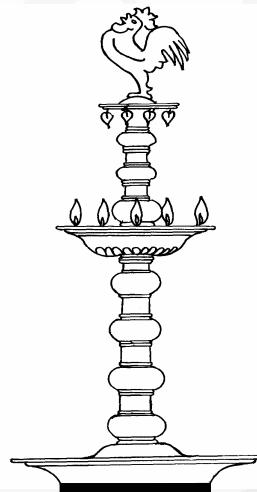


THE CEYLANKAN



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EDITORIAL

What does an Editor of a Journal like The Ceylankan do when, every quarter he has to produce one he hopes is better than the previous one in content, balance and above all an appeal across the board?

Well this one retires to the top of the 50 mega litre dam on his orchard with an easy chair and a glass of local wine - and ponders. The frolicking of the migratory ducks on the surface and incessant flip and flop of the Yellow Belly and Silver Perch below

soothes the ruffled brain waves somewhat like a hot smoothing iron takes away the crinkles of my hand washed shirt. Clarity replaces confusion and then bingo! I am off like a wild hare to my PC to dash of emails round the world lighting fires under the bottoms of all those good folk who make this Journal what it is.

Most of the subjects have a serious tenor and some wax lyrical or have overtones of philosophy. My favourites are those that touch on human frailty and yet come out on top with a touch of humour and good dose of commonsense.

What are your favourite themes? Please take a few moment to ponder after reading this issue and email (or snail mail) your thoughts. More to the point, make your own contribution to the future issues. I have so far not had to reject any material received during nigh 5 years as Editor, so there you are! You need hardly have any fear on that account, and let me tell you that quite a few of the writers have made their maiden effort in these pages. Its not all roses either, I have put my red pen through quite liberally on some material but the end result has been received by the authors in good spirit and cheer. After all we are not competing for the Booker Prize—or can we aspire?

19th Century Images



THE MACE.

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

Some memories of my years in Jaffna

Part 1

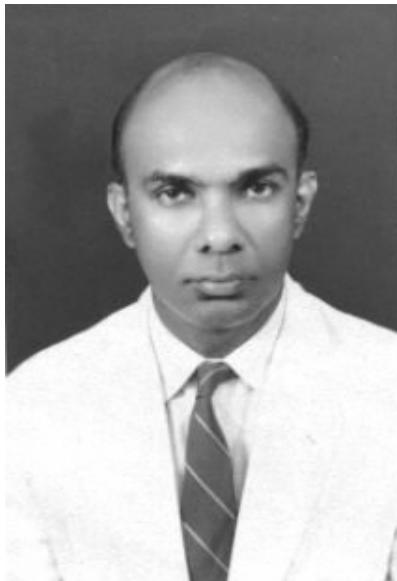
by Neville Jayaweera

It is with some reluctance that I accepted the invitation from Hugh Karunayake of “*The Ceylankan*”, the splendid journal of The Ceylon Society of Australia founded by Sri Lankans domiciled in Australia, to record a few memories of my years as the Government Agent (GA) of Jaffna in the 1960s. The reason for my reluctance was that my memories of Jaffna are so closely woven into the politics of the ethnic conflict, which was predominantly the focus of my work as GA, that any attempt to tell my story ignoring that conflict would be devoid of substance and credibility. I was not sure how the journal would cope with a memoir laced with politics.

What I have done therefore is to release to “*The Ceylankan*”, abridged excerpts from my unpublished memoirs, titled, “**The Ethical Dilemmas of a Public Servant**” chapters from which, relating to my time as GA of Vavuniya, were serialised in the “*Sunday Island*” in Sri Lanka, some years ago.

Mrs Sirimavo Bandaranaike for tea...

The story of my years in Jaffna actually begins in July 1963 in Badulla. In April of that year I had completed a gruelling 3 years as the General Manager of the Gal Oya Development Board and had asked the Secretary to the Treasury, who was the head of the Public Service, for a posting where I could catch my breath, so to say, and recuperate. He obliged by sending me as GA of Badulla, where I had served as an AGA a few years earlier and where Trixie my wife, and I quickly settled down to a more leisurely and spacious life, travelling among villages in faraway Bintenne, Wellassa, Haputale and Welimada etc, all within my district and equally salubrious for work and health.



Neville Jayaweera –picture in the Jaffna Kachcheri

One evening in July 1963, the Prime Minister Mrs Sirimavo Bandaranaike who was addressing a political meeting in Badulla, dropped in at the Residency (as the official residence of a GA was called those days) for a wash, a change of clothes and some tea. That was my first face to face encounter with the redoubtable lady and I must say that contrary to the image of arrogance often associated with her, she was a model of grace, charm and humility.

Over tea, quite casually she turned to my wife and said, “*Mrs Jayaweera, I know that you have hardly settled down in Badulla after the hard time you both had in Gal Oya, so I don't know how you will take this suggestion. I am having a serious problem coming up in Jaffna where the Federal Party is planning to launch a big campaign in October, called the Secessionist Movement, and I would like your husband to handle it*”. My wife was aghast and looked at me not knowing what to say. Mrs B continued, “*I know that your husband, being a disciplined public servant will go wherever the government wants him, but I won't ask him unless you agree first, because I know it is the wife who suffers*”. Needless to say, the ensuing conversation was short and to the point and within a week I had received orders to proceed to Jaffna by the end of August of that year.

So it was that one evening in late August 1963, Trixie and I drove to Jaffna, having relinquished duties as the GA of Badulla the previous day. As we drove past Paranthan I remarked to Trixie that we seemed to be coming into a wholly different country. The lush green vegetation of the South had given way to low parched scrub. Undulating green hills and valleys carpeted with tea bushes and terraced paddy fields were now replaced by rolling sand

dunes, sprouting spindly palmyrah palms looking like giant tooth picks stuck in the sand.

Dusk was falling as we pulled up under the porch of the Jaffna Residency and our immediate reaction was one of extreme depression. The house looked vast, gaunt and ghostly and the whole spectacle seemed forbidding - ancient walls covered over with peeling paint and layers of lichen and ivy, giant louvered doors creaking on rusty hinges, cobwebs trailing from the ceiling like curtains, and emphasising the gathering



The Porch of the Residency— ancient walls covered over with peeling paint and layers of lichen and ivy...

gloom, the wind blowing like a torrent through the mahogany trees outside. Uncharacteristically, for an incoming GA, not a single local official was on hand to greet us, bar the AGA, a Sinhala officer, Ivan Samarawickerema (the father of Malik S, currently Chairman of the UNP). I could not help thinking that a boycott was on the agenda.

The politics of a dog

Things deteriorated sharply the very first morning I went to my office. Our Alsatian dog *Sharmy* had always followed me wherever I went, and my office being only a few yards from the Residency, walked beside me to my new place of work that first morning. *Sharmy* was a very friendly dog seeking only to be stroked and patted by strangers but on this occasion, totally to my dismay, went for the very first member of the public who came to see me and shredded his verti. It was all so

dreadfully embarrassing and the incident was not lost on the local journalists. The following morning, the "*Eelanadu*", which was a vitriolic Tamil journal, blazoned out the news on its front page, '*New Sinhala GA sets his dog on Tamils*'. I sensed a ground swell of hostility being stirred up.

Everything around me, the language the people spoke, the clothes they wore, their religion, the cultural fabric, their whole demeanour and indeed even the very soil, seemed to shout out their uniqueness. The whole ambience reeked of an otherness which I found quite unsettling

With rumours about my supposedly tyrannical style bubbling up all around me, things could only get worse, and they did. A few days into my new job, I called a conference of all the Heads of Departments, numbering about 35, along with all the eleven local Members of Parliament (MPs) just to get acquainted with them. Speaking in English I opened the conference by introducing myself. I could not proceed any further before Dr. E. M. V. Naganathan, in private life a fine gentleman but notoriously volatile in public life as an MP stood up and addressed me in Tamil, '*Mr GA, you are here as a ruler and an oppressor. We don't want you here and you can go back to wherever you came from. If you proceed with this conference any further I shall brain you with this paper weight*' and so saying actually picked up a glass paper weight from the conference table and raised his hand as if to throw the missile at me. Pandemonium ensued. While I remained calm in my chair, officials around me sprang at Naganathan and retrieving the paper weight from him, pinned him down to his chair. I had no alternative but to adjourn the meeting. The Suptd. of Police, Jack van Sanden, who was himself a participant at the conference, wanted to prosecute the MP for attempted assault but I insisted that there should be no prosecution.

The people of Jaffna had made up their minds that I was an agent of an alien power and it became pretty obvious that I if I was to do my job as GA, I had first to dissipate those feelings of hostility. The task was a daunting one, requiring diplomatic skills, understanding, patience and wisdom such as I had up to that time (I was only 33 years old then) never had to summon. I began to understand then, exactly what Leonard

Woolf meant when he said that, as the AGA of Hambantota, way back in 1907, he felt as if he was a ruler and an imperialist, roles which he said he loathed. Equally, I loathed the image the people of Jaffna seemed to have of me. Regardless of the government's policies, I did not see myself as a ruler at all, but merely as the first servant of the district. However, I had to show the people, beyond any ambiguity, that that was exactly who I was. The only way to do that was by being transparently honest, just, and fair, in all my transactions with the local populace, with local officialdom, and mostly with the politicians.

Meeting at 'Temple Trees'

However, first I had to explain to Mrs B, the Prime Minister, my conundrum and the complexity of the task she had given me. She agreed to see me immediately at her official residence at Temple Trees and ordered an air force plane to have me picked me up from Jaffna. On arrival at Temple Trees, I found to my great consternation that the PM had also invited to the discussion her Permanent Secretary N.Q. Dias, who was known for his extreme nationalist views, and was feared even by Cabinet Ministers and had been nick named, not without good reason, "The Tzar".

I set out for the PM, briefly and simply, my philosophy and vision for the administration of Jaffna and for the resolution of the ethnic conflict. I said that to start with the government must implement the "Reasonable Use of Tamil Act", which had been legislated by her late husband but which, up to that time, had not been gazetted though passed in Parliament. I explained to her that the best way to deal with the Federal Party (FP) was neither by using strong arm tactics, nor by duplicity, but by being fair and just, and by enforcing the law in the spirit rather than by the letter. She listened to me patiently and, ignoring interruptions from her Permanent Secretary, who insisted that the only way to deal with the Tamil people was by being tough with them, turning to me said, *"Mr J, I fully agree with you. You go back and do just as you have explained to me. I do not like violence and I want this conflict to be settled through peaceful methods. You have my full support"*. N.Q. Dias was almost in a state of apoplexy, but Mrs B's assurance to me that day was the bedrock upon which I founded my administration of 3 years of the Jaffna District.

The crunch

The crunch came within a month. As expected, the FP announced the launch of the Secessionist Movement, the first intimation of separatism, with a massive march on the Kachcheri (provincial administrative centre) for 10th Oct.

1963. The FP planned to bring supporters in buses and by train from Batticaloa, Trincomalee, Vavuniya, Mannar and from throughout the Jaffna District, numbering over 20,000.

They were to assemble on the esplanade near the Fort and march down Main Street and demonstrate outside the Kachcheri and Residency, which were adjacent, and the highlight of the demo was to be the burning of an effigy of the Prime Minister and a copy of the "Sinhala Only Act".

Wanting to keep strictly within the law, the FP applied to the Police for a permit to assemble and march. The Supdt. of Police, Jack van Sinden, a splendid police officer from the Dowbiggin era, consulted me and I said the permit should be issued. However, the Inspector General of Police (IGP) in Colombo, Jingle Dissanaike, acting on instructions from N.Q.Dias the Perm. Sec. overruled me. There then followed an acrimonious ding dong tussle between the grandees in Colombo and me, which led inevitably to another meeting with the PM at Temple Trees. This time however, besides the formidable N.Q.Dias, there was ranged against me a solid wall of brass and braid, viz, the IGP Jingle Dissanaike, plus the 3 service commanders, General Udugama, Admiral Kadirgamar and Air Vice Marshall Amarasekera, all of the same view, that the FP should not be allowed to march and if they did, should be crushed in their lair.

