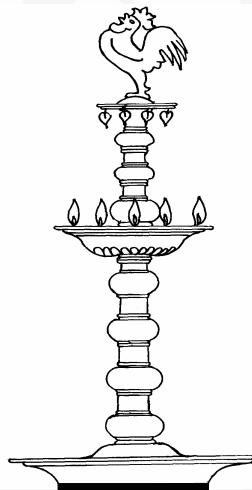


THE CEYLANKAN



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EDITORIAL



A very Happy and Prosperous New Year to all!

Military History buffs will rub their hands in glee with this issue—two very interesting articles on WW II lead the Journal # 37. A bit of internet

research by one diligent member of the Editorial Team, who in the past has Rambled a bit, has unearthed a gem of a piece in the lead article. This will be a two part series so you can savour it a bit longer. Though the Talalla Brothers joined the armed services as Malayans, their Ceylonese heritage counts in our books.

Sergei writes on the “*Burma Campaign*” with academic precision but with that easy reading touch which characterises his prose. More from his quill (nay keyboard) to come throughout this year. Did you see his contribution to the last episode of *Vanishing Ships* aired over ABC TV on Thursday 18th? Our regular contributor Somasiri Devendra and Sergei were consultants to the documentary maker with Sergei appearing on screen and Somasiri seen discreetly in the background. Well done mates!

As President Tony (report on p29) says, we will celebrate our 10th Anniversary this year and will commemorate with a bumper issue in November. So, all good folks and true, look out for the Editor’s begging bowl, and a rash of emails and phone calls. For those of you (and friends/relatives), the “wannabewriters” here is a good opportunity to add a bit of colour. A touch of fiction, personal anecdotes, some poetry will be most welcome. I also need to seek pictures of the early 20th Century to continue the series we have reproduced below. Those having collections of postcards or magazines, please share a select few with other members through *The Ceylankan*. Good reading till next time.

20th Century Image



Galle Road—Kollupitiya circa 1900



DUTY and VALOUR

The **Talalla Brothers**

by Chung Chee Min

Their father had been a Sinhalese who arrived in Malaya from Ceylon with just about the shirt on his back and a few cents in his pocket. A shining example of the Malayan rags-to-riches story, Hewage (pronounced He-wa-ge) Benjamin Talalla rose to become a successful and respected businessman in early twentieth century Kuala Lumpur. With early Kuala Lumpur pioneers like Yap Tai Chi and Loke Chow Thye, he sat on the Kuala Lumpur Sanitary Board which provided public

services like water, light, town cleansing and roads. The Board was the colonial precursor of the K.L. Town Hall, the Municipality and, of course, much later, City Hall. He built up a sanitary hardware business and his company, Fletcher Trading Company Ltd. of Old Market Square, was instrumental in introducing modern sanitation to Kuala Lumpur.



Cyril (front row, left) in School Hockey XI

Hewage was a founder member, too, of the first Rotary Club. He had his fingers on the pulse of the town, rubbing shoulders with the

leading lights of Kuala Lumpur and the colonial administration. He was a guest, for instance, along with no less than the British Resident at the old High Street Victoria Institution (V.I.) when poet Rabindranath Tagore visited the school in 1929 to give a talk and some readings of his works.

Hewage even learned to fly, an exotic skill in an era when the mere appearance of a plane in the Malayan skies was enough to attract great attention. As if that was not enough, in a headline-making flight in 1932, he flew solo from Alor Star to Croydon, England. His epic 28-day flight was the modern equivalent of going to the moon. On his return Hewage was lionized and invited as a speaker to many functions. Two roads, one in Klang and the other parallel to Birch Road (now Jalan Mahara-jalela), are named in his honour. (The KL road is misspelled *Jalan Ta'ala* in some current maps.)

Hewage married Lily Olga Fernando and had seven children, six boys and a girl. The daughter did not survive infancy; the sons were educated at either the V.I. or, as second choice, the St Johns Institution. So when Henry Conrad Benjamin Talalla and Cyril Lionel Francis Talalla - the two oldest sons - came along, their father's choice of school was obvious.

As a child Henry had been nicknamed Sonny, the first part of the moniker "Sonny Jim". Cyril, a year younger, thus became Jimmy in turn.

Henry went to the V.I. from 1933 to 1937 and Cyril from 1934 to 1938. Both were active as cadets and as sportsmen, with Henry representing Shaw House in cricket while Cyril played hockey for Heppenstall House and the school as well. Both brothers were House Prefects, one category lower than school prefects. They were the only pupils to drive to school then, in a two-tone blue-black Morris 10, with license plate SL9189.

However, this privilege ended suddenly when Henry managed to overturn the car one day! After a stern lecture, Talalla senior replaced the Morris with a second hand Austin 7 which the two boys drove around



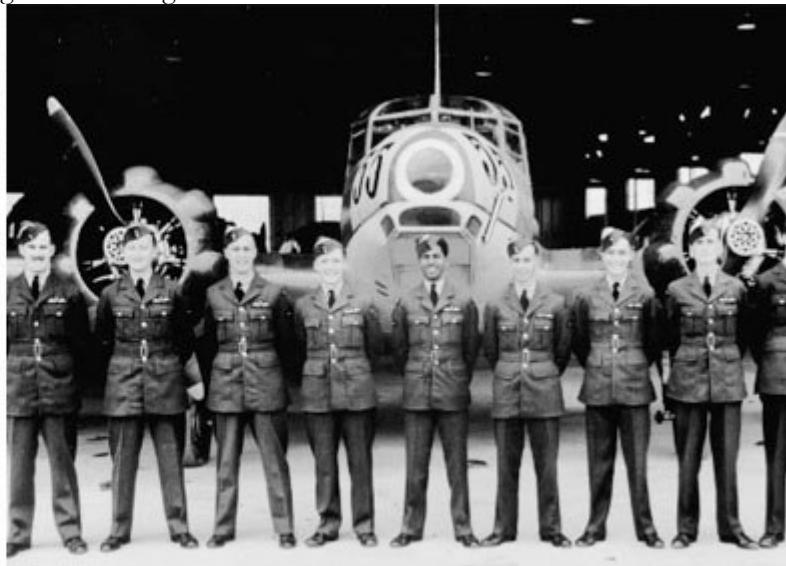
Henry and Cyril- Student pilots

like a sports car.

It was quite natural for Henry and Cyril, who looked upon their father with an element of awe, to evince an interest in flying. Their cousin, Hector Talalla, ten years older than Henry and also a Victorian, had been the first in their generation to join the Kuala Lumpur Flying Club. Henry and Cyril followed suit and were soon buzzing over Kuala Lumpur in Tiger Moth biplanes. By the time they left the V.I. each had obtained his pilot "A" licence.

Henry proceeded to London after his School Certificate to study for his London matriculation with a view to proceeding to St Bartholomew's to study medicine. However he wasn't very successful. On returning home, he and Jimmy, who had just finished at the V.I., joined their father's company where, on their father's orders, the Fletcher staff were told to treat them exactly as anyone else. The boys were each paid 15 dollars a month. They were there less a year when fate beckoned in September 1939. Britain had declared war against Germany.

Like in all families in those days, Talalla senior was very much the patriarch and, when the call for pilots went out to countries in the British Empire, he simply told Henry and Cyril that he would like them to join the Royal Air Force. The lads took it as a direction from their father and simply complied. In 1940 the two brothers trained in Singapore under the Malayan Volunteer Air Force. The *Malay Mail* reported proudly in January 1941 that Cyril was first Asian to pass the rigid RAF entrance tests and to enrol as a cadet at the government flying school. It neglected



TRAINING IN CANADA - Henry (centre, left pic) and Cyril (centre, right pic)

to mention that he was the only non-European selected from almost two dozen applicants. Cyril sailed off with the third Malayan squad to Perth from Singapore, and from there went overland to Sydney and thence circuitously on to Canada. After advanced training at Macleod, Alberta, Cyril was sent to Britain in October as a Sergeant Pilot.

The diminutive Henry had failed to measure up in the physical and had to spend another six months back in Malaya building up his weight and strength before he was finally accepted. When that finally came, Henry made a farewell flight over Kuala Lumpur. On a challenge from his brother Andrew the future RAF pilot performed some daredevil acrobatics, diving low over the compound of their neighbouring doctor (Dr Narunha) and earning a severe reprimand from his father later. The following day he turned up late for his departure from the old K.L. airport in Sungei Besi Road because he had been busy saying farewells all round. As he took the last seat, just over the rear wheel of the early model DC-3, it was the last time the Talalla family would see him again.

Henry flew to Singapore first, and from there, like Cyril before him, took a round-about route to the Empire Flying School in Alberta, Canada. On completing his course he received his commission as a



Cyril and a Hurricane

sergeant pilot and was retained as a staff pilot at an air navigation school. After a stint with the Hurricane Operational Training Unit, Henry left for England in early summer of 1943. After further training, he was posted on 18th November to 182 Squadron, Second Tactical Air Force at Merston, where he was one of the early pilots selected to fly the newly developed fighter-bomber, the Typhoon. These tank-killers, with their broad white bands on wings and fuselage, were assigned to the most dangerous missions. They were the first RAF fighters capable of exceeding 400 m.p.h. Carrying on each underwing

eight 30 kg. rockets and four 20 mm cannon, they could perform low altitude ground attacks. Based in Dorset, they flew across the English Channel hedge-hopping and strafing German panzers.

Cyril had by that time also been trained on Hurricanes and had been a staff pilot at the Hurricane Operational Training Unit until May 1942 when he was posted to No. 118 Squadron, which was

equipped with Supermarine Spitfires. Cyril's first kill was reported in a British newspaper (the lack of a Malayan identity is painfully obvious):

A Sinhalese pilot, the first to fly with his fighter command scored his opening victory a few days ago. He is pilot officer Talalla. His section of the Spitfires was over the Dutch coast when two Focker Wulf 190s were sighted 100 feet above the water. Talalla saw that one had damaged a colleague's wing, so he dived down behind the Focker Wulf. "My fire burst sent pieces flying off it", he said. "There was an explosion in the cockpit and the enemy dived into the sea with an orange flash." A second Focker Wulf was damaged.



Cyril meeting Queen Elizabeth at an RAF base

Cyril saw active service in Spitfires over England, the English Channel, the North Sea and German-occupied Europe, making fighter sweeps and providing escort for 1,000-bomber raids. In June 1943, Cyril was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross

for having "...participated in a large number of sorties and led his section with great skill and keenness. He has destroyed one enemy aircraft." His tour of operations completed, Cyril was sent on rest for six months as a flying instructor to the Spitfire Unit.

The two lads' bravery and valour were hardly known to their family back in Malaya, who were having their own troubles. For, by late 1941, war had come to Malaya and there was a three-and-a-half-year blackout of news about their sons. In the chaos and destruction wrought by the Japanese invasion and occupation, Hewage took the initiative in re-establishing a system for collecting garbage and sewage for Kuala Lumpur. Then he, his wife and remaining sons were arrested on 15th October 1943 following the Double Tenth sabotage in Singapore Harbour when a number of Japanese ships were blown up in an operation directed from Perth. Talalla Senior and his wife were tortured on trumped-up charges of espionage.

to be continued

The Ceylankan thanks the author and Victoria Institution for permission to reproduce this article from their web site www.viweb.freehosting.net/talalla-bros.htm

Sociability is as much a law of nature as mutual struggle. If we ask nature: Who are the fittest: those who are continually at war with each other, or those who support one another? We at once see that those animals which acquire habits of mutual aid are undoubtedly the finest.

Peter Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid*

Ceylon Volunteers of the Burma Campaign: The Forgotten Veterans of the Forgotten Campaign, (1941-1945) Part 1

by Sergei De Silva-Ranasinghe

Protracted Campaign

It is often overlooked that the interneccine Burma Campaign was for the British Army and its auxiliary forces, the longest campaign throughout the Second World War, continuing from December 11th, 1941 and ending on June 15th, 1945. The intensity of the fighting can be gauged by the casualties suffered by both sides, with 14,326 Allied troops killed and 73,909

wounded; and the Japanese an estimated 185,149 fatalities. Due to little public recognition received in the press and the protracted nature of the campaign which extended well past VE Day - May 8th, 1945, the British/Indian Army in Burma was termed the 'Forgotten Army'. As one officer described it, he had the, *"...strong feeling that they are taking part in a forgotten campaign in which no one in authority is taking any real interest."* During the early stages, up to early 1942, few people in Sri Lanka, then Ceylon, demonstrated an awareness of the impending strategic consequences of the Japanese invasion of Burma. Only in April 1942, did the full reality of war come home to the people of Ceylon, when the Imperial Japanese Navy assaulted Colombo and Trincomalee by air and mauled segments of the hastily assembled British Eastern Fleet off Ceylon.

