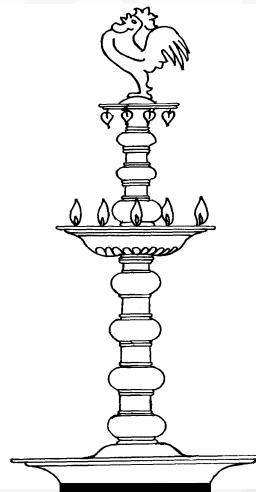


# THE CEYLANKAN



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## EDITORIAL



Instead of an Editorial note from me in this final issue for the year, I would like to present a very interesting Letter to Editor by one of our readers. Tony Peries our former President has these observations on two articles we published in the last issue.

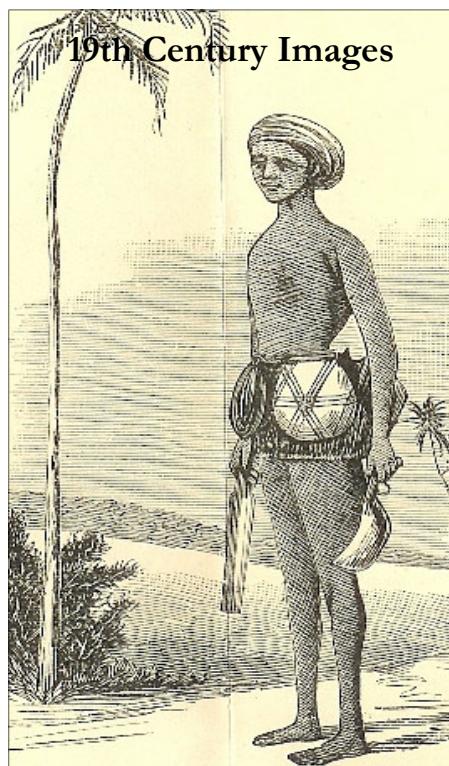
Tissa Devendra's article (Ceylankan # 43, p 8) has led me to wonder if anyone else recalls a *thambi karaththey* (cart) which sold groceries in the Colombo 5 & 6 areas pre 1940 but then vanished possibly because of rationing? It re-appeared post war and was a highly distinctive vehicle as it had a yellow hood with some red touches. Two men did the vending of flour, sugar, a few canned goods and sweets. A popular legend had it that the vendors frantically searched for "toe jam" on being asked for it! The nearest *kaddai* (grocery shop) to my parent's home was in Dickmans Road. All purchases were

wrapped in old newspaper. Heavier ones would be done in multiple sheets. If one was lucky, the papers would include cartoon pages from US Sunday papers and the "Blondie" cartoon which is still seen around the world was first seen by me in this way.

Michael Roberts' remarks (p 28) on "thuppahis" etc struck a chord as I had never heard the expression "polkudu suddha" used of mixed race people or Burghers. In fact I only ever heard my father use the words which he maintained, described lower class British such as engine drivers or police sergeants. I apologise if my words cause any hurt but the British themselves in the colonies maintained a strict "caste system" so much so, the Royal Colombo Golf and the Yacht clubs did not admit non executive Brits and indeed barred shop employees. My father said the term was coined by the Brits themselves to describe those of their race who habitually ate local food but used the coconut from which the milk had been squeezed out, to make sambol instead of using fresh gratings.

Well, we are at the end of another eventful year in which we saw the Colombo Chapter take off to a grand start and another Australian Chapter ready to take off in the New Year. Thank you all for the support the Editorial team has received throughout the year, particularly to those contributors who make this Journal a unique publication.

We wish you a contented festive season and a Happy New Year - 2009.



**Sinhalese Toddy Drawer**

## Bulath

by Jeanne Jayasinghe



**ulath ( Betel leaf)** has always been held in high esteem in Sri Lanka, so much so that no important event would take place without the *bulath atha* or a sheaf of betel.

A relative of the pepper family, the *bulath* vine was once a common sight in every garden where the vine snaked up rows of stakes, neatly planted in a square, onto the trellis of coir rope – the *bulath kottuwa*. It was an ubiquitous presence in village life that even entered nursery rhymes...

*Dorakada wele bulath bulath*

*Batapandure puwak puwak...*

The leaves of the Betel vine are heart shaped with the leaf ending in a point and are bright green in colour in contrast to the pepper leaf, which is dark green. A sheaf of betel consists of forty of these leaves.

Legend says that *bulath* was a gift to man from the Naga world – Nagas were celestial beings who could assume the shape of a cobra when they visited this world. The Naga king who brought the leaf, held it in its mouth by the tip and stem, which is why, before the betel leaf is chewed, the tip and stem ends are nipped off – to avoid swallowing any of the residual poison that may still linger.

As children we have heard the Jataka tale of the pious hare whose *seela* (piety) was tested by God Sakra who came in the guise of a Yaksha. The Yaksha demanded to be fed and following the meal he wanted the hare to teach him the Dhamma – however he would only eat flesh. So the poor hare was now in a quandary – not wishing to kill others, the only flesh he could think of was his own, but if he killed himself, he could not teach the Dhamma after the meal. After some thought, the hare asked the Yaksha to build a tall mound with earth and to build a fire at the bottom of it. Climbing on to the mound the hare jumped off and began to teach the Dhamma on the way down. God Sakra impressed by the hare, caught him before he fell into the fire and taking a golden brush drew the likeness of the hare on the surface of the moon – which can be seen to this day. Having drawn the picture, he dropped the brush, which then fell straight down into the Naga world and into the mouth of the Naga King Muchalinda –

who accidentally swallowed it. The brush injured his throat and the Naga king died of the injury. When the Naga King's body was cremated, leaves sprouted from his head, the body became the stem of the vine and his feet the roots. *Bulath* is also known as *Nagavalli* because of this.