Contrary to their view, I stated my position coolly but unequivocally. I explained that the FP had a democratic right to assemble, to march, and to protest, that if the government refused them permission to march, they would march regardless, and that that would make them an unlawful assembly. This would result in the use of force to disperse them, arrest of their leaders, to be followed by prosecutions and trials, all of which would make martyrs of the FP leaders and give them the publicity they wanted. I pointed out that such a chain of events would only aggravate the ethnic conflict throughout the country.

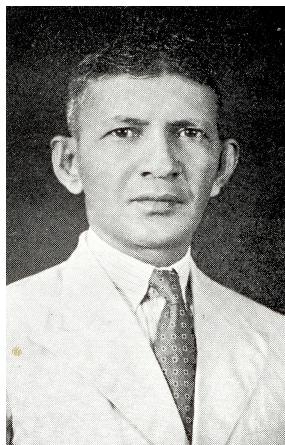
Mrs B listened intently to both sides and again, without any hesitation, said, "*I fully agree with Mr J*" and turning to me said, "*Mr J, you do just as you think right and I want you to co-ordinate all the police and military activities on the day of the march.*" The meeting had lasted barely an hour. Whether Mrs B's straightforward decision was born of innocence or of deep wisdom I do not know, but it made N.Q.Dias visibly angry and filled the IGP and the 3 service commanders with total dismay.

The fateful day

The fateful day arrived. I arranged with the police and the military that, in order to minimise any provocation, they should keep off the roads on the day of the march and the marchers should be allowed every opportunity for a peaceful demonstration, even to burn whatever effigy they liked, provided they did not commit arson. Actually, by police estimates, over 30,000, far in excess of the number anticipated even by the FP leaders, marched on the Kachcheri that day. The entire esplanade and the Main Street was one heaving, jostling, slogan shouting, mass of humanity. From my office, their slow approach sounded like the roar of the sea, making Trixie, who was watching from the balcony of the Residency, and my parents, who were with us that day, fear and tremble for my safety. Having swarmed outside the Kachcheri and on to the Residency grounds, the vast crowd kept up a steady and deafening drum beat of slogans for over an hour.

After they had gone fairly hoarse, I walked out to meet the demonstrators, with the Supdt. of Police by my side. We were totally unprotected, there not being a policeman or soldier in sight and on my request, van Sanden had even left his revolver behind and his holster was empty. That was a very powerful metaphor of our intentions. This was not how we were supposed to react. We were supposed to be shooting off tear gas canisters and at least the Supdt. of Police should have been carrying a revolver. Even when they burnt an effigy of the Prime Minister and a copy of the Sinhala Only Act, in our presence, actions tantamount to extreme provocation, especially when perpetrated before the government's chief representative in the district, we watched impassively. The crowd found this response of non-violence from the GA and the police totally disconcert-

ing. To add to their bewilderment, turning to their venerated leader S.J.V. Chelvanayagam, and within earshot of those around, I said, "Sir, why don't you and a few others come inside from the sun so that we can talk in my office". Chelvanayagam was very feeble. So, holding him by his hand, I led him into my office, followed by about 6 other FP stalwarts, to the accompaniment of thunderous cheers from the crowd.



S J V Chelvanayagam

hours of marching and shouting in the Jaffna noon day sun were thirsty and hungry; to partake of some sandwiches and cakes my wife had made for them, which they happily consumed. Having washed it all down with some tea and after shaking hands warmly with van Sanden and me, and after some light hearted banter, the FP leaders walked out into the crowd again.

I too walked out along with them, again helping Chelvanayagam respectfully towards the vast concourse. As we emerged from my office we were all greeted to a renewed round of deafening cheers.



Dr E M V Naganathan

Within a few hours I had been transformed from an imperialist GA into a people's GA!! "*What a world*" I mused inwardly as the crowd dispersed and van Sanden and I polished off what remained of the sandwiches and cakes. The FP leaders had expected me to set up barricades across the road, to call out the police and

the military in strength and to use tear gas and batons, so much so that they had instructed the demonstrators to bring suitable head gear to fend off blows from police batons and scarfs to wear as masks to ward off tear gas. Those head gear and scarfs were never used and I felt that the FP leaders were totally bewildered and even disappointed about the outcome. The fateful day had arrived and passed without a gunshot, or a canister of tear gas being fired, or a baton being wielded, or even a stone being thrown, and everyone was happy! Everyone's rights had been respected and protected and proceedings had been totally democratic, harmonious and civilised. If one ignored the slogans and the heat and the dust, it was all so bourgeois!

The only cost to government had been a sum of fifteen rupees which was the cost of the sandwiches and cakes (things were so cheap in those far off days) with which I entertained the FP leaders, which amount I charged to the GA's entertainment allowance!!

The events of that day had far reaching consequences. They transformed the negative perceptions that the Federal Party (FP), the Tamil Congress (TC) and the Tamils in general had of my administration in particular, and of the government in general. More importantly, they led eventually, in 1965 to the rapprochement between the new government led by Prime Minister Dudley Senanayake and the two main Tamil parties, and served as the foundation upon which the Dudley-Chelvanayagam Accord was signed during the last few months of my tenure in Jaffna. Sadly however, for reasons that cannot be recounted here, that Accord too, like the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayagam Pact of 1957, was abrogated by the government, unilaterally, a year after it was signed. The conflict that was renewed thereafter has burgeoned and spiralled out of all control bringing violence, death and destruction to the whole Island for nearly 40 years.

To be continued

As an experience, madness is terrific... and in its lava I still find most things I write about.

Virginia Woolf in a letter to Ethel Smythe June 1930

New Ireland Experience

by David Parker

You may recall in an earlier article (*The Ceylankan Journal # 31 Vol VIII No 3 August 2005*) I told of my transition from working tea in Sri Lanka to helping an infant industry get off its feet in New Guinea: how the culture of that country, the living conditions and the isolation had such an effect on the new comer. Here now is a record of life in the Islands.

If you look at a map of Australia you will see the large island of New Guinea to the North with New Britain off the North East coast; running on



a North West / South East axis is the long thin island of New Ireland, which was once the outer reef of this group of islands thrown up by volcanic action. New Ireland is over three hundred miles long and rises to above five thousand feet at the Southern end: a very fertile place excellent for most tropical crops. In the far North of the island is the town of Kavieng, the centre of local government and commerce and was my home for the next few years.

Kavieng had a mixed history, predominantly a fishing community who were not averse, in true New Guinea style, to stealing their neighbours' young women. The common language was Pidgin English: they were a pleasant people who were industrious. In the 1890s Germany took over the outer New Guinea Islands to develop a Copra industry, and to establish roads, ports etc. There are many stories about the first governor of the

area, a giant of a man, with similar personality, called Bullaminsky. One of his first edicts was that all villagers would build a road down the East coast and bridge the rivers so that he could travel in his coach and four. It appears that some of the villagers chose to ignore this order with the result that all able bodied men in that area were assembled and required to carry the coach plus occupant plus horses across the river. Needless to say that only happened once.

There is another story of a court being held and several villagers had been condemned to death. When the hanging was over several elderly villagers were brought before the Administrator with the request that these people should also be dispatched. It appears that they were unable to work and a drain on the local economy! Be careful, you pensioners, you may get more than your senior's discount!

Kavieng it self was typical of many small Territory towns. It included several stores, a number of Chinese outlets, a pub, a club and motor garage together with Port, Administration and air strip facilities. The population was about 1500, with 500 European and Chinese, with the rest local residents. My own job was to administer a large plantation group producing Copra, Cocoa, Rubber and Beef cattle. I had four European managers as well as support office staff. It was an interesting position, not only from the planting point of view but because we were also Import / Export and motor vehicle agents.

Life in the town was very pleasant, excellent fishing at our doorstep with skin diving, if you were careful. There was a nine-hole golf course as well as good tennis courts. On one occasion my wife and I swam out to a reef five hundred yards from the shore to look for sea shells. While I was diving something attracted my attention and I saw an enormous fish coming my way. It was the size of my car, and I had a large Chrysler in those days. This meant a quick trip to the surface and out of the water. A very large Dugong was curious as to who I was! After sniffing my flippers he moved off to find something more edible. The Dugong, the original "mermaid" of old, harmless to humans. Unfortunately it is being fished out as with motorised canoes and spear guns it has little chance. One must remember that it is an excellent food source, and so will disappear completely in time.

On another occasion we had taken the children on a picnic to a lovely rock pool fed by a fresh water stream. I decided to explore for Crayfish, leaving the boys playing on the beach. I had not been in the water very long when I was aware of a strange sensation, like a very mild electric shock with vibrations. It was so disagreeable that I came out of the water and stayed on the beach. A few days later one of our plantation managers told me that he had shot a large crocodile which was attacking young cattle very close to where we had been. I can only imagine that the croc thought that I was an interloper and was guarding its territory, but I was not to be his lunch that day!

The estates were run on the lines we are familiar with. Burns Philp and Steamships Trading were the giants of the industry with branches throughout the country, and the smaller organizations such as ours dealt with banks and shippers ourselves. The Plantation agencies did not exist. Some of the estates were situated on off shore islands serviced by coastal steamer every three months. The ships brought food, mail and most of them had a good library but the vessel was their only link with the mainland, other than radio. There is a story about one of these outposts where the ships only called every four months. On this occasion the visitors were greeted by the estate long boat and the "boss boy" advised the captain that the copra was ready for loading and where was the rice and bully beef to take back? When the captain asked where was the master, the reply was, "He died four moons ago, but we buried him, when is the new master coming?"

Labour for the estates was often a problem as the local population had their own plots and gardens, and had no need to work for wages. We recruited labour out of the highlands. Fifty three able bodied young men, so the order said to the recruiter. This was a full DC3 load which brought them to the coast on a two year contract and returned those who had finished work. The scheme was a good one as the labour was paid half their wages every month and the balance was handed over to them when they got off the plane. This ensured that they had something to show for the time they had been away from home.

When the new labour arrived they were scared,

some hardly spoke Pidgin, were dressed in rags and many in need of a good wash! When the labour returned they were well dressed, fit looking and full of cheek. The contract labour soon took to the work; three meals a day also made a big difference. There was little labour trouble other than an occasional out break of intertribal rivalry. Our produce was disposed of in several ways. All copra went to the Copra Marketing Board in Kavieng, cocoa and rubber were sold in Australia under contract, and when beef was available it was for local consumption, the main function of the cattle was to keep the grass down under coconuts, the beef being a by-product.

The islands often attracted those who found civilisation difficult. In another era they would have been known as "remittance" men. Some were running away from something and others were not allowed back to where they had come from. A real melting pot of humanity, a place one could settle into, let standards drop and watch the world go by. As an employer the expatriates had to be watched for such signs and get them away on leave as necessary; Sydney was only three hours away by plane. It was no wonder that Somerset Maugham had such a fund of stories. On the other hand there were men like my number one who inherited a small estate and proceeded to make his asset grow until he had a most worthwhile company with fingers in many financial pies; he now lives in comfortable retirement. One of the sadder aspects of modern New Ireland was the occupation by the Japanese. New Ireland was the first of the New Guinea group to be occupied. The occupiers arrived by sea and were in the town before any one knew they were there. All Europeans were rounded up and with the exception of one nun, were executed; she ran the local leper colony and was left alone. The Japanese were incredibly cruel to the local population who slowly drifted into the hills and kept out of harms way. Several planters escaped, and went into the hills and became part of what was later known as The Coast Watchers. These men did a wonderful job reporting on shipping and troop movements, and were serviced by submarine. We always knew that our stay would be short lived and centred round the education of the children. A decision was made and we went "pinis" (finish) to grapple with yet another way of life. A sad departure for us all as we loved this strange island and its interesting people.