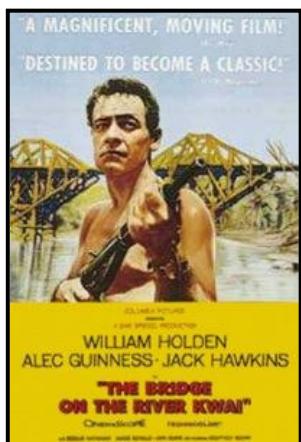


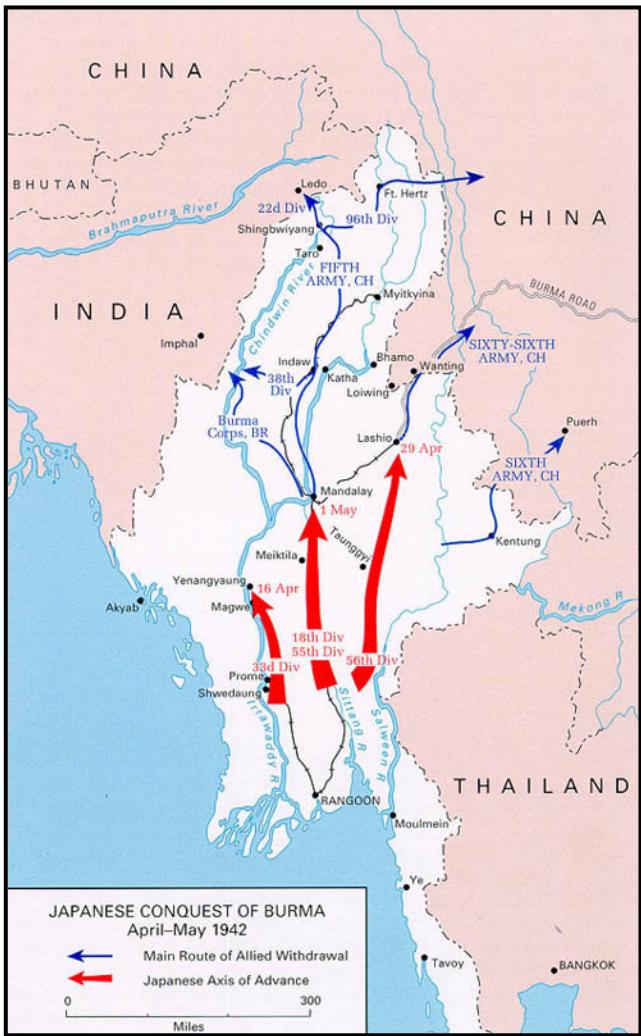
Prisoners of War (POWs) on the Burma-Thai railway, which received widespread coverage through the award winning film, *The Bridge on the River Kwai* (1957), which incidentally was filmed in Ceylon. At the time, the film was a huge undertaking, the bridge alone needing, as the late Noel Crusz who liaised with director David Lean, maintained in a radio interview: "Local labour, carpenters and craftsmen from Kitzulgala saw 1,500 trees cut down and dragged to the site by 48 elephants ... It was the largest film set built at that time, even surpassing Cecil B. de Mille's Gates of Tanis in 'The Ten Commandments'. There were many fair-skinned Ceylonese Burghers: planters, merchants, engineers, willing to be extras. In fact 37 nationalities were among the extras, and some had fought in World War II."

Considering Ceylon's proximity to Burma, for years I was deeply intrigued to ascertain whether Ceylon, in any way contributed to the Burma Campaign. In recent times I was fortunate enough to find rare details alluding to the participation of Ceylon volunteers to the much vaunted Burma Campaign. Hence, with the imminent fading of the Second World War generation of veterans, it is with a sense of urgency and determination that I have approached my research on Ceylon's poorly recognised involvement. After undertaking years of extensive field research and conducting numerous interviews with veterans, I have finally gathered the biographical details and stories of several Ceylon volunteers who served in the forgotten Burma campaign, which commenced 64 years ago.

Enter the Ceylon Volunteers

At present, it remains obscure how many Ceylon volunteers served in the Burma





Campaign, although there are fleeting indications that suggest the manpower contribution was between 100-200 volunteers. However, I am aware that Ceylon's volunteers formed two distinct ethnographic categories, British and Ceylonese – the British mainly from the exclusively European Ceylon Planters' Rifle Corps (CPRC) and the Ceylonese from units of the Ceylon Defence Force (CDF) and the Ceylon Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve (CRNVR).

The British element consisted of two types; those born and raised in Ceylon and those who settled in Ceylon for mercantile or other reasons. Both types joined the all European CPRC, a prominent unit of the CDF which was open to all European males of military age in Ceylon. An appropriate personification of this is exemplified by CPRC volunteer Major Philip Grimwood, as stated by his relative: "Prior to World War Two, Philip was a Tea Taster in London and was subsequently employed by Attampettia Estate, Bandarawela as a tea planter, joining the Ceylon Planters Rifles' Corps in 1939. He was also the SD in charge of the Napier Division of Rookatenne Estate. With the outbreak of World War Two, he was involved with Garrison Duty in Ceylon with the CPRC. On the 7th May 1942, Philip was granted an Emergency Commission into the 4/10th Gurkha Rifles. From January to May 1942 he attended the Officers Training School at Belgaum, India and was subsequently deployed at Imphal with the 4/10th Gurkhas. The 4/10th GR War Diary entry for 4th

November 1943 states: 'Lt Grimwood and Rfm Budhiman Limbu entered Burma for attachment to 3/1 GR, being first men of 4/10th GR to enter Burma.' He subsequently served with the 3/4th Gurkha Rifles, as a Lieutenant attached to 40th Column in the Second Chindit Campaign. Later, he served with the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), Detachment 101 and Special Operations Executive (SOE), Z Force. Upon demobilisation at the end of the war, Major Philip Grimwood returned to Ceylon to continue his career in the tea industry.

At the time, European males of military age in Ceylon were generally affiliated to the CPRC in much the same circumstances as the First World War. Throughout the Second World War the CPRC served as valuable officer reinforcements and is estimated to have provided over 700 volunteers commissioned in the British and auxiliary armies, mainly enlisting or obtaining transfers on an individual basis. Between August 1940 and July 1942, the CPRC dispatched six contingents amounting to 172 soldiers as officer reinforcements to the Officer Training School at Belgaum, India and were given postings in British/Indian Army units. According to one unpublished and incomplete list, the CPRC had at least 39 of their volunteers in Gurkha units, some of whom are highly likely to have served in Burma. Perhaps there are many similar stories to be told about the hundreds of CPRC volunteers who served in India. However, it is not the objective of this article to investigate solely, the CPRC/European contribution to the Burma front. I remain equally interested in the largely unknown involvement of the Ceylonese.

Of the CDF units, the Ceylon Light Infantry (CLI) appears to have been where the trickle of Ceylonese volunteers originated. These participants included: Gerry Van Reyk of the 2nd battalion CLI, (who according to Lieutenant General Denis Perera served in Burma, although no records have been located); PD Pelpola; SD Ratwatte; AR Udugama and BR Kriekenbeek, who all served as military observers. It is a matter of profound regret that I could not locate any substantive details on PD Pelpola, SD Ratwatte



and AR Udugama other than their war service records. Volunteers from outside the CDF included Rex de Silva, Bonaventure Schofield and 17 known personnel from the CRNVR. As such, the largest contribution of manpower to the Burma Campaign came from the CRNVR. As will be established, the unassuming Ceylonese contribution to this forgotten theatre, merits recognition.

Peter Donald Pelpola

The late Major PD Pelpola served in both World Wars in frontline theatres receiving many decorations, including the War Medal, Defence Medal and the Burma Star for service in the Second World War and appears to have

been the oldest Ceylonese volunteer to serve in Burma. Due to his rank as Major and his impressive military background, notably in the First World War where he served with the Legion of Frontiersmen in German East Africa campaigning against General Von Lettow-Vorbeck, it is quite likely that he held a position of responsibility. According to his service records, while he was affiliated to the 2nd battalion CLI, he volunteered to serve in Burma for a short tour. He was sent to India for further training on December 16 1943 and was subsequently attached to the 161st Indian Infantry Brigade in the Arakan, from January 1 1944 to January 27th 1944.



Sooriyaratne Douglas Ratwatte

The late Colonel SD Ratwatte joined the CLI in 1938 as a 2nd Lieutenant and when war started was posted to the 1st and 5th battalions, CLI respectively. In 1942 he volunteered to serve in Burma. After initial training he was attached to the 14/15th Punjabis in the Arakan, where he led a company. In the post-independence Ceylon Army, SD Ratwatte held several senior positions in the Ceylon Volunteer Force, later the Sri Lanka Army Volunteer Force, notably as the first Commanding Officer of the 2nd (V) Sinha Regiment, retiring at the rank of Colonel.



Alexander Richard Udugama

AR Udugama received a commission in the CLI as a 2nd Lieutenant in 1940 and was posted to the 1st, 3rd and 4th Battalions respectively. According to the excellent research conducted by retired Major General HV Athukorale: "He underwent numerous infantry courses [sic] in Ceylon and India, and was promoted to the rank of Captain on 1st January 1943. In November 1943, he was selected for attachment to the 14th Army in the operational areas of Burma. During this period of attachment, he served [sic] with the 7/2nd Punjab Regiment in the Arakan area, on the eastern side of Mayu Range. For service during the Second World War he was awarded the Burma Star, the Defence Medal and the War Medal."



Mervin Rex de Silva

Winner of the prestigious Lord Leverhume Aviation Scholarship, the late Rex de Silva from St. Peters' College Colombo, was one of several dozen Ceylonese volunteers who joined the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve in the Second World War and was amongst the first Ceylonese to experience frontline aerial combat in the war. He received his training in England and was posted to 504th Squadron, (Spitfires VB) at Ibsley and Redhill where his squadron escorted Marauders over German occupied 'Fortress Europe.' After a lengthy period of service in Europe, he had the honour of being posted to Ceylon in April 1944, with the 17th Squadron at Minneriya in defence of the 'Trincomalee Fortress Area'. On November 19th 1944, the 17th Squadron relocated its operational base to the Imphal valley, where air sup-

port was rendered to the allied ground offensives on Kalewa and Taukyan. In his diary, Rex briefly surmised the events: "December 19th. Spitfire VIII. Beat Up Taukyan. Just a show for the Colonels's benefit!!! December 19th. Patrol. Kalewa Bridgehead again. December 20th. To Sapam. And Gentlemen! Kalewa Once Again!!" Rex ended the war as a Flight Sergeant.

to be continued

Acknowledgements: This article is a revised version of the original, which was first published as a three part series in *The Sunday Times Plus, Sri Lanka* - "Forgotten Campaign, Forgotten Veterans" (November 5, 2006, Vol. 41-No. 23); "Surviving Amidst Dying Men and Muddy Swamps" (November 12, 2006, Vol. 41-No. 24); "CRNVR's role in the Allied Reconquest of Burma" (November 19, 2006, Vol. 41- No. 25). The author also wishes to thank the following people who provided assistance to this article: Somasiri Devendra, Dawn Waring, Victor Melder, John de Silva, Charles Amaresekere, Ian Grimwood and Lieutenant General Denis Perera.

About the Author: Sergei DeSilva-Ranasinghe is interested in corresponding with anyone who can provide further information or assistance to his research. Email: sergei.desilva@optusnet.com.au or **P.O. Box 251, Batman, VIC, 3058, Australia.** His professional background includes: B.A. (Hons), Politics at La Trobe University, Australia, where he wrote his thesis: *Military Evolution in a Plural Society: The Sri Lanka Armed Forces (1881-2002)*. He has since conducted numerous seminar presentations and published articles widely. In addition, he has worked with Mullion Creek Productions as a Senior Interviewer/Researcher for the *Australians at War Film Archive* and as the *Consultant Military Historian* to the acclaimed documentary production, *Vanishing Ships of War* (2006). Sergei is a member of the *Professional Historians Association, Society of Editors* and the *Oral History Association of Australia*.

Some memories of my years in Jaffna Part 2

by Neville Jayaweera

As I recounted in Part 1 of my story, the first few months of my tenure in Jaffna had been fraught with great tensions and stresses. However, I had not only managed to survive them but had succeeded in forging a new understanding between the government and the two main Tamil political parties, which, during the last few months of my tenure, served as the foundation for the Dudley-Chelvanayagam Accord.