The Vedas too mention *bulath* or as is called in Hindi – *paan* and is testimony to the ancient origins of the custom of chewing betel. Chewing *bulath* was so entrenched in the days of yore that every household had a raft of implements associated with it. No home was without the *heppuwa*, a receptacle made of brass with intricate work on it. This was used to offer the betel to visitors on formal occasions. When chewing the leaf, a lick of lime or *chunam* was spread on the leaf. The *chunam* or lime was kept in a special receptacle known as the *killotte*. Another important ingredient in the chew was the slice of *puvak* (areca nut) also called Betel nut. The cleaned and husked *puvak* was sliced using a *giray* – an instrument like a nutcracker that could slice – also made of brass and in some cases made in the shape of a lizard with the mouth being the cutting tool. There was also a small mortar and pestle in which to pound the chew to make it easier to chew – though this was not absolutely essential. While the less affluent households had simpler tools – like a *vattiya* ( a woven basket) to arrange the leaves and the *chunam* stored in a pouch – no household lacked the tools required to store and prepare a chew of betel properly. It is not evident when the strip of tobacco leaf was added to the chew of betel but was undoubtedly post European colonisation.

There are also variants; the *sipiri bulath vita* – the *sara vita* – which have additional material such as pieces of desiccated coconut in variegated colours and spices like cardamom and cloves added to it. This is the chew that is normally sold at carnivals and fun fares by a man dressed in multicoloured attire.

The betel leaf has medicinal properties. The



Betel ( *Piper Betle*, f, *Piperaceae*) which includes pepper and kava. Mild stimulant and has medicinal properties. Digestive, expectorant, antibacterial and carminative.

Courtesy—Isobel Shepard  
[www.herbsarespecial.com](http://www.herbsarespecial.com)

practice of chewing *bulath* was based on sound health principles – especially oral health. Chewing betel helps cure bad breath, prevents plaque formation on the teeth and keeps gums healthy. Betel also helps sharpen the appetite and aids in digestion. Perhaps because of this, following a *dane*, ( alms) monks are offered *debeth* as the chew of betel is also called. Ayurvedic practitioners use the juice of the betel leaf to dissolve their medicines for stomach ailments and worm infestations when administering these to patients.

The outcry against betel chewing was given a boost as a result of oral cancers being said to be on the increase in Sri Lanka. The reason for oral cancer was not the chewing of the betel itself, but the practice of retaining it for long periods in the mouth. The culprits in this case were not the betel chew itself but the tobacco leaf and the extra *chunam* that was added to the chew.

Robert Knox in his book speaks about the practice of chewing betel in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century in Sri Lanka. “But above all things Betel leaves they are most fond of, and greatly delight in: when they are going to Bed, they first fill their mouths with it, and keep it there until they wake, and then rise and spit it out, and take in more. So that their mouths are no longer clear of it, than they are eating their Victuals.” Knox, however, does not mention any cases of oral cankers among these folks. Perhaps because of the way they prepared their chew: “But to describe the particular manner of their eating these Leaves. They carry about with them a small Box filled with wet Lime; and as often as they are minded to eat Betel, they take some of this Lime, as much as they judge convenient, and spread it thin upon their leaf: and they take some slices of the Betelnut, and wrap them up in the leaf, and so they eat it, rubbing their Teeth therewith ever and anon to make them black...” “But whensoever they eat of the Betel-leaf, the Lime and the Nut always accompany it”. No mention of adding tobacco to the chew which is a more recent event. Indeed, the advice given by the medical practitioners in ancient times has been to use *chunam* sparingly – not too much and not too little but just enough.

Knox too got into the habit while he was a prisoner in Kandy and mentions that when he finally escaped from the Island the only thing he missed was his chew of betel.

Enough of this. Let us look at how else *bulath* formed a part of our customs. Ample

stocks of betel and rice was also a measure of one’s prosperity as the following lines show:

*Naga lovin gena ava bulath vita  
Thama rate parathi  
Apa Sinhala gedera dore  
Batha bulathin nithara piray.*

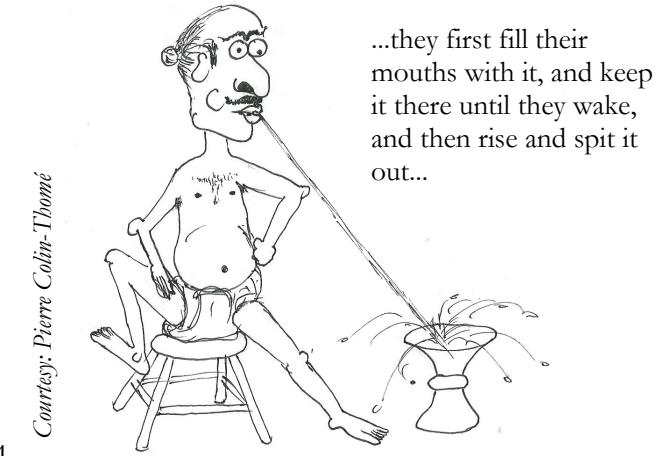
(The betel leaf brought from the Naga world, still pervades our land. Our households are never short of *bulath* and rice. - translation by Ed)

A child who is starting school for the first time would take a sheaf of Betel which he or she offered to the teacher before going down on their knees and worshipping the person who was to provide them with knowledge henceforth. A very good practice I think – to show this respect to the teacher. A person who does this will never think of lifting a hand against the teacher. Today, just like this custom, respect for one’s teachers does not exist.

During Sinhala *Aluth Avurudda*, the New Year celebrated in April, the younger members of the family offer elders a sheaf of betel. The elders would then give a gift of money wrapped in a betel leaf. The sheaf of betel was an essential item when visiting ones family at this time.

As a young child I used to love to listen to the conversations of my elders and sometimes would join in with my two cents worth. On such occasions my mother would bluntly say: “We didn’t offer you *bulath*” or “ Who gave you *bulath*? ” and I would retire abashed. To offer *bulath* meant to invite someone to participate in the event.

Invitations to weddings were not pretty printed cards sent out impersonally by post. Instead, the parents of the bride or groom would visit the elder relatives in the family to issue invitations to the wedding in person. At each house, they would ask for the *heppura* and the sheaf of betel



they brought with them would be arranged on it and offered to each person. Of course the extended family meant most of the relatives lived close to each other and it was not an onerous task to issue invitations to a wedding in this manner.

*Bulath* was also an important item at the wedding itself. The celebrant – *Shilpadipathi* – would hand a few leaves of betel with a silver coin placed on it to the bride and groom standing on the *poruwa* – a special highly decorated dais on which the couple stood. The couple would hold it together and drop it at their feet. They do this seven times. This is done to thank the seven generations of ancestors and to invoke their blessing on the couple without whom they would not be standing on the *poruwa* that day. Remembering ancestors on the wedding day, not only shows that marriage was considered an important institution in our culture, but also that this was a union of two families – not just the two people who were getting married. The couple then went on to offer *bulath* to their elders: their parents, grand parents, uncles, aunts and older siblings and cousins – all of whom bestowed their blessings on the bridal couple. The actual tying of the knot – tying the two little fingers with the golden thread and pouring over the water – took place only after this.

