ways to examine invisible/conceptual subjects are through subconscious mind and use of Quantum Science. Rebirth can be explained using principles of Quantum Science. The methodology is to hypothesise, predict and observe a particular phenomenon. Albert Einstein's Theory of Relativity was proven using Quantum Science methodology. George Gamov, the famous astrophysicist used the same methodology in explaining the "Big Bang" theory of the formation of the universe.

People are able to recall the past, even childhood events through hypnosis. If rebirth is true people should be able to recall beyond this life.

Dr.Dharmawardene has conducted hypnosis on many people and assisted them to solve their problems and phobias related to past life. The well known psychologist Sigmund Freud used hypnosis to heal psychological disorders that were the result of past life experiences. Many examples of children detailing their past life were presented to illustrate Dr Dharmawardene's talk.

In this context, birth marks he said are physical injuries that occurred in the past life of a person that surface in the present life as a physical abnormality. Similarly if a person had a skill or talent in the past life it is revealed that the person is able to continue same in the present life. Some people have the ability to speak, ancient languages through past life experiences. A very interesting collection of examples was presented as evidence in support of the phenomenon of rebirth.

A theoretical explanation for rebirth: consider the brain as an interface between body and consciousness. There are two interfaces: slow interface (electrical), the brain is linked to the body, the other, quantum related interface has an infinite speed. Consciousness is connected to the brain through this fast interface. When the brain loses this character, consciousness departs and seeks a newly formed foetus, which acquires all the past life experiences in his/her subconscious mind. A stimulating and interesting question time followed the presentation.

The raffle for the day was drawn by Dr.Dharmawardene. The lucky winner was Chandrika Beneragama.

Dilhani Kumbukkage.

Sydney 23rd July 2006

President Tony Peries introduced the speaker Ms Anoma Pieris as an architect and lecturer at the Melbourne University. She has travelled extensively and lived in various parts of the world. She writes regularly to Sri Lankan publications on social and cultural topics.



Anoma Pieris talking about the *Saramayata Kalisama* (trouser under the sarong). Hopefully readers can discern the image on the screen

Ms Pieris is the grand-daughter of Sri Lankan historian Dr. G.C.Mendis.

Speaking to an enthusiastic gathering Ms Pieris explained: "The 'Trouser under the Cloth', *Saramayata Kalisama*, is the name given to a peculiar mode of dress that was adopted in Ceylon during the late colonial period (1815 – 1948). An adaptation of the official regalia of the native component of the colonial administration, it was worn by a westernised elite who embraced the colonial spirit of economic opportunism. This hybrid garment, consisting of a trouser wrapped in a short cloth, reflected the ambivalence of urban elites who simultaneously negotiated both colonial and indigenous social structures. Whereas initially, the shortening of the cloth was a sign of deference to the authority of the trouser (and its wearers), it was ultimately useful for concealing or revealing western aspirations. The freedom to negotiate some identities and to produce others was most readily available to marginal

(Continued on page 29)

A Worthy Lullaby

by Nigel Kerner

When the mega Tsunami hit Sri Lanka on December 26th 2004, the beautiful island seethed with the sounds of grief and loss. Then a silence of stone came upon the resplendent island. Even the birds stopped singing for a while it is said. The hearts of a people used to tragedy missed another beat. So many missed beats for mothers losing their sons and daughters in a senseless political tragedy played out in a civil war that has gripped the island for years. But then, in that far off somewhere of the human spirit, a new strength and resolve formed as it had done so many times before in Sri Lanka and another sound was to be heard. The sound of a new resolve. A resolve that formed in a song. A very special song.

This sound had started some years previously in the mind of Mike Read, a British TV and radio broadcaster and presenter of renown. He had penned a beautiful song about grief and had put it by.

In the words of Mike Read: "I was totally shocked at the enormity and suddenness of the disaster and in tears on seeing the orphaned children wandering aimlessly in search of their parents. Some of the newspaper photographs were just so harrowing. The impact of the destruction has hit us all and briefly speaking to my friends in the music world from artists to managers and record company executives, it was clear that they had all been touched in some way and wished to help." That help came in the words of his song '**Grief Never Grows Old**'.

Mike Read donated the song to the Disaster Emergency Fund. He did more than that. He got an illustrious team of world names in the current music scene. Stars from the world of music including



Soundarie David

Sir Cliff Richard, Russell Watson, Robin Gibb, Barry Gibb, Boy George, Steve Winwood, Jon Anderson, Dewey Burnell & Jerry Beckley, Bill Wyman of the Rolling Stones and Rick Wakeman on instrumentals. They all came together at very short notice and, working from many parts of the world, contributed their services free of charge in making a CD under the label of New World Records. All proceeds from

the CD were to go to the Disaster Emergency Fund overseeing relief in the tsunami affected countries.

The Holy Family Convent of Colombo Sri Lanka is situated a stone's throw from the waves that took the lives of so many neighbours. The school had a world renowned choir under the direction of Soundarie David. Ms David is the last word in Western music on the island. The school choir had entered the prestigious Langollen Music Festival's choir competition in 2005 and stunned the Welsh audience with their performance. They were proclaimed first runners up from over a hundred world wide entries competing against choirs from the USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, Sweden, and the Netherlands in the finals.

Some of the girls in the school choir later formed their own choir '**Soul Sounds**' under the musical direction of Ms David, and through her quite brilliant auspices have gone on to become one of the finest female choirs performing in Western music in Asia.