Newly emerging force

On the other hand, I had not reckoned with a newly emerging political force among the Tamils. Without exception, the leaders of both the Federal Party (FP) and the Tamil Congress (TC) were all gentlemen, schooled in the highest traditions of liberal democracy, honourable in all their dealings with me and fully respectful of my responsibilities and rights as the Government Agent (GA) of the district. However, after the initial opposition from them had abated and we had arrived at a *modus vivendi*, a group of youth felt that their leaders had sold the pass and were now collaborating with a hated Sinhala government. They felt that they had to reverse this trend and they set about it in a dramatically different fashion, portending the rise of Tamil militancy and violent rebellion two decades down the road.

One day, shortly after the march on the Kachcheri, I had been called away to Colombo on official work. Early one morning around 2 am, the telephone in my Mt. Lavinia home rang. At the other end my wife Trixie was very agitated. She told me that the Kachcheri was on fire and was spreading to the Residency. Fortunately, my parents who were staying with my wife at that time, had quickly summoned the police on the scene and they had fought the fire with water and sand and extinguished it before it reached the Residency. I took the morning flight back to Jaffna but by the time I reached Jaffna, a Deputy Inspector General of Police and police dog Rex, along with its 3 handlers, a Colonel from the army and a Commodore of the navy, had preceded me, having been ordered to do so by the PM personally.

WANTED

Genealogy pages from family Bible of
James Alfred Ernst Buultjens (1865-
1916) from Matara.

Principal Ananda College Colombo
1892 - 1900.

Bible last seen in Kekkadura near Matara
in 1975. Willing to compensate.

Please contact Jennifer van der Graft at
jennifergraft@gmail.com

or regular mail: Jennifer van der Graft,
Sintat Avivim 12 - apt. 8, Kfar Saba
44381, Israel.

Arson and a dog named Rex

As a precautionary measure, the arsonists had used some cricketing gloves to protect their hands when pouring kerosene oil on to some boxes that had been piled high in the rear of the Kachcheri veranda, which they were going to set ablaze. Unhappily for them, some kerosene oil had spilled on a glove, which also ignited when they started the fire. Whereupon, the man whose glove caught fire had dashed it off his hand on to the floor and in the ensuing melee left it behind. That was sufficient for smart police dog Rex. Taking the scent, Rex shot off like an arrow, vaulting over fences and parapets, followed by a posse of policemen, huffing and puffing, hardly able to keep Rex on the leash. Rex ran straight on to the campus of a prestigious boy's school nearby, sprinted down a corridor, went into class room and pounced on a young boy of the university entrance class. On examination, the police found the young boy's right palm had been scalded by some new burns, corresponding exactly to the burn hole in the glove, and the police had a cast iron case.

The young man in question turned out to be the son of a sitting judge, functioning in a provincial capital elsewhere. The police sought my permission to prosecute the young boy, but I said, "no"! I explained to Jack van Sanden, the Supdt. of Police, who was a thorough gentleman and officer, that this case had sensitive political overtones which we had to take note of. While it enabled us to expose the ugly face of the Tamil protest, it also provided us with an excellent opportunity to show magnanimity and to work towards reconciliation. I also said that regardless of the facts of the case, a prosecution will be construed as a persecution. Furthermore, I argued that purely on moral grounds, we should not destroy the promising career of a young man merely because of an episodic indiscretion.

I telephoned the judge concerned and giving him the facts said that although it was within our power to prosecute his son and destroy his future and even jeopardise his own (the judge's) career, I would desist from going down that road. However, I wanted from him an assurance that he will personally reprimand his son and ensure that he

will not get involved in such activities thereafter. The judge was enormously grateful and contrite and said that he will not only discipline his son, but will also take him away from that school. However, I sent for the young man, and van Sanden and I gave him an almighty dressing down, all of which he accepted with great humility. I am glad that we did what we did, because the young man in question, never fell foul of the law thereafter, went on to qualify as a doctor, got his FRCS and settled down to a lucrative practice abroad.

These facts were not lost on the political leaders.

It not only convinced them of my sincerity, but that far from persecuting the people of Jaffna, my administration was driven only by the highest moral considerations and by a constant deference to the demands of justice and fair play. However, the ultra vitriolic Tamil paper, the "Eelanadu", saw the incident in a completely different perspective. It claimed that the so called arson was in fact a set up by the police, who being disgruntled by the growing rapprochement between the Sinhala and Tamil leaders, wanted to trigger a new round of repression. Which was of course a totally absurd story, considering the evidence produced by Rex the police dog!



G G Ponnambalam

Problems with officialdom

Following this, I had serious problems not with the FP or with the local people so much as with the officials in Colombo, who kept up a steady pressure on me not to let the FP off the hook. I could not go to the Prime Minister every time I had a disagreement with officials in Colombo and I had therefore to be in constant tension with them. On one occasion the Secretary to the Treasury sent for me and cautioned me about my seeming insolence to the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Home Affairs because I had questioned the validity of some of his orders and ordered me to apologise to him, which I did. The action taken by the head of the public service to "caution" me, though not taken as a formal disciplinary measure under Administrative Regulations, was unprecedented and was tantamount to a shot across the bows. On the other hand, in hindsight, I must confess that, though holding a Grade 1 position as the GA of Jaffna, for someone who had been only eight years in

service and therefore in the eyes of the grandees a mere subaltern, I must have come across to them as an arrogant and insufferable upstart, about which I can only feel shame and contrition now.

The first 12 months in Jaffna were therefore very trying and I had to tap deep into my inner resources to maintain the balance between the often myopic demands of officials in Colombo and the imperatives of my conscience.

I believe that eventually, though it cost me and my family dear in terms of stress and tensions, I succeeded in my endeavour to build bridges between the Sinhala and Tamil people, to the extent that when it was time for me to leave 3 years later, the Federal Party made representations to Dudley Senanayake the new PM, that my term as GA should be extended by another 3 years. However, it was not to be. The government said that I had finished my mission in Jaffna and was needed elsewhere. Within 6 months I found myself installed as the Chairman and Director General of the newly formed Ceylon Broadcasting Corporation, with Mr J.R. Jayawardena, then the Minister of State as my Minister. I was then 36.

Humiliation and life changing experiences

Thereby also hangs another tale. I served the new government of Dudley Senanayake in my capacity as the Chairman/DG of the Broadcasting Corporation with the same diligence and loyalty as I had served Mrs Bandaranaike's government as the GA of Jaffna.

The latter, now Leader of the Opposition, perhaps considered my loyalty to the new government a personal betrayal of her and when she returned to power in 1970, transferred me to Vavuniya. In terms of grade and status this posting was two or three notches below the post I was holding as the Head of Broadcasting, and even below the post of GA Jaffna which I had held 8 years earlier.

It is quite extraordinary the way politicians seek to exercise proprietorial claims over the careers of public servants who work under them, and when thwarted, misuse their power to punish them. This event generated within me such a great disillusionment about

a career in the public service, that while still only 42, I took early retirement and sought new pastures abroad. At another level I am grateful for what happened, because the ensuing disillusionment brought in its wake deep life changing experiences and a dramatic transformation of consciousness.

The Jaffna experience

My stay in Jaffna though enormously testing in terms of political challenges was also rich in experience and culture. I must confess that when I took over as the GA of Jaffna, although I had not formulated a coherent vision for my work, my perspective was not very different from that of many in the South.

One week before I assumed duties in Jaffna, Mr N.Q. Dias the Prime Minister's ultra nationalist Permanent Secretary, invited me to lunch one afternoon at the Galle Face Hotel and unfolded to me his radically nationalistic vision for my administration of Jaffna. He saw me as a major tool in his programme to bring the Tamil parties to heel. I must confess to my shame, that while I may not have responded to him with fulsome support, neither did I protest or even show dissent. I merely listened, mesmerised by Dias's grand vision. Perhaps, because he was the most powerful and feared public servant in the country at the time and given that he was more than 25 years my senior in the service, I did not have the strength to challenge him face to face. Or perhaps, secretly I rather fancied my role as a Sinhala warrior, fighting at the frontier of the nationalist cause. Either way, I must confess that when I went to Jaffna I was not the liberal I quickly became.

I suppose what transformed my perspective so dramatically and so quickly was the direct experience of a repression and a blatant injustice of which I was now expected to be the principal instrument and agent. That realisation dawned on me within the first 48 hours as the GA of Jaffna. It proved catalytic.

Deep within my conscience I realised that the moral obligation to meet the demands of justice and fair play, far outweighed the negative conse-



S J V Chelvanayakam

quences to my career of failing to toe the Colombo line. Eventually, though now without an anguished inner struggle, I found the courage not only to challenge that line but succeeded even in transforming it, at least to the extent that the Dudley-Chelvanayagam accord became possible.

During my 3 year tenure I made a special effort to learn the Tamil language, and I acquired such a proficiency in it that I could address a public meeting in Tamil and be understood, though not without producing some giggles from my audience!! In fact, I was able even to read some of the Hindu scriptures in Tamil. My reading of the Hindu scriptures led me to research the Tamil caste system in great depth, which in turn led to my writing a monograph on the subject which, though serialised in the newspapers in 1966, has yet to be published as a book. I also developed a great liking for Carnatic classical music, especially the “*miruthangam*”, and “*Bharatha Natyam*” dancing. Not least, I developed warm personal relationships with all the Tamil political leaders, including S.J.V. Chelvanayagam, Dr E.M.V. Naganathan, G.G. Ponnambalam and Prof. C. Suntheralingam, all of whom were thorough gentlemen, decent and cultured, extending to my position as GA the same respect I showed them as MPs.

Although I had served as a GA and an AGA in several Districts in the South prior to my posting to Jaffna, it was in the role of the GA of Jaffna that I most validated my career as a Public Servant and found the greatest job satisfaction. At that time, i.e. in the mid 60s, the population of the Jaffna District was about 600,000 of which about 22,000 were Sinhala and they lived in complete amity with the rest of the population, even though throughout the rest of the country, since 1956, the ethnic conflict had been erupting from time to time with increasing ferocity. The maintenance of amity between the Tamil and Sinhala within my district was perhaps my greatest joy and boast.

In the next part I wish to turn to more light hearted and perhaps more interesting aspects of my stay in Jaffna. I want to talk about the life and style of some of my illustrious colonial predecessors of the previous century, about the monumental Residency one of them built, and of things even in lighter vein.

to be continued

To Let for a Song

by Ransiri Menike Silva

Back in the ‘fifties a mildly eccentric gentleman flew into our lives and twittered around for a brief period. He was a charming and captivating conversationalist and tucked among all the trivia that constituted his cheery monologue, was his claim to be a bird lover. There was more to this than initially met the eye for we soon discovered that his interest was not confined to the feathered variety alone!

His home in the suburbs of Colombo had an extensive garden which he had converted into a private bird sanctuary. In order to entice more visitors from the neighbouring fields and woodlands, he had, he told us hung up an open cage with the notice.. “TO LET FOR A SONG”. Why on earth any bird lover would invite his feathered friends into voluntary incarceration was a question none of us dared ask him as he was so obviously thrilled by his own ingenuity.

What happened to Mr. A after he took himself off from our lives I cannot say, but we did hear later that he had eventually empathized with his feathered friends completely by turning into a cuckoo in the nest.

Although no notice so innovative as Mr. A’s hangs in my garden, yet it is full of bird-song all day. The small lawn flanked by a gnarled mango tree on one side and a sprightly guava tree on the other, it is a pleasurable day time resort to a variety of natural life both feathered and otherwise. A keen sense of observation is all that is needed in order to enjoy the interesting activities of the different layers of animal life that range from energetic daytime visitors to a less noisy nocturnal group of bats, mongooses and other night prowlers.

Each morning I am awakened by the sweet refined notes of the Magpie robin (*Polkicchha*) joyously heralding the onset of a new day. Hardly has her serenade drawn to a close than the soft mournful call of the speckled dove (*Kobeyya*) floats in. Still in bed I wonder at her plaintive lament of “*Hath-puth-poro-ko?*” for legend has it that this grieving mother was transformed into a dove to fly in search of her seven woodcutter sons inveigled by the wiles of a “*rakshaka*” (demon) and held captive in his domain deep in the forest.

All traces of her grief stricken cry has evoked vanishes as the shrill twitter of Babblers (*Demalichcho*) fills the entire garden temporarily banishing all other sounds. With their yellow beaks and legs relieving the brown-grey of their plump round bodies, they chitter and chatter endlessly, hopping around animatedly searching for goodness knows what, before drinking daintily at the 'kiri-hattiya' that serves as a bird bath. This is followed by some extremely noisy splashing that passes off as bath time, after which they get down to the serious business of breakfast. The bonhomie displayed at this 'fast food' outlet – a discarded saucepan lid – is truly amazing. After a bout of lively banter they share the bounty peaceably with the sprightly squirrels, whose sharp staccato of "Come to the cook-house door, boys" has already rung throughout the neighbourhood summoning the wandering pack together. Then in one great co-ordinated movement the Babblers take to the air and vanish....to inflict themselves on some other garden no doubt. The irrepressible squirrels, now left to themselves, concentrate fully on the left-overs, frisking around the branches at intervals as a diversionary exercise. The sudden swoop of some larger bird causes panic, precipitation a high insistent clamouring which is their danger signal. Chittering and twitching their tails nervously, they lurk among the foliage and are quick to return as soon as the intruder leaves.