If you needed to have your horoscope read – you would offer the astrologer a sheaf of betel with his fee inside it. The sheaf of betel was normally offered with the tip end of the leaf pointing towards the receiver. It was considered rude to offer the sheaf with the stem end of the leaf foremost. However, when visiting the astrologer when a daughter has attained puberty (which is an important milestone in her life) the sheaf of betel is offered with the stem foremost. That is a way of indicating the specific event for which an auspicious time is required.

Apart from its cultural importance, *bulath* is also extensively used in ayurvedic medicines. It is said to be a decongestant and cures coughs. The leaf is steeped in hot water and the resulting liquid is ingested to bring down fevers.

Chewing betel is still prevalent in India, even among the elite. India and Pakistan used to import betel leaves from Sri Lanka. In the 1970s hordes of young people travelled overland to Europe – using the famous hippy trail used by the flower children who came to India in search of Yogis. That was when exchange restrictions were in place and you could only have something like £3 if you were travelling overseas. In

order to finance their journey, these enterprising young people had worked out an ingenious system. As, many of the countries they had to travel through did not have embassies in Sri Lanka they had to go to India to obtain visas. They would fly from Colombo to Madras with their baggage filled to the brim with – coconut oil and betel leaves. These they would sell in India at a good profit. They could now travel light – with just a few clothes and use the proceeds to finance their onward journey through India across the Khyber Pass into Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Turkey and so through to Germany where they generally ended up.

Of course as Sri Lankans became more ‘civilised’ – the practice of chewing betel has been abandoned and those who still enjoy a chew are looked upon more as eccentrics than normal people.

Perhaps in the interest of good oral health, the custom should be revived? It would certainly be a plus if visits to the dentists could be reduced.



Traditional bulath *heppuwa*, an ornate brass server. In the picture are: the leaves, areca nuts, ( husked ones bottom right hand) tobacco, *chunam* and cardamoms. The device - top right hand, is the *giray*, a nutcracker like implement to slice the nuts.

Picture credit :  
[www.flickr.com/photos/krishan\\_kumar](http://www.flickr.com/photos/krishan_kumar)

## Tea Tasting Tales

by Tony Peries

# T

### ea-tasting as an occupation

has always intrigued people whose reactions vary from thinking it an easy way to make a living, to the slightly incredulous, or the comment, "You must have a fantastic palate". Having been a tea taster for 21 years from 1952 to 1973, I feel a little de-mystification is desirable.

Prior to World War II, tea traders in Sri Lanka were almost exclusively British, as they dominated commerce anyway and the tea firms like Lipton and Brooke Bond employed no Sri Lankans at the tea-taster/executive level. There were some small local firms like M.S. Heptulahoy & Co. who traded in tea very early (late 19<sup>th</sup> century) though that organization was owned and run by Borahs whose families had been domiciled for generations but were not ethnically Lankans.

By the end of the 40's a few British firms had seen the necessity (post independence) to employ local executives and among the first of those were Errol de Fonseka and Mahinda Wijesekera at Forbes and Walker, and Bartleets respectively, both firms of brokers, and Austin Perera at the export firm English and Scottish Joint Cooperative Wholesale Society.

Tea Tasters fell into three broad categories – buyers like Liptons , brokers, as just mentioned, and sellers like George Steuart & Co, Ltd. or Gordon Frazers, who were really estate agents and employed tea tasters to check the quality of tea produced on the plantations. To be a senior buyer for a big firm was a quite complex task and a taster at George Steuart & Co., as I was, had a much simpler life.

Tea is tasted in a standard sized white china handle-less cup and brewed in a standard pot, which looks like a straight-sided cup, with a lid. The quantity of tea used is also standard, weighed out in special scales with a weight affixed to one pan- it is said that weight was equivalent to the old English silver sixpence. Water for tasting was boiled in large whistling kettles and no more than a certain number of cups were brewed from one kettle as once it went off the full boil the leaf did not brew to its full

potential. An over boiled kettle brewed flat tasting tea, readily discernible by tasters.

A "tea boy" was the weigher and brewer. In Sri Lanka, a tea boy's job was a highly responsible one and the head tea boy in a big firm was almost always an elderly man. Young men on the way to executive rank who learnt their trade in London had to start at the tea boy level, brewing tea for tasting; running around with the enormous kettles and burning their fingers or spilling boiling water on their toes!

Fortunately, social categorisation in Lanka spared us this aspect of training. In the 1950's tea was sold at auctions held on Monday and part of Tuesday in the Chamber of Commerce building in the Fort. Up to about 2750 lots of tea were sold weekly and the major buyers got an ounce sample of every lot from the selling brokers. Even allowing for two or three tastings, an enormous quantity of sample tea was left over from which firms gave their staff a free allowance and the remainder was a "perk" of the head tea boy, who enjoyed a lucrative trade!

Each time an estate made an "invoice" of tea, samples of each grade were sent to the agent: some owners had no agents and sent samples to the broker. Steuarts had, in their heyday, over a hundred estates of which I think about eighty were tea and the firm handled about 12% of the island's tea crop. At Steuarts, we tasted between 60-80 cups on most days but the quantity rose and fell with the seasons. The dry leaf



The tea tasting at the sales room at Forbes & Walkers

*Pic courtesy of D. M. Forrest- A Hundred years of Ceylon Tea. 1867-1967. Chatto & Windus London 1967*

was laid out on sheets of stiff white paper, on a long wooden counter and behind the leaf samples was a tray holding six cups of tea – behind each cup was its pot, with the “infused” leaf held in its upturned lid. We examined the dry leaf first, for size, colour, etc., and checked it for dust or excessive “stalk and fibre”, which originated from coarse green leaf. Next we looked at the infused leaf which ideally had a bright, even, copper colour. Finally, we tasted the tea; a stenographer followed us around and took down a report (on each of the three aspects mentioned above) which was mailed to the estate.