Is our future in the past?

by S Pathiravitana

This seemingly paradoxical query is from a theme that came up for discussion at a conference of environmentalists who met in Perth a few years back to talk about what we should do when building towards the future. We were represented by Mr. C.G. Weeramantry who was the Vice-President once of the Court of International Justice at The Hague. He refers to this Perth conference in the preface he wrote to a little booklet where he published his separate opinion (while agreeing with the conclusions of the Court) on a very interesting case that came up before the Court around 1997.

The litigants who appeared in this case were two states, Hungary and Slovakia. Their grievance was over a dam that was being built on the river Danube, which also happened to be their common frontier. Slovakia had spent several billion dollars on the initial investment. Hungary was now complaining that the dam was going to create a lot of environmental damage to its country. We didn't hear of this dispute earlier, if there was one, because the two countries were then under the Soviet grip. The treaty that was signed by these two countries then was now coming apart.

What was before the Court, however, was a dispute over development and environment - the development of one country in this case being disastrous to the other. How was the Court going to resolve this problem? Mr Weeramantry tells us that his mind took him at once towards his childhood memories when he accompanied his parents on their visits to the historic cities of Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa and the sight of those huge reservoirs has remained in his memory ever since. That experience soon became relevant to the understanding of the problem now before the Court.

Faced with similar problems, how did our kings set about damming the rivers and the waterways without damaging the environment too much and also improving the welfare of the land and its people? After studying the question at some depth he gathered a lot of useful information on how traditional wisdom helped the conservation

of the environment, which he has now included in a little booklet. This will soon become a useful little compendium of traditional wisdom to jurists interested in what is now becoming a subject of great importance - sustainable development.

"One of the legal issues before the court," writes Mr Weeramantry, "was the concept of sustainable development which is so much in the forefront of modern international environment law. I realised that our ancient irrigation heritage was an example par excellence of the practical application of this concept. In fact it offered one of the best examples in world history of the implementation of this concept. Its relevance to the legal question before the Court struck me as inescapable."

Another reason for his effort to draw wider attention to this subject was when he circulated some statistics among his colleagues in the panel of judges "concerning the scale and duration of the Sri Lankan operation... (which) neither the bench nor the bar, as far as I could detect, had the slightest awareness of this phenomenal Sri Lankan contribution to universal culture." Since this is a rare feature in the equipment of the Sri Lankan academic, who often is aware only of the negative side of the Sri Lankan landscape, he deserves a special word of thanks for displaying to the world the genius of the people of this country.

You gather from the information he provides that the Sri Lankan civilisation was not an isolated case, but one which had diplomatic relations with Rome in the first century A.D., with Byzantium in the 4th century A.D. and that the presence of Sri Lankan ambassadors in Rome was recorded by Pliny (lib. vi, c 24) and the detailed knowledge Rome had of this country was noted by Grotius in his *Mare Liberum* and how Lanka was known to the Greeks as Taprobane, to the Arabs as Serendib, to the Portuguese as Ceilao and to the Dutch as Zeylan. Gibbon, too, noted that Lanka had trade relations with the Far East and the Roman Empire.

Arnold Toynbee also refers to our tank civilisation as an 'amazing system of water works' and goes on to describe how the hill streams were trapped and the water guided into giant storage tanks 'some of them four thousand acres in ex-

tent.' Mr. Weeramantry also quotes extensively from a modern day campaigner for the environment, Edward Goldsmith, as in the following quote:

Sri Lanka is covered with a network of thousands of man-made lakes and ponds known as tanks (after tanque, the Portuguese word for reservoir). Some are truly massive, many are thousands of years old, and almost all show a high degree of sophistication in their construction and design. Sir James Emerson Tennent, the nineteenth century historian, marvelled in particular at numerous channels that were dug underneath each bed of the lake in order to ensure that the flow of water was constant and equal as long as any water that remained in the tank.

The quotations cited by Weeramantry range from Pliny to Arthur C Clarke and may be sufficient to impress a reader from the West, but the one he quotes from the Mahawamsa may strike this same reader as being 'quaint' but, nonetheless, startling. In the modern West the role of Man is conceived as that of a conqueror of Nature. But here in the East he plays only a secondary role as pointed out by Arahat Mahinda, when he surprised King Devanampiya Tissa in the middle of his hunt with the following words:

O great King, the birds of the air and the beasts have as equal a right to live and move about in any part of the land as thou. The land belongs to the people and all living beings; thou art only the guardian of it.

It is difficult to imagine that the West will ever come to grant a secondary role to Man in the scheme of things. The way the modern scientific age stands now, dreaming of building cities on remote planets and satellites, it is hard to dissuade it from spending billions of dollars on such projects. Here on earth he is unable to live barely in peace among his fellow men, how is this same Man going to build a better future over there?

No doubt there were voices in the West, too, that cautioned those who wanted to rush headlong into the future with words of warning such as this:

Why has not man a microscopic eye? It is Alexander Pope who asks this question and

goes on to supply the answer:

For this reason, man is not a fly.

And he goes on to ask a second question:

*Say what the use, were finer optics giv'n
T'inspect a mite, or comprehend the heav'n'*

In this traditional scheme of things man is not on the top of the pile, says Alexander Pope but somewhere in the middle alongside 'Beast, bird, fish, insect' in what he calls the 'Vast chain of Being' extending from microbes to God. But then who reads Pope these days? From Alexander Pope to T.S.Eliot and Wendell Berry in our time, they are all voices crying in the wilderness.

That is why I am beginning to wonder whether the term 'sustainable development' is the most appropriate to apply here. 'Development' has several meanings; the one that comes most to mind readily is a change of state from worse to better. And striving towards a better state means for people today a desperate yearning to go to the Middle East or Italy, only to come back loaded with all the gadgetry in the world and to find that they are unsuited for our style of doing things.

Some people in the West are now realising that over consumption is all wrong and wasteful and harmful to the environment. They, like E.F. Schumacher, are recommending now a Buddhist economics that can observe a proper balance of economic, environmental and social needs to reduce the tension between development and environment. Schumacher sums it all up in one sentence – **A maximum of welfare with a minimum of consumption.**

If you like to see how this worked read Robert Knox:

Thus plentifully has Nature stored this Island that they neither need nor have many manual operations, except making tools to till the ground to sow Cotton for Clothing and for rice; for they reach not for more than food and raiment and drink the water of the brookes. Thus with these naturall helps they live with little labour; having less riches and Care than we in England, but are healthful, Chefull and Carelesse and so live with their wives and children tell worned out with old age.

Thus they eate to live (not for wantonnesse) and live to eate, for they use not sports for recreations

when grown up, but their Chief diversion is to sett and talk with their friends and neighbours.

'This kind of life have I had many years experience of having but little and wanting less - I mean such things as are absolutely necessary for mans subsistence - and so could very well have Continued myself to have Continued...'

While the materialist is mainly interested in goods, the Buddhist is mainly interested in liberation. But Buddhism is the 'Middle Way' and in no way antagonistic to physical well being. It is not wealth that stands in the way of liberation but the attachment to wealth: not the enjoyment of pleasurable things but the craving for them. The keynote of Buddhist economics therefore, is simplicity and non violence. From an economists point of view, the marvel of the Buddhist way of life is utter rationality of its pattern - amazingly small means leading to extraordinarily satisfactory results.

E F Schumacher (1911-1977) German born economist in Small is Beautiful—A Study of Economics as if People Mattered. 1973

Bumper Stickers



I used to have a handle on life...but it broke off.

Try not to let your mind wander...It is too small and fragile to be out by itself.

WANTED: Meaningful overnight relationship.



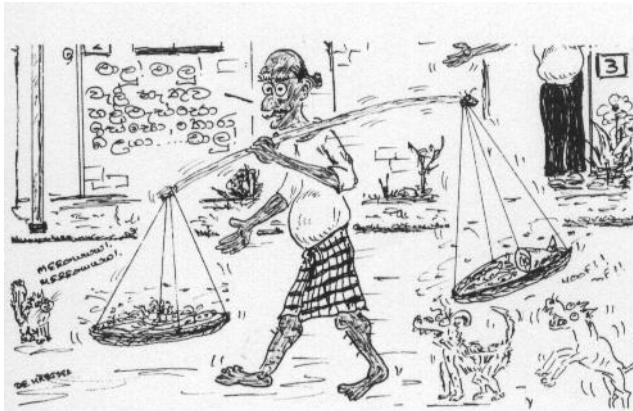
Road Scene on the way to the Kelaniya Temple, Colombo.

Road scene on the way to Kelaniya Temple
Photo Gallery ...yesteryear

What Happened to the Itinerant Tradesman?

by Vama Vamdevan

In the 1930s and 40s the itinerant tradesmen were so much a part of our life in Sri Lanka. Those were the days when we grew up in homes that had big gardens or compounds as we used to call them. They were large enough for cricket or soccer games. We even played cricket matches with ‘pol pithi’ bats



The ‘Malu Karaya’ (itinerant fish salesman)

and ‘kaduru’ balls and even had umpires, a much-maligned breed of the Darrel Hair variety. In this scenario, our mothers were home bound and hardly had the time or conveyance to go shopping. The tradesmen rose to the occasion and brought all the household needs to the doorstep. This gave the householder an undue advantage. He or she could haggle over prices and the hapless vendor invariably gave in rather than face the prospect of trudging more miles to find a buyer.

The most welcome tradesman was the breadman. The scent of newly baked bread announced his arrival. Needless to say whatever the time of his arrival the cricket match would break up for lunch. The most sought after were buns – every child’s delight especially the sugar-topped variety. For a few cents both teams would be fed and the match would resume. In his basket were an assortment of ‘kimbula paan’, ‘sankili paan’, ‘roast paan’ and other assorted delicacies. None of the ethnic bakeries in Sydney can match what the breadman brought to our doorstep.

The ‘Malu Karaya’ (itinerant fish salesman) arrived around 11 a.m. His arrival was announced by his shouts ‘Malu, malu aluth maalu’ (fish! fish! fresh fish). His shouts were superfluous in any way, because of the barking dogs and buzz of flies that preceded his arrival. The housewife would be ready at the doorstep with an entourage of servants armed with used brown paper or vessels. As the fish vendor lowered his basket, (if not carried pingo style) assisted by the prospective buyer’s servant, there would be a chorus of condemnation of the quality by the lady of the house roundly agreed to by the rest. The ploy was aimed at striking a bargain even before the sale. Then the haggling over the price, with much action of getting up and going away then coming back to the fray would commence. The fish vendor was at a tremendous disadvantage with none on his side and conscious of this drawback he would apply a liberal dose of sea sand on the fish to artificially increase the weight of his supply.

The ‘Keera Ammah’ was also a welcome visitor; she had ‘mittis’ (bundles) of gottukola, thampala, nivithi and several other leafy vegetables in her basket. They are usually from the local ‘Keerakotuwa’, (leafy vege patch) in the low-lying marshlands. The attraction was that for a mere 10 cts, at that time of course, most palatable and nourishing food was on the table. The vendor, invariably a lean Indian Tamil woman of dignity who irrespective of her poverty, would be decked with gold ear studs pulling her ear lobes to the shoulders and of course a lot of tattoos on her visible parts of the body.