Although they share their meals with the rose-ringed parakeet (*Mala Girara*) with commendable tolerance their complacency is disturbed by the Indian Cuckoo (*Koha*) who has classed itself as an illegal immigrant by its reluctance in recent years to return to its native land within the stipulated period of welcome. The Crow Pheasant or Coukal (*Ati-kukula*) smart and dignified in its coat of brown and black, walking with measured step in search of a juicy snail or two, also causes an occasional flutter.

A pair of Red-vented Bul-Buls (*kondaya*), nesting in a nearby bush consider the bird bath their personal property, patronizing it at all hours of the day. But it spells danger to me to my two tiniest visitors, the Humming Bird or Loten's Sunbird (*Sootikka*), the male glorious in iridescent colours, and the Tailor Bird (*Battichcha*) with its ever twitching tail and lung power excessively out of proportion to its tiny body. He

is an engaging little fellow who has made his home close to the bird bath but avoids it with studied precaution. Once I spotted him having a merry splash in a large bubble of water trapped in a Caladium leaf!



The all pervading green of the garden is occasionally enriched by a brilliant streak of colour – the vivid blue of a Kingfisher (*Pilibuduwu*); the flaming red of a Woodpecker (*Kottorwa*); the vibrant yellow of a Golden Oriole (*Kaha-kurulla*). A rarer visitor is the Brown-headed Barbet (*Jambu / Polos Kottorwa*) its body of subdued green complemented by a head of muted brown, who is spotted most frequently when the mangoes are ripening. The Mynahs though, are daily visitors strutting around the lawn confidently trying to tease out tid-bits scattered carelessly by the Babblers and squirrels. As the noon-day heat recedes leaving the evening in a mellower mood, a lone Shrike (*Ukusa*) takes to the air, rising in slow circles higher and higher into the sky. Flocks of water birds, some in intriguing formation, and the Red wattles Lapwing (*Kirala*) with its haunting cry, make their way homeward after a day's hunting in the nearby Diyawanna Oya, where I have spotted a mother Cormorant (*Diya Kava*) diving for her breakfast while her two little ones cruised around close to her in the bay of an islet of Water Hyacinths.



It is now dusk and serenity seeps in fanned by cool breezes. The peace is suddenly shattered by the arrival of the Babbler Brigade trumpeting their arrival with a tremendous cacophony and a repeat performance of the morning's show. But high above their interminable chatter arises the clear whistle of the White-bellied Drongo (*Kawda*) with its fishlike tail, proclaiming to all that it has unfailingly kept its twilight tryst with the telephone wires. He is quiet and unobtrusive, quite content with its own company and still able to deceive me with its excellent mimicry of a kitten.

The last to leave us is the Magpie robin now bold enough to venture into the verandah in

search of nocturnal insects just emerging from the cool dark earth. It dines voraciously on those unfortunates who are gobbled up even before they have a chance to live. Well fed she makes her exit with a delightful song of farewell. Just in time too, for now a variety of bats swoop in on silent wings – night time invaders taking over the night sky from the scavenging crows already flying home to roost.

While all this is taking place the under-growth has been bristling with innumerable unseen creatures, all engaged in their individual life preserving activities. Ants, aphids and a hidden amphibian – a large orange coloured toad. Bees, bugs and butterflies. Crickets, caterpillars and centipedes. Slugs and snails; earthworms and millipedes; lizards and garden geckos, and a host of other creeping, crawling, climbing creatures silently busy throughout the day.

Although I am extra vigilant of prowling neighbourhood cats intent on pouncing a morsel of fur or feather, and consider them enemies, it delights me to watch the grace of a stalking Iguana (*Thalagoya*). It occupies our ceiling during the day, relinquishing it to a family of mon-



gooses (*mugatiya*), who use it mainly as a pathway to more fertile hunting grounds across the road.

Once a cocky young intruder attempted to usurp the ceiling for its own use and a noisy brawl went on above us until they slipped down and landed together in the kitchen garden. Up in a flash the antagonists rushed at each other furiously – but what I expected to be a fight unto death turned into a civilized test of strength on the lines of a Japanese Sumo wrestling match. They stood upright on their hind legs, tails stretched behind for support, forelegs clasped around the others chest each one's head looking over the other's shoulder. Hissing and grunting they pushed against each other and trying to topple his opponent. They were equally matched in size and strength and contin-

ued to push until they topple sideways on the ground. Each time this happened one of them would try to pin down the other with his body taking little nips at the loose rough skin of the opponent's leg. This is the only time they used their teeth., but they never bit hard or tried to hurt the other seriously in any way. Soon they would be up and wrestling again. This amazing spectacle went on for about fifteen minutes,

until a sudden outside distraction disturbed them. Then the challenger, presumably accepting his inferiority slipped away unnoticed by his opponent and the visitor remained to rule his territory for a while longer.

This captivating episode ranks second only to a much rarer sight I was privileged to witness some years ago in the very heart of Colombo. This was a Snake Dance.

Making our rear garden a part of his daily route was a lone, mature Rat Snake (*Gerandyā*) who repaid our tolerance of it by reducing our unwanted population of rodents. As I watched its movements one day I was surprised to see another snake approaching it from the opposite direction. As they met they began to entwine themselves, wrapping around each like lianas, raising themselves higher and higher above the ground while doing so. I watched fascinated, as now almost half their firmly entangled bodies were in a vertical position.....and then they began to dance, swaying gently and gracefully from side to side in perfect rhythm. Was this some exotic mating ritual? But no....a third snake, so far unnoticed, joined them and wrapping itself round the other two integrated itself smoothly into this exquisite dance sequence and all three swayed together to some unheard magical music. Then a startled sound and a stone thrown by a frightened worker separated them and I have been left wondering ever since how it would have ended and what it signifies in the life of a snake.

Can some reader please enlighten me?

...of church ladies & typewriters

Our youth basketball team is back in action Wednesday at 8 p.m in the recreation hall. Come out and watch us kill Christ the King

The peacemaking meeting scheduled for today has been cancelled due to a conflict.

Letters to Editor

Dear Sumane

You must have mail from members reacting to something they have read in the Ceylankan. Well here's mine. I was reading the first instalment of Decima Pereras's memoirs (Nov. 2005) when I realised she had experienced cataclysmic events similar to mine.

1. A life-changing Depression of the 1930s.
2. An almost identical thunderstorm where a bolt of lightning passed along a row of French windows of my home to crash into a tree in the Kachcheri garden nearby. (My husband was the G.A., in his office at the time).
3. A flood causing considerable damage. (She was in Kelaniya; we were in Batticaloa when the town was completely cut off from the rest of the island)

She appears to have been five years older than me. Grew up in Colombo where she had her experiences. I grew up in Galle but the thunderbolt and flood got me when I was moving to out-stations with my husband. I wonder if the conjunction of these events are common to many Ceylonese? When I last sent you an article, you asked for photos with some specifications. I am now about to plunge into learning how to send 'photos by email'. Please tell me again, what were those specifications? I like the humour you have included in the magazine. With best wishes.

Barbara Misso

Thank you Barbara, both for the encouragement and the pictures which reached me exactly to specification. I do not wish to be indelicate, but may I assume you are a septuagenarian? If so more push to your elbow for battling with cyberstuff and getting it right. Congratulations. Your article goes in the next issue Journal 38 where the theme is "schooltime" memories.

Ed

Dear Sir,

I read the article by Michael Roberts in the Ceylankan of August 2006 on the subject of Mahadeva Sathasivam. On the subject of his being charged with the murder of his wife and subsequent acquittal I wish to make an observation.. It might interest readers that when I was ASP, Matugama in 1961 I traced William to a colony in Badureliya. I went to his shack and found he was getting ready to go to Colombo. I gave him a lift

to Colombo in the Police jeep in the hope I could get him talking and get some information out of him on the murder mystery. After refreshments at a wayside boutique and much small talk, I asked the all important question. Something like " Tell me the truth, now that everything is over, aren't you the one who killed that lady?"

He did not say YES or NO. I expected him to jump up and say " Anney, mahathaya mama nang keruwa nay" (meaning " Oh sir, it I did not do it..) or some such thing. But he just would not say yes or no and kept his face averted. Just hung his head down. I got the impression he just did not want to say 'yes'. This is the impression I was left with.

Vama Vamadevan

Email exchange with a non member:

Dear Editor

I am not a member of your Society but had a chance of reading through a couple of copies , including your November 2006 issue.

Do you really sit on your dam and ponder?
Or are you pulling the proverbial leg?

I ask only of self interest. I was for a short time involved in editing a community rag. For the love of Mike, I could not enthuse our members to contribute anything like what your members do. Two things, it speaks well of the high erudition levels of the membership and your level of skill in putting The Ceylankan together. Try as I might I could not find a teeniest error which bedevilled our rag. It was blamed on the gremlins at the printers end. The person from who I borrowed the mag tells me all of you are amateurs! Well not from where I stand. Either you are a professional Editor or one lucky b...d.

Mike Shand
December 2006

I guess I am the latter. Professionally I am a Mechanical Engineer now turned Plum Grower. I was simply thrown in at the deep end - but confess I have an excellent support team for research, resources and proof reading. Yes, only a handful of our members are published authors, all others write for pleasure. My guess is that they are passionate about the subject matter, hence they get it right. A complimentary copy of this issue will be on its way to you as soon as it is off the press . Perhaps you should join us. Ed

The Architecture of Geoffrey Bawa

A Poetry of Place

by Dr Ranjith Dayaratne

It is not unfair to claim that architecture today, both in Sri Lanka and elsewhere, is in turmoil. More often than not, the buildings made today seem to create “placelessness” than place, loss of identity than authenticity which are rudimentary needs of building. As often talked about, modern architecture has dislodged the present from the past and destroyed the wholesomeness that naturally existed in the vernacular and the traditional. Most people including many architects however remain unaware, undisturbed and unmoved.

Exceptions however, do exist. Geoffrey Bawa was perhaps among the few who were sensitive to such complexities of architecture and attempted to make a change appropriately meaningful specifically in the Sri Lankan context. For that reason, it is inspiring to dwell upon Geoffrey Bawa’s work in order to develop an understanding of architecture that can connect the past with the present and the future, to build passionately and to re-create the wholesomeness of places that we live in today.

Bawa’s work had yet another important facet to it; he unlike many others resurrected the Sri Lankan architecture from the cultural dislodgement that had set in pursuant to colonisation of the island of Ceylon for centuries. His comments about the piece of land chosen for his final settlement in Ceylon in fact hints at the state of affairs of architecture he stumbled upon in the island.

“This is how I found it, abandoned and uncared for, the lake hidden behind the curtain of leaves except when a sudden breeze moving a branch opened momentarily a view of clouds and lake – promising what could be”

Undeniably, he found it abandoned and uncared for, but also saw glimpses of its poetic potential that no one had ever seen before. However, the setting in which he finally settled in could not have been better. Ceylon, even after centuries of colonisation was still a land of enchanting natural beauty, with vast areas of undisturbed wilderness

and ruins of ancient tanks. Indeed, Ceylon had just become independent from the British rule, the last of the colonisers, and was beginning to search for a new identity, a search for the essence of their being. And this had to be found from within the assortment of Western and Eastern practices that had been assimilated to those of the Sinhalese and had come to reside in their landscape.

The ruins of a 2500 years of civilized history laid amidst the jungles of the hinterlands together with rural villages and temples while the south western coast had been invaded by the Portuguese, the Dutch and the British and was acquiring the veneers of the western cultures. More than all, the Buddhist Monasteries set in natural landscaped gardens dotted the countryside together with the temples, the paddy fields and the natural water tanks. The hills had become tea gardens with waterfalls in between and the island was surrounded by the beautiful beach opened only occasionally through wilderness of unpolluted land.

An architecture existed that had been primarily generated through the wisdom of reverence to Nature and adaptation of natural landscape. Simple yet profoundly poetic in its ways of reconciling with the conflicts between man, earth, animal and the super natural beings the peasants believed in, they concretised the humane and interdependent existence of the monks the peasants and their collective environment.

For example, the manor houses or ‘walauwas’ of the Sinhalese aristocrats combined rich architectural traditions of the Dutch, the Portuguese and the Sinhalese and comprised of large verandas, colonnades and overhanging roofs. Importantly however, together, they created places that ensured relation to the land, the natural wilderness and above all, pleasant places for dwelling.