My mentor was an Englishman: George Savage, who had been at Steuarts since before the war. He was an excellent teacher: he was however a very lazy man who had therefore seen some of his juniors promoted to director level, which doubtless contributed to his lugubrious aspect and manner. To taste a tea properly, it is important to get the right sized mouthful, which is not as easy a task as it sounds, so learners are often given a spoon, as I was. A discriminating palate can, I believe, be cultivated but intelligent observation is significant as is a good memory so that one can recall tastes associated with the technical terms like greenness, flavour, pungency and the like. A test for learners was to be given three different teas, each brewed twice so that one was confronted with six cups and asked to “match the pairs”.

Steuart’s had a lot of very good estates and Savage was supposed to ensure they produced tea which was at least on a par with neighbouring properties: prices fetched were of course the best check of this. Because he was so idle, Savage took the line of least resistance and almost never initiated changes in manufacturing till something went wrong. We were supposed to be manufacturing advisors and within my first eighteen months of employment, I spent three months on an upcountry estate, learning some of what “creepers” do but concentrating on the factory, where I passed days and some nights, understudying the tea maker. At the end of three years I was a reasonably competent tea taster and acted as department head while Savage was on overseas leave. The final stage of my training (finishing school, as it were) was some seven or eight months working at a London Tea Brokers.

The London Tea Trade was very much of a closed shop and the brokers particularly sometimes had three generations of one family (the owners’ families) working in one firm. The sale of tea there was beset with practices which were little other than rorts, perpetuated over decades,

such as the use of selling and buying brokers, or sampling allowances of one pound a chest whereas in Colombo it was eight pounds a lot irrespective of the number of clients. The business itself was very leisurely with senior staff mostly starting around 10 a.m. and finishing at 4 p.m. I did not have to work on Fridays and hardly ever after lunch so my work experience was wholly delightful.

Brokers were the intermediary between seller and buyer: their staff went round to sellers’ warehouses, drew samples, distributed them to buyers, printed sale catalogues and valued the teas coming up for sale. The broker called on all the buyers to “spruik” his catalogue and the sellers to check if they had any instructions. Finally, the broker auctioned his catalogue, often at the rate of 5 lots a minute in Colombo, so it was a job for quick minds and cool heads. Junior brokers started by selling small lots and “off grades”, disposed of at separate auction, mostly attended by junior buyers so the entire proceeding was low key.

The buyers, particularly the senior ones, had the hardest job of all. Firstly, they had to taste most of what was due to be sold, decide what they wanted and how much they could pay. The major buyers purchased tea mostly, but not entirely, for their own wholesale and/or retail organisations overseas, from whom they received orders: some big companies had standards which changed regularly as seasonal variations affected offerings at auction. Most businesses purchased some tea for “trade”, hoping to sell at a profit. Quite apart from taste, a buyer also had to keep a sharp eye open for leaf size: in the fifties, most tea was sold in the U.K. in quarter pound packets. These were preformed in a machine, for subsequent automatic filling and if the leaf size varied too much, the pack held less or more than the quarter pound. Also, smaller leaf or dust in the mix gave a stronger brew which the consumer did not necessarily welcome. A company which sold a standard pack had to ensure its contents tasted much the same at all times, for consumers were remarkably acute as well as quick to complain.

The Colombo auction took most of Monday, often ending at 7.p.m. or later, in the 50’s (I can’t recall after) and the first broker selling after 6 p.m. served whisky/beer at their expense to all in the room. Tea for sale was packed in multiples of six chests, being supposedly, the blenders unit. At the auction, buyers were allowed to divide a lot into, two, three, or four, so if buyer “A” yelled out his bid first, several others would ask, “Can I have some?” and the first buyer would say

“halves” or quarters”, naming those he was sharing with and sometimes adding “against you X”. The bidder had to decide who best to share with and who to exclude as the least likely to raise the price. With lots being sold every 10 or 15 seconds, a major buyer who often had two or three others with him (so that they “spelled” each other) had to make split second decisions. In the fifties, there were no faxes or email and overseas phone calls had to be booked in advance: major traders had telex and some had phone calls booked for auction days. Cablegrams were used extensively for notifying purchasers overseas what had been bought for them.

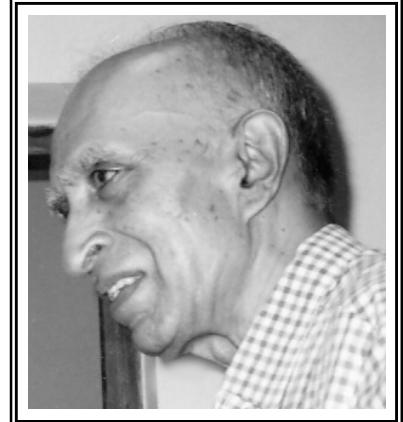
Lest readers think I had an easy life tasting a few teas and idling many hours away, Steuarts sold other products, notably rubber and there was extensive correspondence with estates on a variety of topics covering the quality and handling of their crops. I visited the company warehouses daily and was responsible for their maintenance, supervising the head storekeeper who directly watched over a constant flow of in and out going consignments, and the labour force.

Up to 1956, when the first M.E.P. (S.L.F.P., L.S.S.P. etc coalition) Government assumed office, the Colombo tea world was fairly stress free especially as the largely expatriates executives all had six months “home leave” every three years so firms carried more than a minimum of staff. Many senior expatriates, especially those approaching retirement took fright after ‘56 and left Sri Lanka, their replacements often being locals who then had to contend with frequent labour trouble, especially in the Port of Colombo. This led to logistical nightmares with tea exports, culminating in Trincomalee being opened up as a tea export centre in 1958. Nevertheless, “tea people” had good working relationships in which insurmountable problems were almost unknown – in fact the whole trade had a “clubby” atmosphere and I for one was very handsomely entertained by overseas contacts many of whom had nothing to gain commercially. They could, of course count on generous reciprocity in Sri Lanka.

The lavish hospitality shown to tea folk from all over the world, in 1966, when a Tea Convention was held in Sri Lanka to mark 100 years of tea, is still remembered: one north England buyer dropped dead on arrival at home!