Then there was the “Bombai Mootai” man the most welcome tradesman for all children. Why his wares were called “Bombai mootai” is a puzzle. May be some reader can offer an explanation. But the assortment of his sweets was fascinating for us children. There was colour, with a preponderance of pink that left tell tale marks for days on our mouths. His sweets were carried in a tub like basket on his head. He timed his itinerary in such a way that he would be outside schools during the school intervals and lunch breaks. The fluffy ‘mootai’ (candy floss) and ‘muskat’ (a sweet like Turkish delight) were his specialties. He had strips of old newspaper cut into rectangular pieces, which he would fold in

the fashion of modern day ice cream cones to dish out the ‘mootai’.

In addition to foodstuff there were also services brought to the doorstep. The knife sharpener with his home-assembled contraption from various parts of a bicycle comes to mind. A discarded bicycle wheel, a make do pedal turned from wood, a circular grinding stone neatly mounted with a leather belt linking the cycle wheel to the grinding stone completed his machine. He would pump the pedal to get the stone revolving at some speed, and he would be in business. His shouts “*Chanai! Chanai!*” (Tamil) in Wellawatte, Kotahena areas and “*Kathurumuwath, kathurumuwath*” (Sinhala) in other areas would bring out the servants with all the blunt instruments in the household. His activity always attracted kids in the vicinity who watched in awe this contraption and the reddish sparks which flew in all directions. Mind you, neither he nor his audience was ever protected from these flying sparks with safety goggles etc. That was another era.

Another welcome itinerant vendor was the *Parana coat*’ man. His business was barter of pre loved clothing for household wares. For this he was a housewives dream and was always welcome. In his box of tricks was an assortment of vases, cutlery, cups, mugs and other knick knacks. The housewife would exchange unwanted children’s clothing, coats and what not, with items from the vendors basket. If it was not considered a fair exchange the vendor would demand more used clothing and the usual haggle ensued until a bargain was struck. It ended when both parties thought they got the better deal of the exchange. It was a win, win situation where both parties walked away with a good ‘bargain’. We often wondered where he found a secondary market for the used clothes!

Then there was the *Gal-kotanna* man. His tools were merely a hammer and an assortment of cold chisels. His service was to roughen out stone grinders and mortars worn smooth by usage, deepening the grooves to give them a new lease of life. He would make the biggest possible din whilst working. This was primitive but effective advertising to attract attention of the neighbour.

The Chinese cloth vendor was also a welcome

salesman. A bundle of textiles tightly bound in khaki cloth was secured to his bicycle carrier. We used to wonder how he managed to balance such a load of cloth and trundle along on pot holed roads. He was armed with a smattering of Sinhalese and Tamil just enough to get through his business. Any shortcoming he would cover up with a wide smile displaying his gold teeth. He wielded the yardstick with mesmerizing speed and it was long after his departure the housewife realised that she did not get the bargain she thought she did. His gold toothed smile was an effective distraction from the short measures he applied and probably was the precursor of a modern day second hand car salesman’s smile while he offloads a lemon on you.



“*Kathurumuwath*” the knife sharpener with his home made contraption –red hot sparks aflying..

Other purveyors of grocery items also come to mind. The ‘*Thel Vaaniya*’ (cooking oils), a rather oily character himself, the ‘*Vimto karaya*’ (aerated waters) in a bullock drawn cart with sodas for dads and “*orangenbarley*” and Ribena like “*Vimto*” for the kids. The milk man was the other itinerant vendor I remember. He would have a canvas sack with individual compartments for each bottle draped on centre bar of his bicycle with a milk can tied to the rear carrier. He would vend fresh milk no doubt but of questionable density. After all water was free.

Before all this modern day fuss about re-cycling and council bins, the “*paththarakaraya*” called over and not only collected your old newspapers but also gave ready cash for it. He had a little trick in the way he held the weighing scales (of the spring balance variety) which, with a tilt

of his finger, he could give an upward lift thus reducing the weight of the paper he bought. It would be done in a flash and nobody argued the toss. The bulk of his collection went to the Valachchenai paper factory. A small portion was sold to boutiques for wrapping paper and eateries where the paper was cut into small squares to be used as paper serviettes, ages before the present day fancy paper serviettes were devised.

The rise of flats and apartments as homes and the change of life style, increased mobility of the housewives, sophisticated merchandising, supermarkets and loads of advertising have eventually contributed to the demise of this charming and personalised trade. Now the salesman is confined to his shop and the housewife does the long trek. A few modern day vendors are motorised and use scooters, tuk tuks and small vans.

But gone are the days when one could hear the plaintive cry down the lane “*gaal kottaaaaande*”...

CEYLON SOCIETY of AUSTRALIA

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The 10th Annual General Meeting will take place on Sunday November 26 commencing 7.30 PM at the Thornleigh Community Centre, corner Phyllis & Central Avenues (Phyllis Avenue is off Pennant Hills Road).

Main business of the meeting is the election of Office Bearers for 2007 and tabling of reports from the President and the Treasurer.

Please note that nominations for office and notice of any resolutions must be forwarded to reach me AT LEAST 2 weeks prior to the date of the meeting.

Douglas Jones

Hony. Secretary
109 Oakhill Drive
Castle Hill NSW 2154 Australia
Email: [\(deejay20@bigpond.net.au\)](mailto:deejay20@bigpond.net.au)
(02) 9894 7449

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

Part 2

by *Sergei De Silva-Ranasinghe*

From its inception, there was considerable emphasis on planning a force structure geared for internal security operations. The role of the CA was designed to undertake four key functions, indicative of a developing nation: **(a)** Defend the nation from external foreign aggression; **(b)** Assist civilian administration in internal security, such as Task Force Anti-Illicit-Immigration (TaFII), 1953 Hartal, 1956 Gal Oya Valley riots, 1958 riots and Ceylon's first post-independence insurrection in 1971; **(c)** Conduct labour intensive national development tasks such as assistance to the Mahaweli Development Project, agrarian food cultivation and harvesting in 1967 and 1968 on a 500 acre farm near Walawe, a 600 acre farm at Padaviya and a poultry farm at Ridiyagama; **(d)** Manage essential services by operating and maintaining important government services during countless strikes, emphasised by the 1961 Colombo Port Strike.

In addition, estimates indicate that throughout the five years after the proclamation of emergency rule since the 1958 riots, emergency rule had lasted three years. At least seven of the fourteen year period from 1958 to 1972 was governed under emergency law. Strikes and internal security operations were so frequent and draining on the regular army that successive governments were forced, by the 1960s, to expand and mobilise the CVF on an almost constant basis to support the regular army.

Task Force Anti-Illicit Immigration

The first internal security operation of the CA was not under emergency duty, but in a coast watching and interception role. This was in support of Royal Ceylon Navy coastal patrols and police operations against an influx of illegal South Indian immigrants brought in by smugglers from Ceylon and India, as affirmed by Lieutenant Colonel H W G Wijeyekoon: “The checking of illicit immigration from South India was the National problem which set off this operation. Illicit

immigration had assumed alarmingly large proportions and the Police service had neither the numbers nor the organisation to cope with the initial task of detecting landings. The army was therefore called out in aid of the Civil Power and undertook to detect landings along a seventy-two mile stretch of coast line commencing at Palagamunai, nine miles north of Mannar, right round the island of Mannar, and terminating at Achchankulam, twelve miles south of Mannar. The bulk of the illicit landings were taking place in this area. The army also undertook to watch the coast by the mouth of the Kal Aru just north of the Wilpattu Game Sanctuary.”

Starting in 1952, ‘Operation Monty’ was expanded and renamed as Task Force Anti-Illicit Immigration (TaFII) in 1963. It also transpired to be the CA’s longest single operational deployment lasting 21 years. The CA’s contribution, referred to as ‘Army Force M’, initially incorporated a full strength infantry battalion and auxiliaries stationed on the Mannar district seaboard. With the proliferation of indigenous separatist groups after 1972, the primary role of TaFII expanded to a counter-insurgency operational outfit until it was disbanded in 1981.

1953 Hartal

The advent of a hartal or mass strike on August 12, 1953, tested and stretched the army’s efficiency for the first time. Organised by the left wing parties and trade unions, the protest which involved many thousands was against the government’s abrogation of a rice subsidy, which substantially escalated the price of rice, the nation’s staple food. The protest rapidly turned into major civil unrest, mainly around Colombo, leading to a dozen deaths. The government was compelled to mobilise the military under emergency regulations to its first encounter.

It was in this setting that the CA first made its presence felt. The situation stretched resources, compelling the CA to use 200 batmen, orderlies and messengers in operations, including some recruits who had not completed their full training requirements. However, the CA swiftly restored order. In an evaluation of the 1953 hartal, the CA’s first Ceylonese Commander, Major General A M Muttukumaru, provided an assessment of the army’s performance: “The last time I had been in a comparable situation was in

1947 when the CDF was recalled from being mobilised for action against trade unionists. The troops were seasoned and took their duties readily... Altogether, the inexperienced regulars reacted correctly to the situation and fully appreciated the need not only for ‘minimum force’ as necessary but also for a greater degree of force when dealing with relatively recalcitrant opponents.”

1956 Gal Oya Valley Riots

Following the 1956 elections and the introduction of Sinhala as the country’s official language, the first major outbreak of ethnic violence occurred leading to the deaths of around 150 people. It was the worst sectarian violence since the 1915 riots, 41 years previously. The unrest initially started in Colombo but was quickly suppressed. However, it remained severe in the Eastern Province’s Gal Oya Valley, which due to inadequate police resources to contain the unrest, led to a collapse of government authority.

The government declared an emergency in the Eastern Province and rushed army units to contain the spread of violence. Much like the 1953 hartal, the army again found itself under resourced to meet the exigencies of the situation, a fact which Major General A M Muttukumaru depicted: “The army was fully stretched to deal with the situation... The situation was unquestionably difficult because of the violence that the soldiers experienced, involving the use of much more than the ‘minimum force’ adopted in ‘aid to civil power’ operations.”

1958 Riots

The outbreak of island wide ethnic violence from May 24-27, 1958, saw for the first time the deployment of military personnel under emergency proclamations throughout the entire island, where Colombo and the North and East of the country witnessed the worst violence leading to over 300 deaths. Once authorised to use force to bring back order, Ceylon’s Governor-General, Sir Oliver Goonetilleke, looked to the army and gave strict orders against militant and criminal elements, “Clear them out even if you have to sh-sh-sh-shoot them”, as stated by Tarzie Vittachi.

In the North Central district dozens of thugs were shot dead by soldiers, especially around

Anuradhapura and Padaviya, where significant contact took place. In some areas of the East, there was open resistance by militant civilians armed with shotguns and rifles, as recalled by a soldier of the Ceylon Army Ordnance Corps, "At the Kallady bridge we had trouble... they shot at Colonel Richard Udugama the Commanding Officer for operations in the Batticaloa district."

In dealing with the crisis, the CA also played a fundamentally important humanitarian role. The Ceylon Engineers constructed temporary accommodation and ancillary services for an estimated 10,000 refugees. The Ceylon Army Service Corps was tasked to feed refugees and transport them to selected temporary refugee camps.

1961 Colombo Port Strike

A significant feature of Sri Lanka's political landscape was the endless strikes that almost crippled the island's economy. Due to strikes been so constant and debilitating, successive governments relied heavily on the army. This ensured that practically every unit of the army, including the combat units, were deployed on 'strike breaking' operations. The governments in power endorsed the creation of units specifically designed for strike breaking purposes. These units included the Post and Telegraph Signals Regiment (c.1955-1956), Ceylon Railway Engineer Regiment (c.1955-1956), Ceylon Army Na-

tional Defence Corps (c.1958-1963) and most importantly the formation and deployment from 1959-1962 of five CVF battalions, comprising of 9,000 Ceylon Army Pioneer Corps reservists at its peak, needed to operate Colombo port facilities.