It is here that Bawa’s sources of spatial wisdom resided and from which he continuously reaped many of the spatial gestures that were to become hallmarks of his work. He was not however a native dweller of that landscape as much as the

monks and the peasants were. Nevertheless, he had the seeds of the spatial consciousness the Sinhalese have had for centuries; an ability to grasp the essentialities of feeling;

the romance of the earth,
the movements of the sky,
the patterns of the wilderness
and the innate desire of the Man to be
one with this Nature;

The Sinhalese had derived their core cultural facets from the ability that the monks and the peasants of Sri Lanka had long cultivated. The remnants of these existed relatively intact both in society and its landscape although now disturbed by centuries of colonisation.

When Bawa returned in 1957 to practice architecture, the European dominated architectural practices were reproducing architecture in borrowed colonial styles fused with some decorative devices of classical Sinhalese architecture through buildings such as the Colombo Town Hall that dominate the landscape of Colombo even today or the Galle Face Courts, the Cargills and many governmental buildings.

Most importantly, post independence Sri Lanka was gearing up for a cultural revival; a re-search for the subjugated authenticity that was waiting to surface. In all spheres of cultural significance, movements were taking shape in the rejuvenation of a ‘Sinhalese Buddhist veneer’ if not a reconstruction. This cultural re-awakening made possible through the loosening of the colonial power in the island, naturally took shape through the rejection of the legacy of western culture; escape to Eastern roots instead of embracing Western Modernism that was unfolding elsewhere.

The manifestations of these movements thus created people and cultural artefacts that were to become the icons of the era cherished nowadays as the roots of the modern Sri Lankan culture from poetry to films and from sculpture to painting.

Interestingly, they have created a public consciousness of products and people that continue to linger on now for almost half a century with no subsequent people or productions to replace them.

Sarathchandra emerged in drama with produc-

tions like the Sinhabahu and Maname, that powerfully articulated the stories of the origin of the Sinhalese race, together with others such as Mahagamasekara in poetry, Amaradeva in music, Lester James Pieris in cinema, George Keyt in paintings, and Chitrasena in dance recreating artefacts that had Sinhalese orientations in their form. Although these productions and people came into being very early during this period, architecture had produced none at all until Bawa came to be recognized somewhat similarly only late 1980s.

The construction of the Independence Hall and the University of Peradeniya clearly demonstrate the way in which the new directions architecture



Transforming an ordinary beach to an exotic place:
The Lighthouse Hotel

was taking in its pursuance of this cultural revival. Unfortunately, it started with borrowing and re-planting elements of ancient Sinhalese architecture such as the moonstones at doorsteps or the ornate flower patterns on walls and columns, from the glorious historical periods of Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa

Perhaps, despite the fact that Bawa was searching in the same direction and during the same period, it was his difference of purpose and ideology that cut him apart from the cultural ‘gurus’ of the other arts who are much more close to the consciousness of the masses of Sri Lanka. In a way, what is often said of Bawa of returning to ‘tradition’ as the basis of his practice in that narrow sense of the word is only a shallow interpretation of his works.

“In my personal search, I have always looked to the past for the help that previous answers can give... by the past I mean all the past, from Anurad-



Reconstructing the spatiality of a cherished culture: Bandaranaike residence

hapura to the latest finished buildings in Colombo, from Polonnaruwa to the present – the whole range of effort, peaks of beauty and simplicity and deep valleys of pretension. I prefer to consider all past good architecture in Ceylon as just that- as Ceylon good architecture for that is what it is. not Dutch or Portuguese or Indian or early Sinhalese or Kandyan or British colonial, for all examples of these periods have taken Ceylon into first account.”

One cannot deny that the context was indeed the desire among the public; his clients and even the Colombo elites to find something authentic, native or to put it more clearly, an architecture that one can come close to, through their inner beings. For whatever the 500 years of colonisation may have superimposed upon Sri Lankans whether westernized or otherwise, there existed a core; a core that had been essentially nurtured through the presence of nature, the presence of Buddhism and its teachings, and through the presence of 2500 years of civilized history.

Thus the context within which Bawa began his architectural practice was peculiarly complex but undeniably resourceful. It was a period of cultural search for roots, and it was a period of political instability and search for new directions after the absence of the colonial power. He was however, in the midst of the urban elite who had already adopted western dynamisms and sub-

scribed to neither the socio-cultural revival nor the political movements unfolding at that time. He thus grew with others like him; Barbara Sansoni re-inventing fabric and fashion with a Sri Lankan cultural flavour, Ena De Silva with her batik and Laki Senanayake with his line drawings. Unfortunately, not many could see the beauty of the Sri Lankan architectural landscape, except a few. Among them, Barbara Sansoni and Laki Senanayake rank high and deserve recognition although Sri Lankan society is yet to see them in that light. Barbara Sansoni was sketching in her own style the “Viharas and Verandahs” while Laki Senanayake produced fascinating line drawings of the natural wilderness that showed their admiration of this native landscape.

At the beginning of his architectural practice, Bawa joined Edward Reid and Begg and when its office was closed down later on, became its principal. At the beginning he worked together with Ulrick Plesner, a Danish architect then in Sri Lanka, on a number of modernist designs for town houses, which took serious note of the climatic conditions to generate their forms.

Within a modernist framework they developed concrete frame structures with ‘breathing walls’ that created powerful modernist facades defined by punctuated and ordered grid patterns. Al-

though already beginning to show sensitivity to the landscape, this approach however, focused more on the appearance of the buildings as opposed to the creation of the spaces that were being enclosed.

Some of the well-known earliest works such as the Bishops College, the St. Thomas Preparatory school, and the Ekala Industrial Estate were concerned about initiating and managing air flow to cool the building facades although through the process of the structural systems, Bawa together with Plesner, also developed an elevational ordering system that he later came to refine in a number of projects.

The first major shift in the architecture of Bawa began around 1960s, only a three years since he had got into practice, first through the well-known Ena De Silva's house, and then the Bartholomeuz house that he later persuaded ER & B



Kandalama Hotel—built 1990s

to purchase as their office and thus continued to be identified as his office. Through the good Shepherd convent, The Polontalawa Estate Bungalow, the Bentota Beach Hotel, Steel Corporation Office, and the Serendib hotel completed within the next decade, the spirit of his architecture evolved and took roots both in the private domestic sphere as well the public architecture realms that was identified as 'truly Sri Lankan spirited architecture' emerging within the confines of the urban society in Colombo.

So in the Ena De Silva's house, Geoffrey transforms a narrow urban patch within the urban chaos of the city, in to an ashram of sorts, creating open and covered spaces that interact with each other to play light and shade, vistas and

screens and solitude and companionship lined around a large central courtyard.

David Robson wrote, *"this house more than any other was responsible for changing the perceptions of a generation of architects and ultimately of the entire urban population of Sri Lanka."*

Having been awakened to poeticized space through the Ena De Silva house, Geoffrey Bawa goes on to refining the seclusion and spatial articulation of courtyards through the Bartholomeuz House which was created around three courtyards to define public and private spaces while generating a cool atmosphere as a compact urban dwelling. In fact it displays with conviction the refined language of architecture that was evolving in his hands.

Ironically, the golden days of Geoffrey Bawa's professional career was before Ceylon became Sri Lanka, and before it moved away from western bias to the non-aligned movement and the distinct political focus to develop national institutions and local culture.

Geoffrey Bawa, like many other western educated Colombo elites felt threatened at this turn of events, wanted to leave Sri Lanka and had been dismayed by the restrictions imposed by the socialist government that came into power in the 1970s that spearheaded this movement.

However, despite the fact that Edward Reid and Begg as the leading architectural office with its urban clients began to suffer initially from the change, it also had opportunities to attract government funded projects such as the State Mortgage Bank and the Agrarian Research and Training Institute in Colombo.

As I see it, what makes the period before the 1970s, the golden days of Bawa is not only his pioneering projects but in fact the ways in which his architectural peer group had evolved during that time such as Anura Ratnavibhushana Pheroz Choksy and Turner Wickramasinghe and Nihal Amarasinghe. Undeniably, the impact they created in reverberations across the Sri Lankan architectural practices in time to come, enormously transformed the Sri Lankan architectural landscape and also helped Bawa to construct his image as the master.

Geoffrey Bawa came to be identified as the Mas-

ter architect, the “Guru” of the spatial realm of the Sri Lanka’s cultural awakening with many of his grand designs that came with the change of the government in 1977, the introduction of the open economic policies and the liberalisation of many restrictions that existed. The new government initiated many large-scale projects, initiating a construction boom that followed opportunities that were not even dreamt of before 1977.

The Most notable among them was the creation of a new capital city - Kotte, and the location of the Houses of Parliament in Sri Jayawardenepura Kotte, which Bawa was invited to design.

By this time, he had acquired his image as a revered personality in the architectural circle and had amassed enormous power as an architect that enabled him to fashion the entire project as he imagined. Moreover, the project was commissioned by the President himself giving a free hand with the only condition that it be completed by 1982.

It was the construction of the parliament in Kotte and the Ruhuna University on a highly visible site on the land side of the Galle Matara highway that brought Bawa in to the public consciousness and transformed him to a national figure, through these two projects. Parliament through its external imagery has become synonymous with the Sri Lankan identity as much as the Dalada Maligawa in Kandy or the Independence Hall in Colombo. The day to day interactions the students have had with the university of Ruhuna, made the public understand Bawa’s architecture as a way of building that had been forgotten, yet had all the potential to be celebrated as an extension of their authentic spatial practices.

It is the Kandalama hotel built in 1990s during his solitary explorations after winding down the ER & B in the same period, that Bawa was transformed in to a public figure of discourse amongst Sri Lankans following the controversies that surrounded the very location of the hotel project and indeed the decision to build it at Kandalama.

Kandalama Hotel together with the Pradeep Jayawardene House in Mirissa built around 1998 unquestionably establishes Bawa’s quest for creating places for poetic dwelling although he has often been recognised as a vernacularist and a traditionalist. It is true that he often employed the language of Sinhalese culture that had naturally availed many answers to the spatial problems he sought to resolve. It offered him the tools to create the drama of silencing the body and awakening the soul. He

was not at all a prisoner of such narrow confines as the materiality of the tiles on cement roofs or the timber trellis work of the traditional manor houses.

Bawa has been described by the few who have written about his work as almost confined to the frames of tradition. However, as I see it, what underlies Bawa’s architecture takes us far beyond the visual appearance of those buildings or the obvious connections he makes with the sites. In fact, Bawa not only re-discovered the charm and the fascination of the Sri Lankan material culture, he also re-discovered the Sri Lankans spatial spirituality often articulated through the solemnity of the presence and indeed the absence of things at the same time. Overwhelming Buddhist perceptions, values and consciousness had forced the abandonment of ornate ostentation which often represents the aesthetic in the modern world. It enabled the appreciation of simplicity and absence of material things, except that which exists by its very nature.

Heidegger, the phenomenologist and philosopher called such existence ‘poetic dwelling’ and Christian Norberg Schultz argued that the task of architecture is to enable such poetic dwelling. What Bawa had re-collected from the traditional Sri Lankan architecture in fact is the power that resided in that language of architecture to make us ‘dwell poetically’ and dwelling poetically he did, often in his remote home at Lunuganga in the solitude of his inner being.

While the language he often used was naturally extracted from the essence of the rural landscape, the peasant houses, the Sinhalese manor houses or the monasteries and ancient ruins of Sri Lankan history, it is the core of that existence that he regenerates and recreates through his forms and spaces. If there is anything that may continue into the building traditions of future, it is not so much the language of architecture that he employed and clarified through meandering spaces and material outlays, but the deep seated meditative poetry of spatiality that had evolved naturally in the Sri Lankan landscape and its unrecognised ancient buildings created by unknown builders. He enriched its articulation through the medium he created and elevated its presence from the confines of remote rural settings.

Many young architects in Sri Lanka are continuing to re-assemble such spatial poetry through other languages of architecture and there is no doubt

that the stage was inspiringly set by Geoffrey Bawa on a firm footing.

Dr. Ranjith Dayaratne an architect by profession, educated at the University of Moratuwa and at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne UK, has worked as a Senior Lecturer at the University of Moratuwa and also as an Assistant Professor at the Department of Architecture of the University of Bahrain. He has been the Editor-in Chief of the Sri Lankan journal of Architecture and was also the founding Chairman of the Board of Architectural Publications of the Sri Lanka Institute of Architects. He has published widely on Sri Lankan Architecture and authored the articles on Sri Lanka in The Encyclopaedia of Vernacular Architecture of the World, edited by Professor Paul Oliver and published by the Cambridge University Press. He was a Visiting Academic Scholar of the Faculty of Architecture Building and Planning, University of Melbourne in 2005.