Ω Ω Ω Ω Ω

## A Tribute to an Outstanding Sri Lankan



C.R. Hensman 1923 – 2008

*“For all sorts and conditions of men”*

T

These are words that express, clearly and without fuss, the aims and ideals that inspired the first editorial of **COMMUNITY**, published in April 1954, and the character of its creator, C.R. Hensman, an extraordinary Sri Lankan who passed away in London on 9 July this year after a life dedicated to the social and political uplift of this island through unremitting effort and example. As author, editor, teacher and friend, above all as an individual committed to the transformation of society and the ending of class and/or any other kind of oppression and exploitation, he encouraged many in an emerging generation of Sri Lankan thinkers, writers and activists.

### Charles Richard Jeevaratnam Hensman

was born on 17 March 1923 in Nallur in the north of Sri Lanka (Ceylon as it was then). His mother, Louise, a nurse, was an important influence in his life, as were his cousins in Malaya and Singapore, where he spent much of his boyhood. He returned to Sri Lanka as a young man, and became involved in the socialist movement. Throughout his life, he was to remain a committed Christian, active in Anglican and ecumenical circles in Sri Lanka and the UK. His personal life was lit by a deep sense of spirituality: he was that rare phenomenon, a Christian who appreciated what was best in Buddhism and other philosophies and faiths, and the books he wrote in later life largely focused on theological themes, including *Agenda for the Poor*, *New Beginnings* and *The Remaking of Humanity*.

Following their marriage in 1947, and with the collaboration of his wife Pauline Swan (herself an inspirational and talented teacher who was, like her husband, a graduate of the University of Ceylon and a contemporary of Regi Siriwardena, Basil Mendis,

and the poet Patrick Fernando), Dick Hensman wrote and published the first of many books, *A Better Way to English*, which promoted a more creative approach to the writing, study and teaching of English than had previously been the case. His love of literature overflowed from his teaching into planning and presenting poetry programmes for Radio Ceylon in which he involved those among his students and his wife's who shared that interest. At the same time, his interest in current affairs inspired a second weekly radio programme, "Behind the News", while his liking for film and drama led him to establish the Shakespeare Society, an amateur group that brought together such actors and 'theatre people' as Lucien de Zoysa, Rowan de Costa, Sheila Van Langenberg, Johann Leembruggen, Winston Serasinghe, Neville Weeraratne, Arthur Van Langenberg and Osmund Jayaratne on the local stage. Among the Hensmans' students at St Thomas's College and Bishop's College who attended play-readings of a Little Theatre Group they organised were Arthur Sinnathamby, Kasi Choksy, Sidat Sri Nandalochana, Shelagh Jansen, Yasmine Dias Bandaranaike, Sundararaja ("Chummy") Sinnathamby, Wester Modder, Haig Karunaratne and Mohan Wijesinghe.

Dick Hensman's lively sense of humour and love of life, shared by his wife, made them very attractive to students, to whom their home in Mount Lavinia was always open. It is not surprising that many young people regarded their lessons, and later, their conversations with 'the Hensmans' as high points in their adolescent lives, nor that the personalities of both these outstanding teachers have been recalled with gratitude and celebrated in the writings of students whose careers they pointed in new directions. Supporting themselves and their young children by means of their teaching in two Colombo colleges, Dick and Pauline Hensman created the Community Institute in the early 1950s. This initiative, far ahead of its times and the distinguished fore-runner of both Marga and the International Centre for Ethnic Studies (ICES), promoted study and discussion on the direction of post-independence Ceylon, and published several issues of the journal **COMMUNITY**, predecessor of *The Thatched Patio, Polity*, and many others. To many persons who knew Dick Hensman in Sri Lanka, his founding of **COMMUNITY** and the Community Institute are early and very important achievements because they revealed his vision, not only for Ceylon (as it was then) but also for the world, his values as regards what society should be, and the role that individuals can play in

building society or community on the right foundations. He preached no overt ideological message or political agenda: his integrity as editor and founder was evident in all the issues that the journal produced, and the activities in which the Institute engaged itself and promoted.

'The only people who are not welcome to the pages of **COMMUNITY** are people who have no convictions and people who, by restraining the bodies or minds of men, women and children, seek to deprive or have already deprived them of their right to hold and to share their convictions.'

At this early stage Dick Hensman was the journal's only editor: there was no editorial board. Vol.3 No.1, which came out in April 1958, was probably the last in the first series, as the Hensman family moved to Britain following the anti-Tamil riots of 1958, which had seen their efforts to build a community of shared values in a Mount Lavinia seaside suburb damaged – but not, as it later proved, defeated.

While in Britain, Pauline continued to teach while Dick worked for a while as a producer for the BBC World Service. ("His name was a household word in the London of the 1950s and 1960s," writes Joseph Nathan, editor of the London magazine *Confluence*.) Inspired in his thinking by the Chinese revolution, Dick moved away from literary matters to write *China: Yellow Peril? Red Hope?* (Published by the SCM Press in 1968) and *Sun Yat-sen* (SCM Press 1971). *From Gandhi to Guevara: The Polemics of Revolt* (Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, 1969) is a collection of Third World writings edited and introduced by him, that has been used widely by both scholars and activists. His next book *Rich against Poor: The Reality of Aid* (Allen Lane The Penguin Press, 1971), helped make the case – now widely if not universally accepted – that underdevelopment is not an unfortunate accident of history or the result of innate backwardness in certain cultures or peoples, but rather an active process which impoverished some while enriching others at their expense. He was meticulous in gathering and analysing data, but he wrote for an audience wider than that of academe, expressing in everything that came from his pen his strong belief that food, healthcare and education should be accessible to all, and not only to a privileged few. For a while Dick coordinated a Tricontinental Liberation Institute, but, preferring the independence of being a freelance writer and committed despite discouragement to the hope that mat-

ters could improve in Sri Lanka, he returned with his family a few years later to the island, where he continued to work for a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural society in which Sinhalese, Tamils and smaller minorities, Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, Christians and others could live and work together despite the separatist tendencies of politicians. **COMMUNITY** was re-established and a second series of publications begun.

This second series started with Vol. IV No.1 in 1962. Titled “The Role of the Western-Educated Elite”, it was presented as the first issue of an independent bi-monthly published by The Community Institute, with Dick Hensman as editor, assisted and advised by an editorial board consisting of: Hector Abhayavardhana, Robert de Silva, Pauline Hensman, and Professors K. N. Jayatilleke, Ralph Pieris, E. R. Sarathchandra and A. J. Wilson. Shelagh Goonewardene (then Anghie) acted as editorial assistant. This issue presented an editorial that was titled “Independent and Non-Partisan”, the whole being an edited record of a discussion that had been held at the Institute, one of many seminars and discussions held during this period that brought together some of the country’s leading intellectuals, administrators, public servants and thinkers. No.3 (on “The Public Services and The People”) contained several papers by such people, an edited record of a discussion, an Editorial Introduction and a statement about the Community Institute, its aims and objectives.