This operation was the most extensive usage of troops for strike breaking purposes in the army's history, the significance of which was explained by Major General HWG Wijeyekoon: "The operation came into force on 18th December 1961. The army has been deployed in the Port for just over a month now. I have seen for myself and I have heard from the Director Port Operations, the Port Commission and the Port Cargo Corporation officials and even from outsiders that the Army had been doing an excellent job of work in the Port. As a result of the Colombo Harbour not having come back to normal, where approximately 8,000 to 10,000 tons of cargo, are unloaded per day, foreign shippers have threatened to either by-pass Colombo and unload cargo for Ceylon in other Ports, or are refusing to carry any cargo for Ceylon. It is for this reason that Port Operations were intensified and all types of cargo are now being handled. The loading of essential export cargo, tea, rubber, desiccated coconut etc., are also essential to ensure that world markets are supplied with these goods and our revenue increased."

1971 Insurrection

The ultra-left insurrection of 1971 was the first serious armed challenge to the CA, which resulted in Ceylon's first post-independence insurrection. Once the insurrection was successfully confronted, there was a greater drive to train soldiers in counter-insurgency operations, as confirmed by the CA's Commander, Lieutenant General DS Attygalle: "With the advent of this new era in the operational activities of the army a complete re-organization of the army was carried out in the interest of national security." It was not long after this event that post-independence Ceylon moved towards the status of a republic and a new era of challenges.

Army of the Republic

Ceylon was renamed Sri Lanka under a new republican constitution on May 22, 1972. This change also brought a re-designation of the army's regimental insignia ending the era of the



Army personnel at the Colombo Port

CA, which was renamed the Sri Lanka Army. It also, not long after, coincidentally marked the dawn of a new era, the rise of indigenous separatist organisations, including the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

The contemporary Sri Lanka Army role and organisation has expanded and diversified considerably since the dawn of separatism in 1972. It has transformed into a modern military organisation and since 1983 has engaged in three phases of combat against secessionist groups in a conflict commonly referred to as the 'Eelam War.'

By 1998 the army had expanded to an unprecedented total strength of 125,616 (4,233 regular officers and 75,083 other ranks; 1,510 reserve officers and 44,790 other ranks) encompassing 21 separate regiments and corps, five infantry regiments, containing

25 regular infantry and 47 volunteer infan-

try/guard battalions, trained and seasoned in counter-insurgency operations.

The post-1972 era to-date demonstrates how significantly the CA era of bygone days has, as an institution, passed into history.

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.

About the Author: Sergei DeSilva-Ranasinghe is a researcher in *Sri Lanka Military History, Defence and Strategic Analysis*. The author invites correspondence and information. He can be contacted by email at sergei.desilva@optusnet.com.au or by mail at **PO Box 251, Batman Victoria 3058, Australia**.

THE MILITARY HISTORICAL HERITAGE OF CEYLON'S BURGHERS

Sergei De Silva-Ranasinghe, a researcher in Ceylon's/Sri Lanka's military history, is conducting a research project on the contribution of Burghers to the Ceylon's colonial and post-independence Armed Forces. Sergei completed his B.A. (Hons) Politics at La Trobe University, where he wrote his thesis: *Military Evolution in a Plural Society: The Sri Lanka Armed Forces (c.1881-2002)* and previously worked as a Senior Interviewer/Historian with the *Australians at War Film Archive*.

Research Project:

Burgher Contribution to the Armed Forces of Ceylon/Sri Lanka: The scope of his project analyses Burgher participation in the British/Ceylonese auxiliary forces from 1796 onwards, covering the colonial Ceylon Defence Force, including the service of Burghers in the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902), the First and Second World Wars and the Malayan Emergency (1948-1960). It also looks at Burgher involvement in the post-independence Armed Forces up to now. There were many Burghers who received decorations for serving overseas during these wars, especially the First and Second World Wars and the Malayan Emergency. Equally so, there were many who also occupied prominent positions in the post-independence Armed Forces and served with distinction.

This project is a commemoration of Burgher military historical heritage. The end result of his research will be several publications comprehensively documenting the deployment and experiences of Burgher servicemen and women, something which has so far received little scholarly attention. Accordingly, Sergei is keen to link up with people who can assist, as he is on the lookout for the following:

Biographical details of veterans

Archival letters, memoirs and diaries

Photographs or film footage

Archival Books, journals & newspaper articles

Wartime paraphernalia relevant to Ceylon (e.g. medals, war trophies)

War service records

Regimental histories & publications

Contacts, etc.

Sergei is interested in communicating with people, whether veterans or family members of veterans who can provide any assistance, historical material or contacts to his project. Email: sergei.desilva@optusnet.com. Postal Address: **P.O. Box 251, Batman VIC 3058, Australia.**

“Charlie’s Angels”: Remembering the de Vos family of Galle Fort

by Joe Simpson

Richard (Dick) de Vos, whose wife Henrietta Sophia was a member of the famous Morgan family, appears to have been something of a “character”, rather like his son Charles (Charlie) de Vos, also a Galle proctor, whom I got to know quite well during the year that I taught at Richmond College from 1973-4. Dick de Vos appears in E.F.C. (Lyn) Ludowyk’s childhood memoir *Those Long Afternoons*, where Lyn recalls him and Mr. Thomé (the father of the future Supreme Court Justice Percy Colin-Thomé) lustily belting out *Gentlemen of Japan* at a Galle Fort concert held to raise funds for the 1914-18 “war effort”.

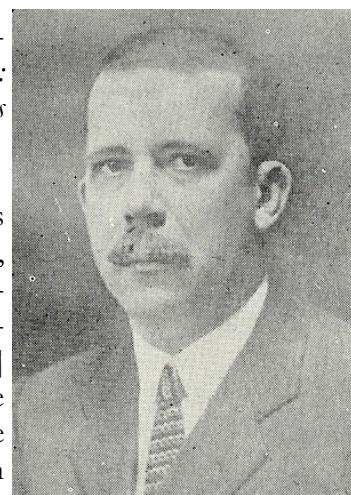
In *Running in the Family*, the Sri Lanka-born Canadian poet and novelist Michael Ondaatje’s fictionalized account of his family’s life in pre-Independence Ceylon, there is a passage that reads: “*It was in Nuwara Eliya that Dick de Vos danced with his wife Etta, who fell flat on the floor; she had not danced for years. He picked her up, deposited her on a cane chair, came over to Rex Daniels and said, Now you know why I gave up dancing and turned to drink.*”

In reality, this incident is absolutely true except that it occurred not in Nuwara Eliya as Michael records, but rather at the Ephraums’ New Oriental Hotel (N.O.H.), in Galle Fort. The specific occasion was the 1924 wedding reception of civil servant R.S.V. de Poulier (then Office Assistant to the G.A. in Galle Kachcheri) and his bride, Amy de Vos. Michael probably knew this, for according to the acknowledgements in his book, while researching it in Sri Lanka during the late 1970s, the famous novelist had free access to Rex Daniel’s unpublished memoirs. Artistic liberty!

The late Galle Fort Librarian Norah Rob-

erts, in her encyclopaedic *Galle: As Quiet as Asleep* (Colombo, 1993), describes Dick as “a tall, hefty beer-drinking Dutchman ... [who] proved to be an unreliable proctor though a very likeable man”. Alas,

adds Norah, he committed suicide in 1931 by drinking a glass of poisoned arrack. He can be seen in a mid-1920s group photograph of the Galle Burgher Tennis Club, that was included in Norah’s book by permission of the Colin-Thomé family: of all the club members standing at the back, including the young Lyn Ludowyk and his Richmond College headmaster father, Dick stands out the one with the most expansive body language, as his right hand rests on his hip and left arm leans casually on his neighbour, “Bubsy” Austin. With benefit of hindsight, given his untimely end a few years later and the eventual Diaspora of all the Burgher families then populating Galle Fort, it is a poignant image of a happy moment frozen in time.



C E de Vos 1871-1941

Gazing back down the years from contented retirement in Suffolk of the early 1980s, Lyn Ludowyk remembered clearly four de Vos children and their mother, who also lived on Middle Street. The widowed Mabel de Vos had also been born de Vos, from yet another branch of the huge extended family that colonised Galle Fort. This little clan lived in one of the so-called “little Pos” (“Pos” being the Sinhala rendering of “de Vos”) houses on Middle Street, between Volkart’s offices and what Lyn refers to as the “house of the Austin ladies”.

According to Norah Roberts, Mina, the eldest of these four children, who never mar-

ried, was a popular Southlands teacher until her early death from cancer in 1949, aged 47. Amy, the next in line, married R.S.V. Poulier of the Ceylon Civil Service in 1924 (as mentioned earlier). Joscelyn (born in 1907) was active in the Girl Guides and St. John's Ambulance, and died in Colombo in the 1980s. Frederick William Edward (known as "Fred"), the youngest of the four, was Lyn's closest childhood friend. Poor little Fred was forever at the mercy of the family servant Alice, a "household dragon" known to the boys as "Alice-Police", who would haul her reluctant young charge away from the games that the two lads loved to play on the grassy-sloped Fort ramparts. The children's late father, Frederick John de Vos, proctor brother of Dick and "C.E.", had died at age 47 in the 1918 Galle enteric (typhoid) epidemic. Lyn's boyhood friend Fred de Vos later became a very successful proctor married twice and enjoyed a lucrative practice in Galle and (later) Nuwara Eliya, before eventually joining the post-Independence Burgher exodus to Australia. Norah Roberts tells us that Fred and his second wife, Virginia, had a son, Jeremy, born in Australia in 1969, and that Fred died there in 1985.

Lyn Ludowyk describes the extended de Vos family as being "one of the oldest Burgher families of the town", and he remembered as a small child peeking out from



De Vos residence - 26 Middle Street - Galle Fort

his Middle Street home at the horse-drawn funeral cortège for the most senior member of the family, an elderly gentleman who had walked alone around the Fort each evening. In actual fact, the de Vos lineage in Sri Lanka/Ceylon reached back to 1673, when 20-year-old Oliver de Vos arrived in Colombo on the VOC ship '*Wapen vander Goes*', a raw immigrant from his native Bruges, Belgium. Like many "Burgher" families, they proliferated down through the multiple generations: for example, Dick, Frederick and Charles Edward were only three out of no less than eleven siblings, all born in Galle during the 1870s and 1880s. "C.E." was the second oldest, Frederick was born the year after him, and Dick was born last of all, in 1887. Norah Roberts provides a brief but interesting potted history of the extended de Vos family in *Galle: As Quiet as Asleep*, at pp. 81-83.

Norah remembered Charles Edward (C.E.) de Vos, born in 1871, as "an eminent lawyer and confirmed bachelor", and in her book gives him "pride of place" among the Galle Fort Burghers of his time. His town home was at No. 26, Middle Street, which still stands across from the present Southlands Girls' College, at the intersection of Middle and Lighthouse Streets. He shared it with his two unmarried sisters, Evelyn and Mary. He maintained a weekend residence at quietly rural Hirimbure, in the foothills a few miles inland from Galle town, where he grew vegetables, and for exercise he liked to walk the Fort ramparts each weekday morning.

A glowing profile of C.E. that appears in Arnold Wright's *Twentieth Century Impressions of Ceylon* (London, 1907) confirms Norah's recollections. A man of gentle nature, scholarly habits (he could read in seven languages) and simple tastes, "C.E." had a brilliant scholastic career at All Saints' School, Galle and Royal College, Colombo, before going on to Cambridge on the cov-

eted University Scholarship that he won at age 17. After completing his Mathematics Tripos (Degree) he qualified in 1894 as a barrister at the Middle Temple in London, and then returned to Ceylon, where initially he practiced as a Supreme Court advocate (barrister) before settling permanently back in his hometown of Galle as a Crown Advocate, becoming a Q.C. (Queen's Counsel) in 1899. He was the first lawyer ever to have his portrait unveiled in the Galle Law Library, and for many years was the acknowledged leader of social and political life in the town.