A Speaking Picture: The Centenary E.F.C.Ludowyk Memorial Lecture 2006

by Yasmine Gooneratne AO, D Litt

Poetry, therefore, is an art of imitation ... that is to say, a representing, a counterfeiting, or figuring forth to speak metaphorically. A speaking picture, with this end: to teach and delight.

Sir Philip Sidney, *The Defence of Poetry* 1595

It was many centuries ago that the Athenian leader Pericles gave the world his views on memorial lectures and orations. 'It is hard to speak properly,' he said, 'upon a subject where it is even difficult to convince your hearers that you are speaking the truth'. The University of Ceylon at Peradeniya in the 1950s is one such subject. I have often found, when it comes up in conversation with the friends who were my classmates or near-contemporaries, and who are now scattered all over the English-speaking world, that Peradeniya in that particular moment in time is invariably referred to by us all in terms that are never applied to any other place or period. Of the terms most frequently heard in connection with the life that we experienced there, one is "A

Golden Age"; another is "Arcadia". 'It was a magical time,' says one former classmate. 'It was idyllic,' says another. Our companions – some of them husbands, wives, or children – who did not share the Peradeniya experience, and who now have to hear us talk about it *ad infinitum*, look sceptical. They don't believe us.

This need not surprise us. The life of this country has moved so fast, and in so many unexpected directions since the 1950s that the past – even the recent past – is easily forgotten. Indeed, it seems sometimes to me that in our inability to recollect history, and our reluctance to learn from it, our people suffer from a form of collective amnesia. And so, using the authority conferred upon me by the University's kind invitation to me to deliver the 2006 Ludowyk Memorial Lecture in celebration of the birth centenary of the great educationist whose influence shaped my life and the lives of my generation, I think it is my duty to affirm that what we say about Peradeniya is absolutely true.

"Peradeniya? Three years in Paradise," a classmate said once. 'And at the end of it, they even gave us a degree!'

What was it that made Peradeniya so special? Quite apart from its magnificent setting in the hill country, and the quality of life that it bestowed on the students who entered its portals from every part of the island, the academic corridors of Peradeniya in the 1950s were peopled by remarkable personalities. Why some of these loomed larger than life, I cannot say, but so it was. Sir Ivor Jennings, Vice-Chancellor; his doughty successor, Sir Nicholas Attygalle; Professor J.L.C. Rodrigo, the kindly and affable Dean of Arts; Professor E.O.E. Pereira, Head of Engineering, a model of gentlemanly courtesy; Professor Cuthbert Amerasinghe, devoted classicist and for many years my ideal of the perfect scholar; Dr Ediriweera Sarachchandra, Sanskrit scholar and author of *Maname*; Dr Siri Gunasinghe, poet and painter; Tawney Rajaratnam, H.A. de S. Gunasekera and A.J. Wilson, who dominated Economics and Politics in their time; W.J.F. LaBrooy, Professor Ray and Father Ignatius Pinto, who did the same for History; O.H. de A. Wijesekera in Sanskrit, D.E. Hettiarachchi in Sinhala, J.E. Jayasuriya in Education, K.N. Jayatilleke in Philosophy are just a few of the names that spring to my mind; and beyond these, in the wider world of the residential campus, the unforgettable figures of the Hall Wardens, Mrs Vajira Cooke of Pieris Hall, Miss Marjorie Westrop and Dr Florence Ram Aluvihare of Sanghamitta, Miss Mathiaparanam, the

philosopher of Hilda Obeyesekere Hall ... and the glamorous bachelors of Mahakande, Dr S.J. Tambiah of Sociology, Dr Ian vanden Driesen of Economics, Dr S.B. Dissanayake of Dentistry

It was as if all the intellectual brilliance in our country had been concentrated in one spot. If the University had been a stage, we students would have been witnesses to the performances of a stellar cast. For me, as an Arts student reading for an Honours degree in English, the English Department was, of course, the undoubted centre of the Peradeniya paradise, a world populated by erudite, witty and dedicated dons. Doric de Souza, committed leftist, legend in the area of Language and Linguistics, who kept his politics and his teaching fastidiously apart; Hector Augustus Passé, specialist in the poetry of Milton and devotee of Conrad; Robin Mayhead, fresh from Cambridge where he had been a disciple of the legendary F.R. Leavis, and a contributor to the literary journal, *Scrutiny*; his South African successor, Brian Smale-Adams ... And leading the procession, the modest, unassuming, benevolent and yet somehow quietly dominant, figure of Evelyn Frederick Charles Ludowyk, eminent Shakespearean and presiding genius of the Dramatic Society, who had been to me a legend long before he materialized at Peradeniya as a flesh and blood person.

This was partly because of the reverence in which Professor Ludowyk's name was held in the Ceylon in which I had been growing up, and partly because of the respect with which it was mentioned by every adult I knew, in my family circle and outside it, who had any connection with education. My English Literature teacher at Bishop's College, Mrs Pauline Hensman, and her husband C.R. Hensman who was concurrently teaching English at St Thomas's College, together with their circle of gifted friends which included Basil Mendis and Regi Siriwardhana, had been among Ludowyk's students at the University of Ceylon in Colombo. When my eldest sister Gwen went to University in Colombo, she too had read for an English Honours degree under Ludowyk, Passé, Doric, and Robin Mayhead's predecessor, the Australian Peter Elkin. There was hardly a day in my school life when my sister, returning from lectures at Thurstan Road, did not have a story to relate about what had happened in class, what Professor Ludowyk had said, and how he had said it. University life, it seemed to me as I listened to Gwen, was one continuing drama, and at the centre of that drama was Professor Ludowyk.

I did not, however, get to meet the great man myself until the day came when, having sat for my University Entrance examination, I was summoned to a scholarship interview at Thurstan Road. I have recently transformed that early experience into fiction; and even though in the shortened extract I am about to quote from the novel I have just published, the names of all the committee members I encountered that day (with one exception, that of the Vice-Chancellor of that time) have been changed, Professor Ludowyk will probably be easily recognisable to Sri Lankan readers under the fictional name I gave him, which is that of one of our Dutch Governors of the 18th century.

For those who have little or no memory of the 1950s, Sri Lanka at that time was in the grip of a post-Independence resurgence of nationalism. Everyone, it seemed, had an agenda, everyone had a hobby-horse. My heroine, as diffident and nervous as I was myself on the day of my interview, finds herself subjected, as I was, to aggressive interrogation by an ultra-nationalist professor:

The interview was to take place in the Council Room of the University of Ceylon in Colombo. On the day before the interview a card arrived in the mail for Latha from [her teachers] Rajan and Paula Phillips. Slightly cheered by the sight of it, she put it into her handbag as a kind of good-luck charm, and approached the entrance to the University. She had never entered those sacred portals before, and she was very nervous. She had expected the University grounds to be filled with laughing, chattering students, but the corridor in which she was seated was deserted except for five other people. They were seated in a row and looked extremely nervous. Perhaps, Latha thought, they're also students waiting to be interviewed. Sitting very still in her pale pink voile sari and new, rather squeaky sandals, her eyes directed at a crack in the cement floor, she resisted the temptation to jump up and run home.

A door opened into the corridor.
'Miss Wijesinha?'

Six dignified gentlemen in suits and national dress and four ladies in sari seated in a semi-circle around a large oval table interrupted their conversation to look Latha up and down as she entered the room.

'Please sit down, Miss ... Wijesinha.'

Latha noticed for the first time that the speaker, who occupied the central place in the half-circle of interrogators, and must therefore, Latha thought, be the person who was chairing the meeting, was a foreigner. He had hesitated over her name, but had pronounced it correctly, with only a slight (British?) accent.

One of the ladies ... smiled encouragingly at Latha, and she began to feel better... Latha sat down, and balanced her handbag on her knees. The handbag was a present from her father. Finding that her fingers were clenched around its handle, she unclenched them one by one, took a deep breath, and tried to relax...

The Vice-Chancellor scanned the sheet before him, nodded, and then looked up at Latha.

'English is your best subject,' he said. 'That's quite obvious from your marks. But Professor [Everard] van Loten here has made a note that you write as if it's also the love of your life.' His colleagues smiled.

'Is it?'

Latha didn't know what to say. Nothing her teachers or her father had told her had prepared her for Sir Ivor Jennings's relaxed Cambridge style.

'I do like to read,' she said at last; and added: 'My mother says I read too much.'

'Oh? And what do you read, Miss Wijesinha?'

The person the Vice-Chancellor had identified as 'Professor van Loten' had spoken for the first time.

'Novels and poetry, mostly.'

The professor opened his lips as if he were about to ask another question, but found himself pre-empted.

'Not, perhaps, so keen on local history, Miss?' said a gentleman in national dress who was seated on the Vice-Chancellor's right.

Latha made no reply, and he continued:

'I noticed that there was some ... vagueness in your answer in the Ceylon History paper ...'

Latha's mind became a blank. Vagueness?

'... regarding the identity of the statue that stands at the side of the Parakrama Samudra.'

Identity? What identity?

(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.

The Sweet & Simple Kind -by Yasmine Gooneratne 648 pp., Rs. 1,000. Perera-Hussein Publishing House 80A Dharmapala Mawatha, Colombo 7.

Mahaweli Meadows -by Valentine Perera, 275 pp soft cover, \$ 20 + p&h available from the author—at 21 Nursery Way, Burwood VIC 3125, 03 9830 6329 Email: valper@hotmail.com

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: vybooks@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

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

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(Continued from page 23)

Latha's school's History Society had visited Polonnaruwa a few months before the entrance examination, and her history teacher had informed her class that the massive figure which dominates the giant water reservoir there, the 'Sea of Parakrama', was the statue of an Indian sage, holding a roll of parchment in his hands. Latha hadn't realized that there were any further questions to be asked or answered about its identity.

She passed on her history teacher's statement on the subject. It seemed to annoy her interrogator a good deal.

'Perhaps, Miss, you take your information only from your teachers? Don't you read the newspapers?'

For the first time Latha looked directly at the questioner. To her great surprise, she found that she could put a name to his face. It was a face that had appeared frequently in the newspapers of late, in connection with a controversy ... involving scholars across the island. ... She identified her interrogator as a professor of nationalistic views who had advanced the theory that the statue immortalized the royal builder of the reservoir. She knew now what the problem was.

'I – I believe it's also thought to be ... a statue of King Parakrama Bahu,' she said, and saw him smile triumphantly. 'But I'm not very sure.'

His smile vanished.

'"Not very sure"? What is there to be unsure about? Are you equally unsure about the identity of the author of Shakespeare's plays, Miss, whether Marlowe wrote them or Bacon?"

Latha made no reply. Professor van Loten hummed quietly to himself and looked dreamily out of the window at a gardener who was watering a bed of cannas in the broiling sunshine. Latha's questioner turned to his colleagues, shaking his head in apparent despair.

'These ignorant teachers in our schools! What nonsense they are passing on to these children! The lady who had smiled at Latha earlier now intervened. She said she had a question to ask ...

'I was interested by what you had to say in your

Botany paper about indigenous plants of the hill-country ... do you have any plans for studying Botany, Miss Wijsinha?'

She obviously expected an affirmative reply. She had been Latha's only supporter at the interview so far, apart from Professor van Loten, and in disappointing her Latha saw all her chances slipping away from her. But what point was there in pretending? She wasn't going to Peradeniya anyway.

'No, it has to be Arts for me,' Latha said; and added, to her own amazement: 'I would die if I couldn't do English.'

This time her questioners actually laughed out loud. (Except for the Vice-Chancellor, who smiled behind his moustache.) The English department in the University of Ceylon, as Latha was later to discover – and tremble at the memory of her own temerity – was the University's elite department, well-known in both Europe and Asia for the brilliance of its star academics and the excellence of its graduates. One did not, as an insignificant first-year undergraduate at the University of Ceylon, *plan* to study English there. One hoped and prayed, read widely and worked hard, and then, at the end of that first year, if one were extraordinarily lucky, one might find oneself called to the study of English Language and Literature, as to a sacred vocation. Latha had made the mistake of speculating about the unthinkable.

The Sweet and Simple Kind, 2006: pp. 201 - 205

This is the second occasion in my writing life on which I have presented Professor Ludowyk as a fictional character. The first occurred when I incorporated into my first novel, *A Change of Skies* (1991), a story told us in Australia by a childhood friend of his from 'the Galle days', Miss Leschinska Ephraums, which you will not find in Ludowyk's short autobiography, *Those Long Afternoons*. According to Miss Ephraums, the eleven-year-old Lyn had set sail on a raft into Galle Harbour with a group of playmates that included Leschinska, then six. They had no oars, and no provisions. When it grew dark, and the little ones began to cry, the children realised that they had no lights. As we all know, the Galle Harbour has numerous submerged wrecks, and the danger they were in was very real. Fortunately, a fishing boat found them and brought them back to shore, and to their distraught parents.