The second series of **COMMUNITY** produced eight ground-breaking issues, each valuable in itself. No.5 (“Ceylonese Writing: Some Perspectives”) carried articles on stages in the development of Ceylonese creative writing, on classical poetry, 19th century writing, Martin Wickremasinghe, Gunadasa Amarasekera, and the Ceylon Tamil Novel. No.6. (“Ceylonese Writing: Some Perspectives. Vol.2) presented essays on Achievements and Problems in the Sinhala Drama, Tamil Writing, Ilankeeran, and – for the first time – examples of original writing in English that included two poems by Patrick Fernando. K.S. Sivakumaran, a writer who regards himself ‘basically, as a writer and critic in Thamil’, considers it an honour to have had his views on Ilankeeran edited and published in ‘a journal meant for intellectuals at that time’.

“I cannot forget it,” he writes, “because it enabled me to write fearlessly in English.” The situation in Sri Lanka was worsening, unfortunately, as an increasingly authoritarian government sought to impose its rule, and some of those rebelling against this were also drawn to violent

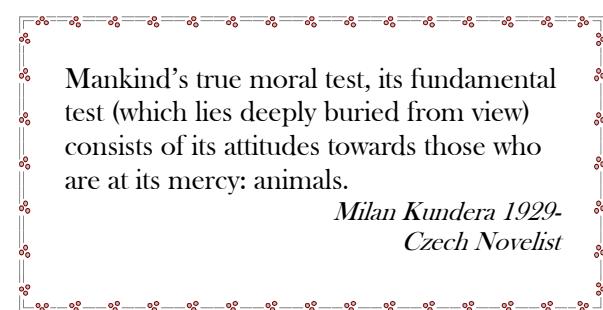
solutions which marginalised ordinary people. After the state-supported ‘riots’ of 1983, Dick Hensman wrote *Sri Lanka: The Holocaust and After* (published in 1984 by Marram Books), under the pseudonym L Piyadasa. An updated version, *Sri Lanka: the Unfinished Quest for Peace*, came out in 1987.

Although he was deeply committed to justice for all, which led him to oppose patriarchy, the marginalisation of children, homophobia and other ideologies and practices which he regarded as life-denying, no account of C.R. Hensman would be complete that omitted notice of his life as a family man. Warm and affectionate by nature, and a generous, hospitable friend, he personally cared for Pauline as she became increasingly frail. His children (Rohini, Jim and Savi) and his grandchildren (Shaku, Murad, Marianne, Chandra and Ravi), their spouses and partners Jairus, Beth, Vijayatara, Ammar, Leena, Paul and Simon, and his great-grandchildren Amlan and Zinedine, were all extremely important to him. He had a deep interest in people, and a firm belief in human capability. Nimal Dissanayake, a neighbour’s son who became like a son to him, and lives in Colombo with his wife and children, will be commemorating him there together with other relatives and friends.

This memorial tribute, based on biographical material provided by his daughters Rohini and Savitri Hensman, draws on the memories of persons who knew C.R. Hensman as teacher, mentor, colleague and friend. Even so, it conveys only a small part of his personality and achievement. His kindness touched and sometimes transformed many lives outside the immediate family circle, including those of the present writers. Others who were informed and inspired by him will continue aspects of his work, but he was unique, and will be much missed.

Yasmine Gooneratne  
Shelagh Goonewardene

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## Canal Burgher

by Earl Forbes

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**o**e lay stretched out on his great lounge chair and gazed before him at the road below. He was satisfied that he had made the correct decision in buying this property; a big sprawling house and eight acres of land for just Rs 20,000. Ordinarily, it would have cost much more but this one was a steal at the price. It was first on the market at Rs 29,000. As there was no interest at this price, it was soon reduced to Rs 25,000. Joe had thrown in an offer of Rs 20,000 and it was accepted. In the eyes of most prospective buyers, the property had one drawback. Its boundaries ran down to the canal at Nedimala. Everyone Joe had spoken to was apprehensive about the proximity to the canal, but not Joe. These canals had been built by his forefathers and he felt at one with his Dutch Burgher heritage of owning property adjoining the canal.

What was probably more important was that Joe had the money to go ahead with the purchase. The past four years had been spectacular for his career in the Public Service. In 1940, after years of service, he was still Chief Clerk at the Hulftsdorp Courts. But during the war years he had been promoted to entry level in the Ceylon Civil Service. Douglas Nelson, his boss, when promoting him had said, 'Joseph at this time we need people whom we can implicitly trust, be scrupulously honest and can communicate clearly in the best English. Burghers fit the bill and if you work hard you can go very high in the Civil Service'. Nelson was not exaggerating because Joe's brothers; Edward and Victor, had also been promoted to higher positions in the Treasury and Education Departments respectively.

After pouring out his second arrack, Joe thought of his four children, three girls and his son. His thoughts did not dwell too long on the three girls. They would soon grow up to be fine young women, settle down with good husbands and raise families of their own. The good thing was that there was none of this bloody 'dowry' tradition among the Burghers. Marry for love and that was it. Joe thought of his friend, Thomas Weerasooriya, who had to give a large part of his property as dowry to his son-in-law. When

his second daughter was to marry, he would have to give the balance of his property assets to her husband and this would leave old Thomas with little or nothing to his name. This made no sense to Joe. Anyway, he had his eight acres now and maybe he could let his daughters and any future sons-in-law build homes for themselves on some part of the property.

For his son Don, Joe had plans. Don was enrolled as a student at St Peter's College Bambalapitiya. St Peters was some distance from Nedimala, but there was no option as Dehiwala and Wellawatte had no good private schools for boys. During the Rectorship of Father Nicholas Perera, St Peter's had built up a good name for academic achievement and prowess in sport. In addition to the formal education, Joe wanted to instill in his son's mind the proud Dutch Burgher tradition. Among other things, he wanted him to grow up in the knowledge that to be a Burgher was to be a proud Ceylonese. As his boss Nelson had said to him, the Burghers had a strong tradition of service to the community with honesty, integrity, impartiality and efficiency as beacons. Joe was determined to educate his son in the great legacy of the Dutch occupation of Ceylon. What better way to drive home to his son the extent of the Dutch legacy than to absorb his mind and body in the Dutch built canal on their doorstep.