Norah's formidably capable father, District Judge T. W. Roberts C.C.S. (also the father of Professor Michael Roberts), always appreciated C.E.'s talent for both cross-examination and courtroom brevity! So fond of Galle was C.E., Norah tells us, that he refused an appointment as Commissioner of Assize because it would have entailed leaving the town. Apart from frequently acting as D.J., he represented Fort Ward in the Galle Municipal Council for 34 years, always being elected even though he never canvassed, and always unopposed except for his last year. Later in life he was persuaded to sit as Burgher Member in the Legislative Council. C.E. was greatly admired as a true friend and adviser to all communities, classes and creeds, being a tolerant and liberal man, while remaining a staunch supporter of the Dutch Reformed Church and long-time Hon. President of the local YMCA. He died in 1941, in his 70th year.

C.E.'s nephew - and Dick's son - C.W.R. (Charles) de Vos, was the very last of Galle's extended de Vos family to remain in Fort. Charles (better known as Charlie) was born in 1916, so would have been in his later fifties when I knew him in Galle. Norah Roberts describes Charlie in his younger days as "tall and handsome, with auburn hair", and with a fine voice, like his father, which stood him well in Shakespearean plays at school. Jayantha Jayawardene in

Colombo has passed on to me a good story handed down the generations, of the time in the early 1930s that Charlie (then in his senior school year) was put in charge of the St. Thomas' drinks tent at the Royal-Thomian cricket match, surely an egregious example of the fox being left in charge of the chickens! At one stage during the match, thirsty parents and other distinguished guests arrived at the Thomian tent to find...a pile of empty bottles and Charlie, fast asleep, snoring on a bed of frozen ice cubes!

At Law College, true to form, Charlie distinguished himself by failing his final exams five times - by most accounts a brilliant student, he would fly into a dead funk and take to the bottle just before the crucial day! A fondness for liquor and a natural aptitude for indolence, a combination that made dear Charlie such popular, delightful and amusing social company, left him with but small practice of law, and indeed in the year that I knew him (1973-4) he did not appear to practice any law at all, but lived as an impecunious bachelor in a small bedsit at the Galle Fort YMCA.

Just as some from an older generation remembered sitting drinking in the NOH bar with the sociable father, I can recall sitting in the very same place, a half-century and more having passed in the meantime, sharing (more than) a few drinks with the equally sociable son. On occasion Nesta Brohier of the N.O.H. would gather a group of us together for an evening picnic and swim on the beach at Unawatuna, where she kept a small beach hut, but Charlie avoided all natural water like poison! On those starlit tropical nights, as the waves washed against the deserted shoreline and the full moon overhead shaped fantastic silhouettes from the surrounding palm trees, the flush-faced Charlie with a well-filled glass of the "Old Stuff" in his hand and a lit cigarette balanced precariously on his lower lip as he rattled off a good yarn, was the life and soul of the party.

I remember Charlie as tall, slender and (even by Burgher standards) extremely pink-skinned, with a great talent for mimicry and a wickedly anarchic sense of humour, possibly very like that of his father Dick. His grey-white hair was often tied back in a small knot, which gave him a decidedly raffish look as he puffed away at his ever-present Four Aces cigarette. From time to time he would muse vaguely about quitting Galle and moving to Australia, where his older first cousin Fred (mentioned above) had set up a legal practice, and of becoming a barrister there. But of course it was all a pipe dream, for he had little income and was as poor as a church mouse. Charlie reputedly kept a common-law spouse (some said more than one) in a run-down property that he owned somewhere outside town. Local rumour had it that by the 1970s, most of his legal practice (such as it was) consisted of defending this woman in magistrate's court every time she fell out with her aged mother and went after the old lady with an axe or a kitchen knife!

When Charlie de Vos suddenly died of leukaemia in his very early sixties, only a few years after I knew him, Norah tells us that the large attendance at his funeral bore testimony to the enormous affection in which he was held. Even greater testimony to this, says Norah, was the readiness of his Galle Bar colleagues to pass the hat round for the cost of his funeral. For he was the last of his clan to live in Galle Fort, and deserved a proper send-off.

Requiesce in pace, Charlie.



Another RAF Nugget

By Darnley de Souza

Gifted with a slim silhouette and a swaying carriage, the stands in her multitude along the paths where men pass. Her retractile mouth, her beautiful teeth and her capacity for gorging at mans' expense, her preference in many cases for the juice of invertebrates, as well as the compelling necessity for liquor under which she lives, all justify our describing her as the chorus-girl of the undergrowth.

This is the description of the leech in "The Jungle Hiker", a Royal Air Force Welfare Publication printed in 1944 by The Times of Ceylon. The book is meant to be a guide to those Aircrews who ingloriously and unwillingly find themselves deposited in the jungles of Ceylon. This production is worth adding to the 'Airflow' magazine the subject of Roger Thiedeman's piece in the Journal Number 34 of May 2006.



The book has a serious intent but written in a light-hearted fashion by a literate author, who remains nameless. Even the chapter headings follow this light-hearted pattern. The humour, however, is strained at times as is evident in the description above. The character addressed in the book is Prune (Pilot Officer Prune) and apparently was a patronising term used in the RAF. The book I have is a fourth edition copy and priced at Rs 1.50. The foreword by Air Vice-Marshall Alan Lees remarks on the enthusiastic reception accorded earlier editions. There are a number of line drawings in the book, a few coloured, by G. de Alwis, P.E. P. Deraniyagala and the author. It is soft covered with 160 pages and 17cm(6 ½ ins) by 12cm (4 ¾ ins). Of interest is the page of "Acknowledgments" and the back cover "Some opinions of earlier editions".

It is full of very useful information for an unplanned stay in the jungles, though the choice seems arbitrary at times. The Sinhalese names for the fauna are usually given, but not Tamil names except where the flora is described.

The jungles of Ceylon are divided into two types and there is a short description of each. Choosing and making campsites are covered and so is the making of fires, bathing and drinking. The types of leeches and their treatment are in the Chapter "Dumb Friends and Public Enemies". It was heart-warming to see Friar's Balsam recommended as an antiseptic rather than iodine. I saw the demise of Friar's Balsam in my youth and the sting of iodine taking its place, unfortunately. Friar's Balsam is often mentioned in the book. For prevention against leeches the smearing of their bodies with oil, tobacco juice or limejuice by the local people gets a mention. Scorpions, spiders, millipedes and centipedes, and mosquitoes are covered, with ticks getting much attention. Mites and sandflies, much to their amusement I am sure, also get their place in The Jungle Hiker's sun.



Cover of "The Jungle Hiker"

nana tree I presume) to the wound is referred to. Here again the use of their Sinhalese names get an odd treatment, with local names used for the less common snakes such as the Hump-nosed viper and the Saw-scaled viper and not for the more common ones like the cobra, python and krait.

Only the larger animals such as the elephant, buffalo, leopard, bear, pig, spotted deer, sambhur and monkeys get separate treatment. It is claimed that elephants cannot jump and offers what is surely a tongue-in-the-cheek obstacle to them- the building of a ditch 7 foot deep and as wide. And also goes to a lot of trouble to describe the various sounds made by elephants.

The Hornbill and the Flamingo get a page and a half for some inscrutable reason, as



Honey is claimed to be the principal jungle food, and five varieties of honeybee and their hives are described from the *Bambara* to the *Dandual massa*. Prune is unfortunately left somewhat vulnerable, when he is strenuously advised not to tangle with wasps and hornets, but is only told they have papery nests.



The book oddly gives more prominence to the Sinhalese terms of Kabaragoya and Tagaloya rather than their English counterparts, recommending against eating the flesh of the first. The two species of crocodile are covered from their description and habitat to tactics in the event of an attack.

As you would expect snakes are given a relatively long exposure with drawings of their heads, and the nature of their bites and their treatment. The then wisdom of making an incision above the bite and sucking this wound is repeated, and the local remedy of applying the inside of a plantain tree (the ba-

CONTROVERSY RAGES

SOME OPINIONS OF EARLIER EDITIONS

(a) Readers (unsolicited)

"Wonderful little book"....."Excellent little book." "Anyone landed in the jungle with this book will shoot the Author" ... Better than Whitaker, and almost as good as Ruff." "Out of the way knowledge on every page." "Lovely as a tree." ... "I laughed until I cried." "You would love the jungle. Come up and see it some time." ... "H. G. Wells at his best." "Highly suggestive book." "A piece of cake." "Crumbly." ... "More meat in it than in the rest of Ceylon."

The originals of the above cannot be seen at our Headquarters; they are absolutely "SECRET."

(b) Press (solicited).

"Daily News":—"Has seventy-five pages."

"Athenaeum":—(Ignored it in most favourable terms).

"Sunday Express":—"Behind it is the wisdom of hunters, scouts and pioneers."

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...the back cover speaks for itself

(Continued from page 22)

their value to poor Prune is undisclosed. The book makes the point that fresh water fishes are in abundance and none harmful except the catfish, the "hunga". Why he then goes on to describe some is a puzzle, if only one is needed to be treated with caution. A further puzzle is the reference to a fish of the snake-head family called the "ara". The author's use of Sinhalese terms throughout the book is quite accurate, except where he calls the "loolla" a "lukula". Whilst admitting that all fresh water fishes will take worm, he dashes Prune's hopes by saying that this would incur the disapproval of the Game Laws. This came as a surprise to me for as a youth I certainly put worms to this ignominious use, and never was taken to task by my elders. For Prune there is consolation however, for elsewhere in the book the making of a rattan trap is described, as is the use in the water of narcotics from certain plants and trees.

The Game Laws are covered succinctly and thoroughly for the edification of Prune and no doubt, to satisfy wildlife conservationists. To see anyone in Prune's position not prepared to risk the wrath of the Game laws is hard to imagine.

True, the setting is the jungle but in the Chapter "The Forest Primeval" a seemingly inordinate 38 pages out of the 160 (24%) are devoted to trees and plants, including 18 full-page line drawings. Of these 5 pages and 8 drawings describe the ones that are poisonous. Knowing how difficult it is to distinguish one tree and plant from another especially in the jungle, it might have been judicious to afford more space, with preferably coloured drawings, to the poisonous varieties and give a *carte blanche* to the rest.

Under the chapter "The Jungle Beeton" is 12 pages dealing with procuring your food, preparing it and then cooking it. A number of recipes are given with the concession that some of them "....are given less for stranded aircrews, to whom they would be unattain-

(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.

Essaying Cricket Sri Lanka & Beyond – by Michael Roberts—372 pages + xvi prelim pp + 60 pages of outstanding pictures Publisher: Vijitha Yapa Publications, Colombo Orders/Enquiries to: rybooks@gmail.com Attn: ASELA Web: www.vijithayapa.com

Softcover: ISBN 955-1266-25-0 SL Rs 3499/ Aus \$45 Hardcover: ISBN 955-1266-26-9 SL Rs 5399/ Aus \$69. Australian buyers, please send cheque made out to "Michael Roberts" addressed to Vasee Nesiah, 35 Moules Rd, Rostrevor, SA 5073, who will arrange delivery.

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

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(Continued from page 23)

able, than for units stationed in the green". The usual diseases and illnesses are dealt with at length with a few exotic ones like black water fever, bubonic plague, hydrophobia, Maldivian fever and Sandfly fever. Sunstroke and sunburn is not forgotten. This is all contained in a chapter with the offbeat title "Diseases of the Ass". Chapter 7, realising that Prune could be deposited on the sea-shore, tells how to get fresh water, what fish (including shell fish) to eat and how to catch them. It does not omit the catching and eating of turtles, sea urchin and sea cucumber.