The lecture was delivered by the author of "*The Sweet and Simple Kind*" (her third novel, published by Perera Hussein in Colombo in 2006).

Colombo Chapter of the CSA set for "Take-off"

After consulting CSA members resident in Sri Lanka the Committee decided, in October 2006, to explore the feasibility of a Chapter or Branch, in Sri Lanka. Mike Udabage was entrusted with the task. In November, Mike co-opted regular *Ceylankan* contributor Somasiri Devendra (as chief convener) and Daya Wickramatunga to join him. By December 6 this trio met several times and consulted with CSA committee members. A letter was then drafted and on December 6th sent to all 24 members resident in Sri Lanka, followed up by telephone calls and emails. All were asked whether they favoured the formation of a Colombo Chapter. The response was enthusiastic with eighteen in favour and only one not in favour (due to age). Balance could not be reached. Subsequently a meeting of nine members was held, followed by a lunch, on January 14th 2007. Unfortunately, apart from those who had urgent business on that day, some were laid low with the dreaded "Chikungunya" and other related viruses sweeping the country. All of the twenty four members will be its Founder Members.

The members who met on January 14th decided to formally establish a Colombo Chapter, similar to the Melbourne Chapter, to be inaugurated in May 2007. As interim office bearers, Somasiri Devendra, Daya Wickramatunga and Mike Udabage were unanimously elected President, Secretary and Treasurer respectively. They were entrusted with the task of drafting a Constitution and providing a means of paying subscriptions locally. The Chapter will open a bank account soon, enabling the Sri Lankan resident members' payment in the Rupee equivalent of the current membership fees which is A\$ 30.00. A Committee comprising Lalith Ambani, Brian Elias, Dr Brendon Gooneratne, Prof Yasmine Gooneratne, Dr Ravi Pereira and Mohan Rajasingham was elected to formulate guidelines and procedures for selection of new members, and to act as the Membership Sub Committee thereafter. All CSA members are invited to propose the names of suitable Sri Lankan residents to join the CSA and "*The Ceylankan*" reading community, for consideration by the Membership Committee.

Attendance at the inaugural meeting of the Colombo Chapter in May will be by invitation.

Please send your recommendations to mike_udabage@itechne.com

Book Review



The Sweet & Simple Kind – by Yasmine Gooneratne ,648 pp., Rs. 1,000. Perera-Hussein Publishing House 80A Dharmapala Mawatha, Colombo 7.

When it comes to being a prose-singer (no, not "praise-singer" whom Mary Renault told of), Yasmine Gooneratne excels. She has this marvellous way of laying out a story, capturing the total essence of her characters. Talk of finesse – Yasmine simply exudes it. What is more, none of her work can ever be like the curate's egg, 'good in parts'. Quality throbs throughout, be it in her humour, her passion, her plot, theme and presentation.

The Sweet and Simple Kind also tells us that Yasmine has stepped ahead of her *A Change of Skies* and *The Pleasures of Conquest*. This book is a small eternity in itself and, if its unfolding leaves one in an arm-lock of admiration, it also brings this island (that blows spicily enough through its pages) into a fine-spun fabric of society, love, politics and family peccadilloes that waft the sense of inner turmoil and what our 'smart set' really is – reactively and proactively.

Set in the Ceylon of the 1950s and 60s, the story takes in the British and the quite embarrassing death of Lady Alexandra Millbanke, who had apparently resented her husband, the Governor's, infatuation with Brenda van Buren. Yasmine keeps her opening chapters most realistic. The Sinhalese under-gardener, Alwis Appu, had nearly tripped over the body but, as Yasmine points out, *he had been well-trained in the proper British way of doing things and he did not, therefore, panic and run about shouting for help as an ordinary native might have done.* [By Jove! Stiff upper lip and all!]

Again, as Yasmine says, the British ADC does not tell the Governor's other (native) ADC, Rowland Wijesinha. Oh no. *Rowland Wijesinha was a thoroughly decent chap*, in Nigel Marsh's, the British ADC's estimation – *Cambridge and all that ... but all things considered, Wijesinha was a native after all ... Marsh was not certain that a native could be relied upon to be discreet.* With these small observations, Yasmine draws the line – a very fine red, white and blue line – between the colonial masters and the natives. It does not do to have Lady Alexandra's ayah coming upon the scene of her dead mistress. *Aiyo, what has happened to Madam?* No, the Governor knew what the outcome would be. *Oh damn and blast ... the story will be all around town in half an hour. Tell the woman to stop her bloody yowling.*

Ah, yes, the good old Sri Lankan grapevine, so true of today as well. The mills grind at express speed and nothing can ever be held private or sacred. The Governor Sir Andrew retires under a cloud. *The rumours*, says Yasmine, *were of a particularly damaging kind ... Alwis Appu and ADC Rowland Wijesinha ... were natives, after all, and would not have been able to resist the temptation to gossip.* One could well say with Conrad Felsinger, "It was the Babbler's Nest."

I have never known Yasmine to gloss over detail, especially when tracing the Wijesinha family lines to bring in her ‘clinging vine’ (Latha) and her ‘taunting wave’ (Tsunami). Tsunami is ADC Rowland Wijesinha’s daughter, and Latha – the clinging ‘parasite’ as Tsunami identifies her – belongs to the same clan – very Westernized Anglicans, and keeping close to the centres of colonial power. As Yasmine records: *By the 1940s (the Wijesinhas) had come to regard their continued access to privilege as something they had inherited, rather than earned.* We learn that Tsunami is extensively privileged and superior, occupying a higher branch in the family tree than Latha, who is some branches below.

To readers who wish to enjoy a quick read, this is not the book for them, but I can see how deftly Yasmine has met such a contingency. In superb style, every chapter becomes a story in itself. Don’t get the impression that this weighty work can clobber you. I must tell you that to produce this review, I had to take the book piece by piece – and you know something? When I had finished Chapter One, I hungered for more. That, readers, is the Yasmine Gooneratne magic.

What we have are two characters, one so sure of herself that she says what she thinks to the limits of rudeness, bluntness, and with a poise that belies her youth. The other is a seeker, a romantic, a small ocean of calm. Unlike poles attract – Tsunami and Latha. Let me give you an excerpt:

“Latha means ‘a clinging vine ...’ “

“Is your name a Japanese name like mine?” Tsunami had asked Latha.

Soma Wijesinha had chipped in ... “Latha is not a Japanese name, it is a true Sinhala name ... We don’t go in for meaningless foreign names ... A girl who is named Latha will grow up to be like a clinging vine. Not just because she will be graceful and lovely, but because she will be a perfect wife. She will cling to her husband as a creeper clings to a tree ...”

“I understand, Auntie. A kind of parasite,” Tsunami said, and calmly changed the subject.

Yes, as Yasmine reminds, *names are fateful things*. Latha discovers the true meaning of the word “Tsunami”. It is, to her, a privilege. Her cousin could be a victim of catastrophe or a creator of it, and it is her duty, be it in good fortune or ill, to be loyal and stand by Tsunami.

As the story progresses, we find the two girls at loggerheads over a lot of things, yet inseparable. To Latha, it is always what her Amma says that is correct. For example:

“Amma says it is better for your health to bow down to the ground before people than to kiss them ... She says it is more hygienic, and it’s what Sinhalese people like us always do ...”

“Well, we don’t bow down to anyone,” Tsunami said.

So many attitudes are aired that make this book most delightful reading. Even servants and their mistresses are treated to a bollocking by the gossip mill. Beds for ser-

vants? Not mats? ... Giving servants the same seer fish that is served at the table! ... Servants wearing sandals in the house! Where was the true Sinhalese servant with her smoke-stained jacket, grimy cloth, barefooted, eating what was a servant’s meal and stretching out on a *padura* (mat) at night, easing her groaning limbs? Long ago, a coconut planter in the south defended the way he treated his servants by telling me:

“Tis the same of baser natures,
Treat them kindly, they rebel;
But treat them rough like nutmeg graters
And the brutes will serve you well.

The characters flow in and out of the story, each bringing their own influences and effects on the girls, and Latha especially. There is Mr Goldman of Rothschild Estate, the blind piano tuner Ephraums (how well I remember him in my own boyhood!) and the many small rebellions that burst out of Tsunami as she grows older, more like the big wave she would become. I will not allow myself the total satisfaction of telling it all. You must savour this book yourself – and find that some things stick out like the Alleghenies on a clear blue day.

Tsunami to her Sinhala kavi teacher: *Why do I have to waste my time studying Sinhala kavi, Miss? Sinhala is a dead language. It’s deader than Latin, and it isn’t half so interesting.*

The title of the book is woven in with the compliments showered on Latha. Her aunts chorus: *So sweet! So innocent! [Latha] is such a sweet, simple girl.* To Latha, to be called ‘simple’ is high praise indeed. She basks in the virtues of silence, sweetness and simplicity.

Soma, Latha’s mother, talking of Latha: *Just look at this girl, always bent over a book! If you go on like this, child, you’ll grow up chicken-chested!*

Tragedies come in full measure. Tsunami’s mother elopes with Mr Goldman. Her father weathers the scandal, even the scurrilous *bailas* directed at him; he then enters national politics, having married again.

Mr Benjamin Ferdinands of the Dutch Burgher Union: *This country is going to the dogs ... In a land where the English language has no place, there can be no place for me.*

This is not just a story, for artfully enough, it brings into focus all the incredulities, inanities, incapacities, insensibilities, incompetence, incorrigibilities, ineligibilities, inequalities, inflexibilities and iniquities of the island’s political make-up. Having said so much, I will leave the rest of the book to the reader. Tsunami marries – a *home-and-home match*, as Latha’s father says. Latha cannot make her mother’s dream of a double wedding come true – and so, enough said. You have in your hands a heaping portion of a newly-independent land – from campus politics to the more infernal kind of politics that besets us to this day.

Oh, a final word. Yasmine gives us such beautiful and varied extracts from a vast spectrum of writers and entertainers, be it famous literature or plain doggerel. Suddenly you find lines from "The Foggy, Foggy Dew", or old songs from "Doing the Lambeth Walk" to "Oh, no, John, no John, no" and "The Raggie-Taggle Gipsies". There are limericks, "The Minstrel Boy", "The Spider and the Fly", Frank Sinatra, as well as *Rosa malai, pichcha malai, yanawa vathure*. Yasmine has opened for us the floodgates of memory, and breached the bunds of our Marvil Arus that we may celebrate what we, as islanders, are.

This is one book that has made me keep flipping back to keep re-reading the pages over and over again. Will our prose-singer take a bow please, although I am sure the encores will go on and on. My compliments to the Perera-Hussein Publishing House for having undertaken to produce a masterly work of sheer literary art.

Carl Muller

This review appeared in The Island, Saturday 18 November 2006, page 3.

Was His Majesty Sri Wikrama Rajasingha responsible?

*by Jeanne Jayasinghe
In the series Myths & Legends*

After the British colonised Lanka, place names were anglicised to suit the English pronunciation. Some of these place names sometimes retained the original flavour and in the post-colonial era it was easy to trace the resemblance. For example, Kegalla had become Kegalle, Galla was turned into Galle and Kurunegala was called Kerniegalle. One name however, had absolutely no resemblance to the Sinhala place name. This was Kandy, which in Sinhala was called Mahanuvara. Senkadagala is another name that is given to Kandy by the locals.

While studying the History of Lanka we learned that the Kingdom of Kandy was known as Kande uda rata (loosely translated to city on a hill) also abbreviated to Kande. It was the word Kande that had been anglicised to Kandy by the British.

There is a delightful little legend about Kande Uda Rata. It is with regard to the location of some of the more important historical sites in Kandy.

Once an ascetic named Senaka (from whom the

name Senkadagala was derived) was going in search of a suitable retreat for meditation. As he was approaching the summit of the hill, he saw a sight that amazed him. A hare was being chased by a fox. The hare ran for dear life and seemed to be heading towards a particular place. As the hare passed a certain spot, he suddenly stopped and turned. It was as if there was an invisible barrier that prevented the fox from going in for the kill. From the safe spot the hare suddenly rushed at the fox and, wonder of wonders, the fox turned tail and ran away. The hare was saved without any harm befalling the fox either. The ascetic also saw the same thing happen with a rat being chased by a snake. Senaka decided that this place was suitable for his retreat. That night, Senaka dreamt that a Deva (deity) visited him. The Deva told him to place stones as markers in certain places that the Deva would point out to him. He was told that one day some of these sites would become sacred and holy while others would become palaces for kings. The next morning Senaka placed stones as markers on the sites that had been pointed out by the Deva. These stones marked the sites where the Temple of the Sacred Tooth Relic, the Temple of the God Natha and the Palace of the King's of Kandy (now the Kandy Museum) are now located.