In the days following, Joe scoured the bookshops around the Hulftsdorp Courts for material on the Dutch occupation of Ceylon. Readings from books coupled with swimming and boat trips on the canal would surely ensure that the boy would appreciate the importance of his heritage. The timing could not have been better. It was Easter 1947: the time off work and the school holidays. The 40 days of 'lent' before Easter, had been one of restricted eating and drinking. No meat on Wednesdays and Fridays and no arrack too. Add to the abstinence some days of fasting and you had a pretty bleak Lenten period. These restraints made Easter all the more enjoyable. On Easter Sunday morning the breakfast table was set out with delicious Dutch delicacies. Centre position on the breakfast table was the Dutch Breudher. The rich golden ribbed form of the Breudher made one's mouth water. Right next to the Breudher was the bright round red shape of the Dutch Edam Cheese. The Dutch theme was then diluted to some extent. The 'Love Cake'

on the table was claimed to be a Burgher thing but whether it was Dutch or not no one knew or cared. The ‘Sunny South’ butter had to be Australian. To complete the dilution of the Dutch food theme there was also on the table, string hoppers, hoppers, several kinds of Sinhalese sweetmeats and varieties of plantains. There were jugs filled with iced coffee to wash down all of the delicious food. The only person who did not drink iced coffee was Joe’s brother, ‘Uncle Soldier’. Uncle Soldier washed down his sumptuous breakfast with many glasses of sweet Palmyrah toddy.

Joe spent Easter Monday reading from the texts on the Dutch occupation of Ceylon. By evening he had gathered quite a lot of information and he informed Don that he would be telling him some stories about their ancestors. Joe fixed a new mantle on to the Petromax lamp, lit it up, and called his son to his side. ‘Son’, Joe said, ‘did you enjoy that Dutch Edam Cheese at breakfast this morning? Without waiting to hear whether Donald said yes or no, Joe went on to tell his son how such a cheese had featured in the surrender of Colombo by the Dutch to the British in 1796. ‘I was reading this morning that the British got their hands on Colombo not by military superiority but by bribery and corruption. In 1796, the Dutch had, as a major part of their military forces in Colombo, a group of mercenaries operated by a Swiss nobleman called Count Charles de Meuron. The British employed a secret agent, one Hugh Cleghorn, to bribe de Meuron so that he would withdraw his troops from Dutch service. The orders issued by de Meuron to his mercenaries to withdraw support for the Dutch in Colombo, were issued in Europe. The Count’s orders were smuggled to the Commander of the mercenaries in Colombo concealed in a ball of Dutch Edam Cheese. When the Swiss mercenaries followed orders and deserted the Dutch, they had no alternative but to surrender to the British,’ Joe concluded.

Joe then went on to tell his son of other great achievement of the Dutch in Ceylon. Almost everyday, he said, he saw very important legal matters being decided in the Hulftsdorp Courts on the basis of the Roman Dutch Law. This body of law, Joe said, was introduced into the legal system of Ceylon by his Dutch ancestors. ‘Son, do not forget the great Dutch Reformed Church. As your mother and I have done, you must faithfully adhere to the teach-

ings of our great Church all your life. You are lucky that you have been born into a religion that is not superstitious, idolatrous and founded on false gods’

Realising that his glass was now empty, Joe asked Don to pour him another drink from the bottle. Joe took a long sip from his glass and said to Don, ‘now son, you must learn something about the greatest achievement of the Dutch. Part of our canal legacy is right at the boundary of this property which will be yours one day. It is the Dutch who built the great network of canals around Colombo, Negombo and Galle. I got this book written by our fellow Burgher, R L Brohier, which has so much on Dutch built canals. You must read as much of it as you can. If you do not understand anything in the book you can ask me to explain. Son, the system of Dutch canals, connects through lakes and lagoons, to Chilaw and Puttalam in the North. Do you remember two years ago we went past Chilaw with Uncle Peter and his family to Madhu church? Of course you know that although we enjoyed the trip, we have no real interest in Madhu as it is a Catholic Church. In the other direction the canals go as far as Kalutara and Beruwela. If you include the canals built by the Dutch around Galle and Matara, the canal network stretches from Puttalam in the North right down to Matara in the South’. Joe would have gone on all evening but his musings were interrupted by Jane, who politely informed him that dinner was served.

In the days that followed the canal became the most important thing in Don’s life. He was almost 14 years of age now and old enough to go down to the canal and enjoy a splash in the water with friends and neighbours. At times when it had rained and the canal was flowing, the place would be a-buzz with activity as the *padda* boats made their way down the canal. These long barge like watercraft would glide down the canal moved by the flow of the water or punted along by men with long poles. At times the boats would appear to get stuck and men from the boat, as well as village folk from the area, would drag the boat along from the canal banks with harness ropes. Some boats would stop overnight near the Hill Street bridge, which was about a mile from Joe’s property. Most *padda* boats had a small structure, like a *cadjan* hut, constructed at one end of the boat. When the boats were stopped, Don would stay around and observe smoke rising out of the

*cadjan* structure as the *padda* boat people cooked the evening meal. Don would pretend not to be looking as the men sat cross legged on the floor of the boat eating. All Don could see of the meal were the mountains of rice consumed. There were other dishes as well but he could not quite make out what these were. After their meal left over scraps were emptied near a scraggy dog which seemed to gobble the scraps faster than they could be put down. The coloured enamel plates were then washed in the canal water and taken inside the *cadjan* structure. Don wished he could get on one of these boats, and drift down to wherever it was going.

Don kept thinking of the *padda* boat which had stopped near the Hill Street bridge and some days later he asked his father how far the boats went. ‘Son’ Joe responded, ‘the *padda* boats go to the Bolgoda Lake and from there I think some go to Kalutara. I am thinking of doing a trip to the Bolgoda Lake one of these days. Mr Weerasooriya’s cousin is an Inspector at the Waterways Section of the PWD. I have asked Mr Weerasooriya to try and organize with his cousin, for us to go along with him on one of his inspections. The Waterways have a good motor launch and when the canal is flowing to capacity the launch can go as far as the Bolgoda Lake’.