The Stingray and Scorpion fishes and their dangers are described with drawings of three Scorpion fish. Prune is consoled with rudimentary remedies to the possibility of poisoning and allergies resulting from eating lobster, crab and other shellfish. The danger from tentacle stings is well documented and the suggested remedy is to rub a 'strongish' solution of potassium permanganate to the stung surface. A few grains of the same chemical are to be thrust into the base of puncture by fish spines.

The last chapter gives the Romanised pronunciation of Sinhalese and a list of useful phrases in both Sinhalese and Tamil script and their Romanised versions.

Acknowledging that this book was published during the war, with its attendant difficulties of finding quality paper and reproducing colour, it is still difficult to see why a book meant to be well thumbed is so ineffectually bound. The colour of the paper has become off-white, but the print is clear. If the intention was also that the book be carried on sorties, becoming 'the Bible' on the ground, adds further weight to the criticism of its binding. Now that two RAF publications in Ceylon have found their way into this Journal could we say that the RAF were a more literate mob than the Navy or the Army. Or, at least, the RAF in Ceylon at the time. Or is there similar literature from the other two branches of the Service that have yet to find their way into

"The Ceylankan"?

I will finish as I started with a quotation from the book.

"Coconut (Sin.:*pok*; Tam.:*tengi*)

Introductory Discourse. If, in the succession of generations men do not stand firm upon the shoulders of those that have gone before, they are nowt but ninnie-noddipols, donkey—didappers and slubberde-gullion coystribs, cloots, clams and twirps—as various and most respected authors do in sundry places affirm. Now I must tell you I am none of these, and I propose to plant my later feet very firmly upon old Omar of Nishapur and to tell you that with this book, Paulette Goddard and a coconut beside you in the jungle, the jungle would be all boomps-a-daisy. The book, Prune, is up to you: Paulette Goddard is up to monkey tricks elsewhere, and the coconut is up to eighty feet in height, and doesn't grow in the jungle anyway."

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**Harry de Sayrah
Public Relations Officer**

BOOK REVIEWS

Forces and Strands in Sri Lanka's Cricket History by Michael Roberts Colombo: Social Scientists' Association, 2006, 64 pages with 22 photographs ISBN 955-9102-82-6



The recent, astonishing win by Sri Lanka against England at Trent Bridge, and the prodigious record stand put together by Sangakkara and Jayawardene against South Africa at the SCC grounds in Colombo in late July 2006, have coincided with a tragic, *de facto* termination of the ceasefire in the conflict between the Tamil Tigers in the north-east and the state. The coincidence of these events encourages a reflection on the unique cricketing achievements of this beautiful country.

How can it happen that a nation that is one-fifth the size of India has produced the greatest bowler in the history of the game – for Muralitharan has taken five wickets in a Test innings on 54 occasions, which leaves the knight, Sir Richard Hadlee, next in line at 36 times, far behind? How has it happened that Sri Lanka has also achieved the two highest partnerships in the 130 years of Test cricket? It also bears consideration that in the mere 25 years since Sri Lanka gained Test status it has won 46 matches out of a total of 165 played with 62 lost. Indeed, since 1996 the record reads 39 won and 32 lost of the 100 Tests played. More critically, the Sri Lankans secured their first victory as early as 1985 four years being initiated to the highest level. By comparison India took 20 years, South Africa 18 years, and New Zealand 26 years before they made the initial breakthrough. Sri Lanka's achievements have not, unfortunately, been fully appreciated by the ICC, which has never allotted a five-Test (or for that matter even a four -Test) series to the island country!

The cricket literature of Sri Lanka is rather sparse. Only two attempts at a comprehensive history have been published, the first by SP Foenander in 1924; the second by SS Perera in 1996. Neither is free from flaws and neither is up-to-date. Michael Roberts has not merely rectified this lacuna. He has gone further than either previous writer in analysing the socio-political and cultural factors that have shaped modern Sri Lankan cricket. Accordingly, his booklet can confidently qualify as the most profound analysis of Sri Lankan history written thus far.

Roberts is well qualified to write dispassionately and unequivocally about both historical and current trends. A historian by training with long exposure to teaching and research within a Department of Anthropology, his long tenure at Adelaide University enables him to perceive both the triumphs and ruptures that have eventuated in his native country. Roberts minces no words in his criticisms of the administration of the game:

"[The voting system] has favoured the election of wheeler-dealers and populist politicians rather than patrician notables ready to dig into their pockets." The retrenchment of successful coaches has not been uncommon. Sri Lanka has had five different coaches over the last nine years. Dave Whatmore was one of the victims on two different occasions despite his patriotically-motivated success rate. Indeed, Roberts remarks that it is a wonder that Sri Lankan cricket has continued to be successful in spite of the ructions in the system of governance.

Even for those who profess a knowledge and appreciation of Sri Lanka's cricket scene derived from having visited the island during several Test series, there is in this book so much original and, in some cases, unforeseen information, that it can be said that he who has not read it has only a fraction of the knowledge essential for a comprehension of the nuances of the cricketing world of Sri Lanka. It is perhaps not widely known that Murali is one of the very few Tamils to have played first class cricket during the last 2-3 decades. But (and again this may not be well-known) his Tamil origin is quite different from that of the Tamils of the north and east of the island, many of whom -- Roberts tells us -- will barrack for India against Sri Lanka. Muralitharan is Malaiyaha Tamil, a descendant of migrants from southern India to the island from the middle decades of the nineteenth century to the 1920s who were induced to move in order to toil as plantation labourers for the most part. His father was from the ranks of *kanganiyas* (jobber, foremen) who moved into small scale manufacture. He was able to educate his son at St. Anthony's, an elite school in Kandy (the former capital of Sri Lanka). In contrast the Tamils of the north and east of the country are of different pedigree insofar as their ancestors have been present for over seven centuries. Despite these roots they felt marginalized when Sinhala was made the official language of administration after a populist electoral overturn in 1956 fuelled by linguistic nationalism of a sectional kind -- eight years after independence was secured. Thus began the tale of their confrontation with the ma-

jority Sinhalese people.

Not merely are there ethnic divisions. Cricket has, till recently, been an elitist pursuit, dominated in considerable part by the products of two English-speaking Colombo schools, Royal College and S. Thomas' College, the former government sponsored and the latter Anglican. It is these two schools in particular who took up the baton of cricket in the 19th century after it was introduced by the British ruling class. What is perhaps less well-known is that initially the game was taken up mostly by lads and men from the Burgher community, descendants of the various European peoples who had controlled territories in the island, that is, the Portuguese and Dutch with a more recent British admixture. Though pilloried at times as "half-caste," their prowess at cricket enabled them to mount challenges to notions of White European superiority. These "Test matches" of the late 19th and early 20th centuries were apparently treated with the same intensity as the formal Test matches that we observe nowadays. Paradoxically, however, the advent of self-rule and the triumph of a Sinhala-Only programme in the 1950s, induced many of these *mestizo* people to emigrate to UK, Canada and Australia from the 1950s onwards.

The manner in which racial, religious and educational differences have plagued Sri Lankan cricket over the last fifty years is a surprise that Roberts has elicited. It surfaced powerfully in the 1960s when the Royal-Thomian network was challenged in an unfortunate manner through a conspiratorial effort that displaced the captain Michael Tissera (a Thomian), albeit in ways that were *ultra vires* and, more to the point, in ways that set Sri Lankan cricket's international advance back by a decade. However, the very fact that such an effort was mounted indicated the intrusions of political and class overtones, especially the divide between fluent English-speakers and bilingual Sinhala-speakers. Moreover, such a challenge marked the presence of good players from outside the magic circle of leading Christian denominational schools plus Royal College. These new men of skill came from what are known as "Buddhist schools," that is, schools that were initiated way back in the 1890s as one facet of the movement of Buddhist revitalization in opposition to the dominance of Christianity in the colonial firmament.

Two of these schools, Ananda and Nalanda, were at the leading edge of this movement both in the political sense and in the manner in which they

had, by the 1960s, nourished good cricketers and developed a "big match" against each other that rivalled that between Royal and St. Thomas. By the 1980s the captains of Sri Lanka were being drawn from these two schools rather than Royal or St. Thomas.⁷ The Wettimuny brothers and the Ranatunga brothers all emerged from Ananda; while Bandula Warnapura, Sri Lanka's first captain when they secured ICC test status in 1981, was from Nalanda.

While highlighting these tensions, Roberts also outlines the processes which encouraged the democratisation of opportunity in the field of cricket and the emergence of brilliant players from beyond Colombo -- from what are known as "outstation" schools. This analysis deciphers the expansion in popularity of this colonial game to the point where it is now the national pastime, one that enjoys immense popularity and interest. But Roberts' masterly treatise ends on a pessimistic note: "Instability, alas, has been a feature permeating the cricketing scene as well as the political scene for many a year." And "the silver lining arising from the ceasefire of the past [two] years has dark clouds threatening it (p.38)" Judging from the performances against England and South Africa in 2006, however, I venture to think that cricket will win out over political turmoil.

Neville Turner
Past President -Australian Cricket Society

Mahaweli Meadow' by Valentine Perera, Paperback pp 274 ISBN : I-4196-3960-9 SLR600

Set in Sri Lanka in the 1950's, 'Mahaweli Meadow' is an intriguing and captivating love story about two young university students, Tony and Devika. In Tony we see the irrepressible young student with 'spur of the moment ideas', who in spite of his iconoclastic attempts to forge his own "Brave New World", is surprisingly vulnerable, and shows a very appealing respect and loyalty to the values of his middle class Sinhalese and Catholic background. The very rich, beautiful and intelligent Devika however displays a level of maturity, determination and self-assurance well beyond her years.

The narrative glides fluidly between the picturesque Peradeniya University campus in its pristine state in the late 1950's and the heroine's Kandyan ancestral home, *Ganga Langa Uyana*, set as its Sri Lankan name implies, close to the banks of Sri

Lanka's longest river. And, in portraying the progress of the relationship between Tony & Devika the writer weaves a rich tapestry of characters and situations very typical of their social context and time.

Valentine Perera successfully uses an interesting technique of interactive commentary between the personified ancestral home *Uyana* and river *Maha*, to increase the awareness of his reading audience, as well as give insights into the situational drama which is being acted out between his two main protagonists. This device said to be adopted by Asian folk tales, is also reminiscent of the role played by the Chorus in classical Greek drama and reflects both elements of Valentine's Sri Lankan background and his studies of the Classics at Peradeniya. The character Tikiri Banda with his wisdom and skilful use of symbolism and allusion in his everyday colloquial language also greatly enhances the story. He is a strong and sentimental reminder to anyone who has encountered similar endearing personalities in Sri Lanka.

To those of us who were actually part of this scene, '*Mahaweli Meadow*' provides the indulgence of a nostalgic revisit to the exhilarating days of emergence from the cocoon of late adolescence into early adulthood. It was a time when, in addition to coping with our physical and emotional development, we were immersed in the creative genius and vision of the great poets, novelists, dramatists and thinkers of mainly western civilization. On a different level, one is able to return to the well-remembered experience of living in residence and the machinations of inter-university campus competition and rivalry. This in hindsight added richly to our total learning experience. The story also provides a vicarious journey into the lives of some of our fellow students and confirms a niggling belief that they may have led much more interesting lives than the rest of us!