This legend has a sequel which occurred during the reign of the last King of Kande Uda Rata, Sri Wickrama Rajasingha.

The King had grand plans to turn Mahanuvara into a showpiece. As a first step he decided on turning a lush paddy field in the centre of the town into a lake. He commanded the people to provide the labour to build the lake as a part of their Raja Kariya. Raja Kariya (compulsory service for the crown) was only used by Kings in the construction of infrastructure that would be of economic value to the people and not for things of beauty. So the people grumbled that they were being forced to turn a paddy field that had a good yield of paddy into a useless lake, but since this was the King's command, they carried out his wishes. Thus the Kandy Lake we know today was created.

Then the King moved into the second phase of his grand plan. He wanted to move the Dalada Maligawa (Temple of the Tooth) with the Dalada Wahanse (Tooth relic of Buddha) up into the mountains where it would look down from atop on the lake and on the town. All the Devala's including Natha Devas temple would also be

moved to the top of the hill. He would then break down the Dalada Maligawa and the other buildings and move his palace to the cleared site and with pleasure gardens that surrounded the palace. Thus the King's palace would then command a beautiful view of the lake and of the Dalada Maligawa across on the top of the hill.

Before he could make this plan a reality, he had to consult his ministers, who had a powerful say in these matters. When the Adigars (chieftains) were apprised of his plans, they were stunned and affronted. They did not respect the king much because of his dubious origins. He was believed to be a love child of Adigar Pilimatalawwe and a Noble Nayakkar Lady. He was also suspected of being implicated in the death of the previous king, who had been beloved of the people. The Adigars set about dissuading the King from carrying out his plans. He, however, would not listen to them. So they came up with, what they thought was a cunning plan. They managed to convince him to consult an astrologer about making these changes. The king agreed to this. Relieved, the Adigars were now sure they could checkmate the king by persuading the Royal Astrologer to give an adverse finding on these proposed changes.

In the meantime, the king had made a discovery of his own. In a remote temple there was a pious monk who had befriended a poor young man. This young man had been trained in astrology. The king while on a visit to this temple met the young man who was an astrologer and was much impressed by the "*gunithaya's*" (acolyte astrologer) capabilities. The chief monk too extolled the virtues of the "*gunithaya*" and said he had a promising career.

When the Adigars requested the King to consult an astrologer, he sent a message to the "*gunithaya*" commanding him to present himself at the next council meeting. In the presence of all the Adigars the king commanded the unknown astrologer to make his predictions. The astrologer asked for time to do his calculations and promised to bring the council his findings in a week.

The Adigars were furious that the King had circumvented their well-laid plan. While they could have coerced the Royal Astrologer, they knew this young man would carry out the King's bidding, as he would be hoping for future Royal Patronage. Angry and frustrated they met again in council a week later, when the astrologer presented himself with his findings.

The astrologer made obeisance and approached the king on all fours. Then kneeling on the ground before the king he said " May you be a Buddha for Five Thousand years Oh Great King, I have made my findings." The king ordered him to make them known to the assembled company of Adigars and leaders. The "*gunithaya*" then said, "My Lord, the Temple of the Sacred Tooth Relic, the Dalada Maligawa should not be moved from its present site. This is the most auspicious location for it. Your palace should remain where it is, hidden behind the Maligawa. The other temples and devalas should also remain where they now stand, as these are the best sites for them."

The king then demanded to know what would happen if the proposed changes were carried out and the "*gunithaya*" answered: " Destruction of the nation Oh Lord, calamities and despair."

The king was silent and the Adigars amazed that this humble man could throw away an opportunity of a lifetime to safeguard the nation. The King made no further changes beyond his previous action of converting a good paddy field into an ornamental lake.

Considering the troubles besetting our island home, could the "*gunithaya's*" predictions have come true in a small measure by the King's previous actions?

...bet you didn't know this!

In the heyday of sailing ships, all war ships and many freighters carried iron cannons. Those cannons fired round iron balls. It was necessary to keep a good supply near the cannon. However, how to prevent them from rolling about the deck? The best storage method devised was a square-based pyramid with one ball on top, resting on four resting on nine, which rested on sixteen. Thus, a supply of 30 cannon balls could be stacked in a small area right next to the cannon. There was only one problem...how to prevent the bottom layer from sliding or rolling from under the others. The solution was a metal plate called a "Monkey" with 16 round indentations.

However, if this plate were made of iron, the iron balls would quickly rust into it. The solution to the rusting problem was to make "Brass Monkeys." Few landlubbers realise that brass contracts much more and much faster than iron when chilled. Consequently, when the temperature dropped too far, the brass indentations would shrink so much that the iron cannonballs would come right off the monkey. Thus, it was quite literally, "Cold enough to freeze the balls off a brass monkey." (All this time, you thought that was an improper expression, didn't you?)

President's Report 2006

We have had another successful year in that our members tell us they were happy with our presentations, especially that by Mr. Merrill Fernando of Dilmah Tea being noteworthy, when we had about 125 attendees, the largest ever recorded. Your committee has worked hard throughout and the Secretary and Treasurer in particular deserve special mention, as does Hugh Karunanayake for the quarterly task of mailing "The Ceylankan", with help from his wife, Tulsi. We continue to be commended on the quality of that journal which is in no small measure due to the untiring efforts of the Editor, Sumane Iyer. I must also thank the many ladies whose "bring a plate" contributions help to make our meetings so enjoyable and the many others who, along with these ladies, assist with setting up and clearing away at those gatherings. It is with regret that I record the resignation due to ill health of "Vama" Vamadevan, from the committee. "Vama" was founding Treasurer of the Society, committee member and a regular contributor to the Journal. He and his wife Charmaine, attended most meetings and who can forget her piano playing for the sing-along after our AGM dinners.

Our Melbourne chapter continues to flourish under the guidance of Dr Srilal Fernando and his indefatigable core group. News just to hand indicates the formation of a Sri Lankan chapter is under active investigation with the help of our committee member Mike Udabage, who is presently in Colombo.

We do really need some new and much younger blood on the committee - the present incumbents being led into dotage by your President. Please do tell us if you would like to serve on the committee -this does not need to be a realm exclusive to males. Our numbers are growing slowly and now total about 325. Sadly, however, we also have slow attrition due to subscriptions not being renewed in time and in November '06, approximately a third of our membership was technically in arrears with 2006 subscriptions still overdue. This makes for unending toil on the part of Treasurer Nada and it will help greatly if subscriptions were paid up in the first two months of each new calendar year. A scheme of gift subscriptions for *The Ceylankan*, exists and we urge you to use it.

Next year (2007) sees our tenth year of existence and some commemoration is planned with details to be advised shortly. In conclusion, Srin and I wish you all A Happy and Prosperous 2007.

Synopsis of Meeting

Melbourne 26th November 2006

The Chairman Dr. Srilal Fernando introduced the speaker, Capt. Elmo Jayawardena, Instructor Captain with Singapore Airlines, Author of *Sam's Story* and *The Last Kingdom of Sinhalay*, Winner of Everyday Day Heroes award from Readers Digest for humanitarian work.

The topic for the day was "From *Sam's Story* to a Bigger



Story: AFLAC and Tsunami Relief". Mr Jayawardena informally commenced the talk by introducing his son Mevan, the chief co-ordinator for AFLAC (Association For Lighting A Candle).

Mr. Jayawardena briefly described " Samiege Kathawa" or *Sam's Story*, a docu-drama with subtitles in English. The video is a reflection of how poverty, ethnic war and corruption confront Sri Lanka. *Sam's Story* is a true story, where Sammy comes to the author's house looking for work. He is a very simple man who is unable to form concepts and yet he knew that he had to despise a Tamil person. Some clips from *Sam's Story*, the docu-drama produced by Mr. Jayawardena were shown during the talk.

Mevan spent 9 months working as a volunteer co-ordinating all AFLAC projects on tsunami relief. Within one week after tsunami the organization collected Rs.5 million and set to work on projects. In the ensuing months AFLAC collected nearly Rs.100 million. Support from the corporate sector was very encouraging. As of date, AFLAC has disbursed over Rs.140 million on projects whilst administrative costs amounted to small 2.6%. Mevan recounted some disaster statistics: 31,000 deaths, 200,000 lost jobs, 140,000 houses destroyed and 60% of the fishing boats ruined. The tsunami aggravated the lot of the poor. NGOs like Red Cross, World Vision and Oxfam dominated the humanitarian work doing an excellent job whilst AFLAC did as much as their smaller organisation could muster. Because of low overheads and operating costs they were able deliver more of the donor monies to direct benefit of the needy.

Some examples of successful projects:

- Housing at Kalamulla initiated 1st January 2005, cost Rs 460,000 per house. Sponsored by J P Morgan with Good Sheppard Congregation donating the land.
- "Siribopura", Hambantota 20 houses, distributed equitably among ethnic groups.
- Panadura, 30 houses with electricity and running water, the best project so far was sponsored by the corporate sector.
- School in Matara and pre-schools in Hambantota
- Financial support of Rs 2,000 per child to 200 orphaned /displaced children
- Bicycles and boats for fishermen. A skilled man who lost his job even got a welding machine supplied. "Swimming for Safety" campaign in the AFLAC built pool opened on 29th December 2005. Target is to train 1000 students from less affluent families to swim. Mevan, illustrated his talk with many pictures taken on various projects. He encouraged guests to visit their web site www.aflacinternational.com for more information on humanitarian work by AFLAC.
- Copies of the docu-drama *Sam's Story* were available for purchase at the meeting.

Dilhani Kumbukkage

A CORDIAL WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS



Neville Jayaweera

Kent, UK

Subia & Valli Muthiah

Chennai, India

Herschel Stave

Ontario, Canada

Thirumugam & Malini Arumugam

Castle Hill NSW

Drs Bandula & Eulali Herat

Baulkham Hills, NSW

Presanji Jayawickrema & Nargis Umagiliya

Marsfield, NSW

Kumarasingham & Vimala Gunasingham

Kellyville, NSW

Krishna & Maithili Sellathurai

Strathfield, NSW

Lalin & Carmen Fernando

Concord, NSW

Neville Turner

Warburton, VIC

..who have joined since publication of Journal # 36

... and

Charita Ratwatte

Colombo 5, Sri Lanka

who joined in September 2005, but due to a glitch in the communication pipeline was not welcomed in these columns. We apologise!

REMINDER MEMBERSHIP DUES

2007 subscriptions are now due. Kindly draw your cheque/MO in favour of the Ceylon Society of Australia and mail to Srikantha Nadarajah 50A -The Esplanade - Thornleigh NSW 2120. Please note subscriptions are for a calendar year.

Annual subscriptions are:

All Members	AU\$ 30.00
Australian Pensioners	AU\$ 20.00

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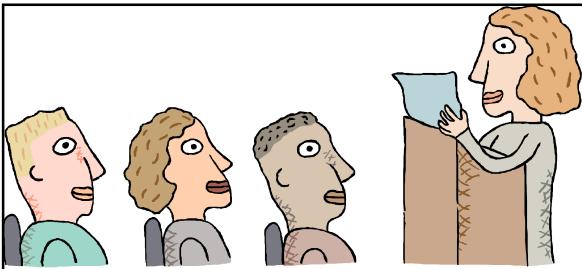
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NEXT SYDNEY MEETING

Sunday 15 April 2007 @ 6.30 p.m

Mr S. Muthiah

former Editor of the Sunday Times , and of the Times of Ceylon Annual
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

For information call:

Tony: 9674 7515

Doug: 9894 7449

NEXT MELBOURNE MEETING

Sunday 25th February @ 5:30 p.m

Gary Watson

Director—Prestige Philately
On

Some Postal History items of Ceylon

and

Valentine Perera

On his recent book

Mahaweli Meadows

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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50A The Esplanade Thornleigh NSW 2120

Ph: 02 9980 1701

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: Sriji.p@bigpond.com

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P & H within Australia - \$ 3.00 - Asia/Pacific
\$ 6.50 & rest of the world \$ 9.00 per package up to 5 issues. Please contact Tony as above.

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

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

The Editorial Committee of THE CEYLANKAN, at its discretion, now accepts advertisements for products and services suitable for our members. Those related to genealogy, antiquarian and contemporary books, maps, art, memorabilia, and other collectibles are welcome. For further details and rates please contact Publications Officer Mike Udabage at Int + 61 2 9978 7728, E-mail: mike_udabage@itechne.com

Candid pics from the AGM Dinner & "Singalong" night Sunday 26th November 2006 in Sydney