Having heard of the record project on a radio broadcast in Sri Lanka, the choir's team tracked down the team involved in the ONE WORLD CD and through some British friends in contact with Mike Read asked if they could participate with vocals. He agreed immediately to give them



'Soul Sounds' recording "Grief Never Grows Old"

a track on the CD. ‘**Soul Sounds**’ turned out an effort that was to be later acclaimed with continuous and exclusive performances on the British TV Channel **Classic FM TV**. It ran for months. The CD reached No 4 in the British pop charts making millions for the Disaster Emergency Fund.

A delighted Mike Read later thanked the choir with these words:

“Thank you very much for your performance of ‘Grief Never Grows Old’. It went down so well in this country and everyone thought it was very, very beautiful. Well done on getting it together at such short notice! I thought your rendition of the song was beautiful, the arrangement was lovely, the harmonies were lovely and the whole thing came out sounding very, very pure. It was received very, very well. It must have been a lot of hard work You looked as though you put your heart and soul and spirit into it. Of course it means that you’ve had a No.4 record here in the United Kingdom. You’re up there with Elvis Presley and the Beatles who had top ten hits, which is great news.”

The waves are quieter now and many people are sleeping in better situations and circumstances. ‘**Soul Sounds**’ have sung them a worthy lullaby.

Grief Never Grows Old

by *Mike Read*

Grief Never Grows Old... it never dies
As fresh as the flowers...as clear as the skies
My heart it is empty ...my feelings grown cold
But I'll always remember... Grief Never Grows Old

Love lives like a flame...it flickers and dies
It flares with a brightness...that bewilders the eyes
But there is a burning...so deep in my soul
That will always be with me... Grief Never Grows Old

Chorus

*Grief never leaves you...it's hand in hand
Like an unresolved question...you don't understand
And no one can answer...no one can say
Why Grief Never Grows Old at all ...or fades away*

Time moves like the wind... the moment He gave
Time flies like an eagle...from cradle to grave
Through tears for your dying...no harvest of gold
Though all things must pass away... Grief Never

Grows Old

Chorus

*Grief never leaves you...it's hand in hand
Like an unresolved question...you don't understand
And no one can answer...no one can say
Why Grief Never Grows Old at all ...or fades away*

Grief Never Grows Old...it falls with the rain
It's a late summer evening...a haunting refrain
And sorrow's an ocean...as deep and as cold
As memories remind me... Grief Never Grows Old

As memories remind me... Grief Never Grows Old

I'll always remember... Grief Never Grows Old
As memories remind me...remind me...remind me

Grief Never Grows Old

(Continued from page 27)

caste groups who inhabited the cultural periphery and moved more easily across colonial binaries. Their journeys were marked by specific physical and social transformations, which concealed their insecurities and cultural betrayals.”

Ms Pieris focused on one such family, (that of Charles Henry De Soysa) and by tracing the lineage of their domicile through three generations, she drew attention to the complex identities through which colonial opportunities had to be negotiated. “Their expedient manipulation of architectural meaning, in consolidating their social status,” the speaker explained, “reflected both the dynamism of the colonial enterprise and the cultural license available to the Ceylonese elite of the late colonial period.” “It also revealed” she said, “how impending nationalist agendas ultimately impinged on these carefully constructed identities provoking a reversal of cultural positions. In the context of the decolonising process, the ‘Trouser under the Cloth’ signified the creative appropriation of personal space outside colonial and nationalist prescriptions.”

At the conclusion of her talk, Ms Pieris eagerly responded to several interesting questions posed by members of the audience. The meeting closed with the usual nibbles washed down with tea, coffee and soft drinks.

Douglas Jones

A CORDIAL WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS



Aubrey & Patricia Janz

Eaglemont VIC

Valentine Perera

Burwood NSW

Avinder & Nirupa Paul

Westleigh NSW

Everrard & Katie Bartholomeusz

Bongaree Island QLD

Raj & Indra Gonsalkorale

Glebe NSW

Bryan Elias

Katubedde Sri Lanka

...we also welcome the following gift subscription recipients of four issues of *The Ceylankan* awarded by Members.

Dr Chris Raffel

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Patrick & Dinoor Kelleghan

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D K Subramaniam

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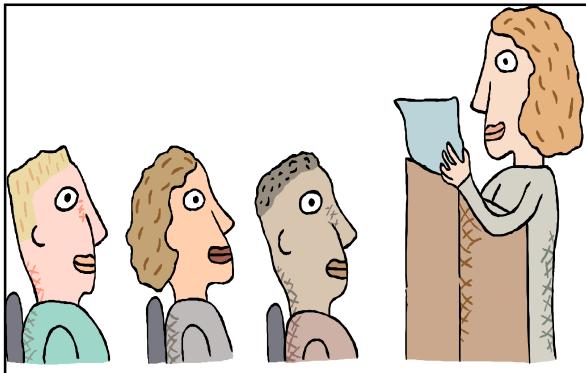
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Ph: 02 9980 1701
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and request an application form

NEXT SYDNEY MEETING

TBA

The Annual General Meeting and Xmas Dinner/Singalong will be on Sunday 26th November 2006 in Sydney

Please mark your diary, look out in these columns for more details closer to event.

NEXT MELBOURNE MEETING

Sunday 10th September at 5.30pm

A talk by Dr Nihal Henry Kuruppu

on

"The role of traditional caste structures operating within a new democratic framework; Political parties, Familial & Class linkages".

Venue: Holy Redeemer Church Hall
Cnr of York Street and Mont Albert Road
Surrey Hills VIC 3127
(Melways Ref: 46 H10)

Shelagh –AH 9808 4962
Or Srilal –AH 9809 1004

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 - April/May, September/October and November/December. Dates can be arranged to suit availability of eminent speakers. Please contact President :Tony Peries on 02 9674 7515 or E-mail: Sri.p@bigpond.com

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

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