On a universal level "*Mahaweli Meadow*" provides an enjoyable and interesting narrative reading experience and gives the reader an insight into some of the social mechanisms operating in Sri Lanka in the mid 20th century. It also encapsulates a vivid snapshot of an illusive time, when the first race riots associated with the outbreak of later inter-ethnic violence, hit Colombo. The close friendship between Tony, Aru and Larry finally demonstrates that ethnic difference rather than being a destructive force can also be a truly supportive and enriching life experience.

Maureen Cox

"Round the Tea Totum (When Sri Lanka Was Ceylon)" by David Ebbels, 216 pages illustrated with the author's own photographs.

David Ebbels was a tea planter in Ceylon for 6 years from 1955 when, realising there was no future in such a career for a non-Ceylonese, he returned to England to study and after acquiring a Ph.D, went to Tanzania to work on diseases of cotton. His father was a planter too so the estate background was familiar and David, now in retirement, writes of his time as a creeper, and then as assistant superintendent, with the pen of a sharp observer, bringing wit and candour to his narrative.

The author paints a vivid pen picture of the elderly and very senior European with whom he crept, laying bare his prejudices as too, those of like background, then fast disappearing. Ebbels observes that his boss calls his appu, Parkin although his name is Paikiam, a sort of humiliating, if minor, dispossession of identity and cites another senior British planter who would seize his appu by the hair, in the presence of guests, to illustrate his "loyalty"! Numerous works of this genre have appeared in the last decade but Ebbel's is a worthy addition, if for no other reason, because of his critical evaluation of his fellow expatriates. Daily work on a tea estate and social life centring around planters clubs of the era are well and amusingly described as, too, trips to low country jungle areas. The illustrations are a little disappointing in clarity but the large numbers among the Sri Lankan Diaspora who were connected with tea and planting will find this a worthwhile acquisition.

Available from David Ebbels, 45 Roundwood Lane, Herpenden Herts AL53BP at £14.99 inclusive of post and packing in U.K. Also via the web at www.authorhouse.com/bookshop or www.amazon.com but the post and packing charge will be a little higher.

Tony Peries

...a few borrowed thoughts

In the 60's, people took acid to make the world weird. Now the world is weird and people take Prozac to make it normal.

Politics is supposed to be the second oldest profession. I have come to realise that it bears a very close resemblance to the first.

SYNOPSIS OF MEETINGS

Melbourne 10th September 2006

The Chairman Dr. Srilal Fernando introduced the speaker, Dr. Nihal Henry Kuruppu, who is currently undertaking a Doctorate program on human rights at Melbourne University. He has worked in management and is currently pursuing research in different areas.

The subject of his talk was “The role of traditional Sinhalese caste structures operating within the New (1948) Democratic Framework; Political Parties, Familial and Class Linkages.” Dr. Kuruppu introduced the topic as a complex and an extensive issue. His research has been confined to study of the caste system among Sinhala people and spans the period 1920 s to 1960 s.

The three threads; party politics, powerful family influences and caste issue are interconnected to people’s lives depending on one’s position in the caste hierarchy. Caste discrimination springs from ideology, zealotry, prejudice and ignorance. A 15th century French philosopher identified ignorance as a cause for caste discrimination. Caste was a serious legacy of prejudice and a social dynamic in Ceylon, it defies a rigid definition. Ancestry, lineage, aristocracy, dynasty etc. are linked to caste. Caste being a sensitive issue research on the subject was fraught with difficulties in gathering information. But research was conducted on select families and some conclusions were reached. Dr. Kuruppu described it as a reductive interpretation of the class factor.

The caste system originated in India. The genesis being Hinduism’s Divine plan which is designed to bring harmony on earth. In Hinduism each person was designated an occupation according to a specialised skill. With time such categorisation evolved into a caste. The Hindu caste system comprises the Brahmins - intellectuals at the top of the ladder followed by Kshatriyas - the military and protectors, Vaishya - farmers or providers of food and Shudra - menial labourers. In the beginning the higher castes respected those lower for the skills and services they provided. But in time, private ownership, power and greed reduced this to an oppressive system. The efforts made by late Mahatma Ghandi and Ambedkar for the redemption of the lower castes were not successful. India’s rigid heritage is too strong to be replaced by modern liberal thought. Sri Lanka’s caste system is not based on religion.

Bryce Ryan states “*Caste among Sinhalese is a self contained emergent arising from diffused Indian influences and historically unique situations*”. The Indian influence had an impact on the Sri Lankan caste system. According to Janavansa a 15th century Sinhala poem, there were 26 castes in Sri Lanka. Today 10-12 castes exist prominent among them are Govigama, Karawe, Navandanna etc.

Prior to 1948, the parliamentary system was dominated by western educated and wealthy individuals. During this period two distinct ideologies emerged; D.S. Senanayake was a conservative preferring to retain status quo thus preventing upward mobility of the lower castes, while S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike despite his Oxford education and rich family background took on a liberal/socialist mantle primarily to attract the electorate but in the process facilitated upward mobility of the lower castes. Prominent families such as, Senanayakes, Wickramasinghas, Kotalawelas, Basnayekas etc. controlled the resources and enjoyed wealth and power they brought them. Informative family tree diagrams were displayed by the speaker showing how intermarriage between these families retained the power base and wealth among themselves. The British did not abolish the caste system but operated through prevailing elites or chieftains. The British encouraged wealthy families for nomination to councils. During 1947 – 1970, 50 % of the MPs were of Govigama caste. Today entrenched caste advantage is no longer a strongly held perception in Sri Lanka, more recognition is given to political skills. The present leaders are Sinhala educated and some may be of lower castes. Former President Mr. R. Premadasa who did not fit in the preferred category was able to reach the apex in political arena in 80s due to his political skills. Some believe there is a degree of caste discrimination in administration, but matrimony is still caste driven as evidenced by the contents of advertisements on the subject in Sri Lankan newspapers. Dr Kuruppu listed several books on the subject for members interested in further research.

At the conclusion, some questions were posed to Dr. Kuruppu which he answered with enthusiasm. The raffle for the day was drawn by Mrs. Kuruppu and the lucky winner was Mr. Sarath Gunatunga.

Dilhani Kumbukkage

A magical pesticide – the “Khema”

by Jeanne Jayasinghe

In this era where farmers depend intensely on GM crops or the use of chemicals for almost anything to do with agriculture, organically grown food crops are coming into greater demand. One wonders how, in the good old days before the advent of chemicals into the agricultural industry, our ancestors managed to fight off pests and other undesirables from their crops.

In Sri Lanka, farmers used a “Khema” to help them drive off pests if they were unlucky enough to have their fields infested with any kind of bug. A *Khema*, according to Carter’s Sinhala English Dictionary, is a “sort of Magic exercised to avert a mischief”, and you can’t imagine a greater mischief for a farmer than an infestation of pests on his crops.

Generally when a *Khema* is being carried out, one is not supposed to speak. Those participating do not even mention why the *Khema* is being done. One only knows that it is a *Khema* and no one is stupid enough to query this because then the *Khema* will not work. The *Khema* is also supposed to be more effective if it is carried out under the cover of darkness.

When a farmer or *goviya* finds out his paddy field has been infested with any kind of pest, he resorts to a *Khema*. He will call on an expert who can conduct the ceremony. The expert will instruct the farmer, on what preparations are required, which the farmer will then proceed to gather.

The farmer visits each household in the village to invite them to the *Khema* and request them to be present at sundown at the affected area of the field complete with a small amount of food and a large flare (*bulu attha*) – much like the Olympic flame – to light up the way and the proceedings.

At sundown the expert will present himself at the appointed place and will construct a platform that stands as high as the height of the paddy in the field. It is not planted firmly in the

ground and is somewhat shaky. The villages too gather around the field in silence, with their flares or *Hulu atbu*. Then the expert begins the ceremony with much chanting and dancing, waving the flares he holds in his hands to and fro. At a given signal, everyone places the food they have brought on the platform and with a final flourish; the expert will conclude the ceremony. Everyone returns to their homes in silence.

The start of the ceremony has been carefully chosen to coincide with the time when the moths or insects that attack the paddy field are flying out. When the people arrive with the flares the insects fly into them and are destroyed. This continues during the whole of the ceremony with the audience making a ring of fire around the affected part of the field. Insects will also fly into the flames held by the expert when he dances around waving his flares. The flames have destroyed a majority of the adult insects that lay the eggs.

The next morning, birds spot the food from the air and alight in the field for a feed. When they alight on the platform, unable to withstand the weight of the birds, it falls down spilling the food onto the ground. The birds now discover the worms that are infesting the field as well as the dead insects and they feed off this bounty. The birds return to the field to eat the insect larvae and worms until there is none left. The pests have been eradicated without the use of any harmful chemicals.

The farmers do not deliberately set out to kill any creature nevertheless, the *Khema* results in a reduction of the insect infestation and the farmer has a clear conscience that he has not intentionally harmed a living creature.

Note on the author:

Jeanne Jayasinghe though not a professional writer, comes with a Journalistic pedigree. Her father is S Pathiravitanaya (former Editor of 3 mainstream newspapers in SL/ author and a regular contributor to this Journal) and her maternal uncle late Tarzie Vitachchi (also editor of The Observer / author). Jeanne lives in Melbourne with husband Kosala, two adult children and two grand daughters and works as a Financial Services Consultant.

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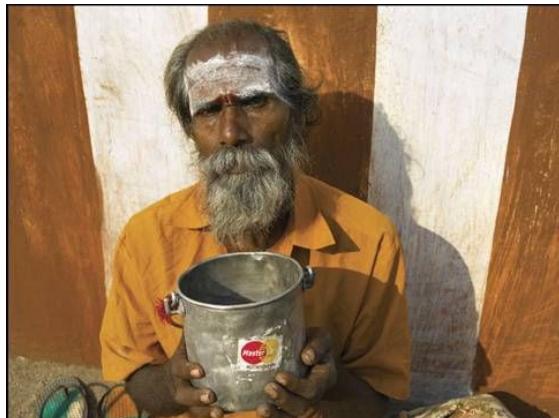
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NEXT SYDNEY MEETINGS

Sunday 28 January 2007 @ 6.30 p.m

Dr Ian Smith

Dept. of Modern Languages, Uni of Sydney
Will speak on

"Ceylon Portuguese- the linguistic legacy of Lanka's first European colonisers"

Sunday 15 April 2007 @ 6.30 p.m

Mr S. Muthiah

former Editor of the Sunday Times , and of the
Times of Ceylon Annual
will speak on

**"Indolankans- the story of the 200 year
saga of people of Indian origin in Sri
Lanka."**

Venue: Thornleigh Community Centre - cnr Pennant Hills Road & Phyllis Avenue

NEXT MELBOURNE MEETING

Sunday 26th November 2006 @ 5.30 p.m

Capt. Elmo Jayawardena

Instructor Captain with Singapore Airlines
Author of Prize Winning Books *Sam's Story* and *The Last Kingdom of Sinhala* - Everyday Hero award
from Readers Digest for humanitarian work
Will speak on

**From *Sam's Story* to a Bigger Story:
AFLAC and Tsunami Relief**

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

How to become a member of the Ceylon Society of Australia

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E-mail: vsnadarajah@bigpond.com

and request an application form

In search of speakers

The committee would welcome nominations of knowledgeable and academic persons to speak at our regular meetings, both in Sydney and Melbourne. You may have friends, relations who live in or visit Australia. Our calendar for the year is - 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: Srin.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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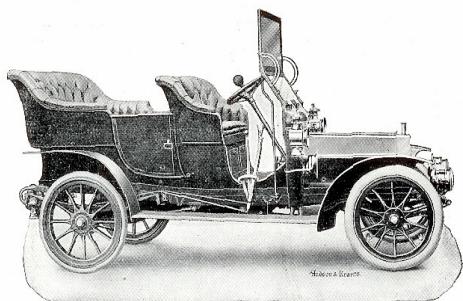
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