And so it came to pass that sometime later, Friday the 3<sup>rd</sup> of November, was fixed for the Bolgoda trip. The previous evening Don had pipe-clayed his shoes and made Jane iron his shorts and shirt. The night of the 2<sup>nd</sup>, his sleep had been restless with visions of the motor launch gliding along a canal as wide as the Amazon. His dreams then turned to a nightmare as he saw the launch leaving the next morning without him. His tortured sleep was interrupted to the sound of Jane’s voice calling, ‘baby, baby, wake up it is time to get ready for the trip to Bolgoda’.

Originally, there were to be six going on the trip; Joe, Don, Mr. Weerasooriya, his son Upali, Mr Weerasooriya’s cousin the Waterways Inspector and the person operating the launch. A late addition to the group was Uncle Soldier. He had arrived a few days before and had talked himself up into joining the group. The plan was to cast off at 6.30 a. m. from Nedimala so as to reach Bolgoda at about 10.00 am. On the return journey, the schedule was to leave Bolgoda at 1.30 pm and be back at Nedimala around 5.00 pm.

At about 6.15 am on the morning of the 3<sup>rd</sup>, Mr. Weerasooriya and Upali arrived at Joe’s. In a short time, all except Uncle Soldier, were ready to walk down to the canal bank up to the point at which steps went down to water level. Uncle Soldier was still in the bathroom. Joe was eager to get to the canal with the others and he shouted to Uncle Soldier that they were walking down and he had better hurry up as the launch was due in ten minutes. Almost exactly on time the group on the canal bank heard the chug chug of the launch motor. The launch drew closer, cut the power and glided up to the steps at water level. Mr Weerasooriya greeted his cousin and jumped on board. He then assisted Don and Upali on to the launch. In the meantime Joe was getting agitated as Uncle Soldier was nowhere to be seen. Joe’s eldest daughter was standing at the top of the path which led down to the canal. Joe shouted out to her to tell Uncle Soldier that the launch had arrived, and that if he did not come at once, he would be left behind. A few minutes later Uncle Soldier came ambling down the path as if he was on a leisurely stroll. Joe was furious and shouted for him to hurry up. As Uncle Soldier was getting into the launch Joe asked him ‘why the hell did you take so long’. Uncle Soldier sat down on the wooden seat of the launch and casually replied, ‘Joe, before leaving on this trip, I had to put a good bog’.

All aboard now and the launch man, (given the name of ‘skipper’ by Uncle Soldier) powered the motor once more for take off. Soon the launch was passing under the Hill Street bridge. In about half an hour the launch was moving along at a still slow pace past Piliyandala. The banks of the canal were not as built up or structured as they were at Nedimala. Houses and huts beyond the banks were thinning out and soon acres of open paddy fields came into view. At particular points the paddy fields gave way to clumps of wild mangroves. The paddy fields and mangroves alike were alive with bird life; water fowl, cranes, some type of stork and snipe. Uncle Soldier boasted that if he had a gun he could shoot down many of these birds, specially the snipe. He announced to the others that Elephant House was selling snipe at a very high price. Mr Weerasooriya and his cousin did not show much interest in Uncle Soldier’s talk. At a break in the conversation

Mr Weerasooriya turned to Joe and whispered, ‘Joe you know we are Buddhists’.

Don and Upali, who were seated next to each other, were so totally absorbed in the passing landscape and bird life that they did not feel time pass. The skipper announced that they would soon be entering the waters of Bolgoda Lake. All around now there was very little vegetation. The skipper spoke again and said that they would keep to the south eastern side of the lake and go to the Waterways jetty. The wind was blowing strongly across the expanse of water and little ripple waves were pushing the launch up and down in the water. The skipper was all concentration now and he requested all in the launch to be seated. The launch made its way along one edge of the lake and it soon came in sight of a small jetty stretching from the shore of the Lake out over the water. To this spot the skipper guided the launch, asked Mr. Weerasooriya's cousin to please tie her up and announced that all could now disembark.

*To be continued in Journal # 45*

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## Save the Last Dance for me

by Capt Elmo Jayawardena

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**a few months** back I was in Hong Kong visiting a well known charity organisation called Crossroads. It was to seek assistance for a project in Sri Lanka. Crossroads has an enormous warehouse filled to the brim with anything and everything; ready to be sent to places where people are in most need.

The store surroundings looked familiar. Then I realised I was standing where the old Kai Tak airport was, now pastured and replaced by the glamour of the new Hong Kong International Airport.

Yes, I have been here before, many a time at that, bringing jet aeroplanes in to land on runway 13, turning at the famous Chequered Board at 600 feet and pointing at the short runway besieged by the sea. The final turn and approach was made between sky scrapers that stood on

either side like sentinels and one could spot the flat residents' laundry hanging outside their windows.

The Chequered Board was fixed to the mountainside, big board with orange and yellow squares, clearly to say "Turn now, beyond this is damnation".

That was Kai Tak, surrounded by hills, minimum length to stop and the weather gods playing their fancy games so often that we mere mortals who flew the machines were nothing but puppets on a string. But we managed; day in and day out to put our aeroplanes down and brake like crazy to make sure we didn't overrun and tip into the water.

When the skies were friendly it was a thrill to land at Kai Tak. The runway usually was direction 130 (runway 13) and the wind rolled from the East, nice and steady and we came past Green Island and saw the Chequered Board in front to tell us we have to change direction lest we too got pasted like the Chequered Board on the same mountain. Then came the turn, low and precise to make the final approach, the laundry run, to fly between the buildings and place the wheels precisely at the touch down point to avoid going swimming.

Every time a pilot landed in Hong Kong in the olden days, there was that gleam in the eye. I've seen it a hundred times in my co-pilots and I've felt the same when ever I made the approach; the accomplishment of doing something right where the demand was high which sent the adrenalin to over-drive.

The typhoon time was another story. The winds sheared, gusted, backed and veered and the rain swept across the field, diminishing visibility. Dark grey clouds hung low covering the mountains and the Chequered Board was hardly visible. We went in by the leading lights, which were very powerful strobes that throbbed, giving us a path to follow to take us to the laundry lane. All this was with the wind playing wild symphony and the rain pattering down like machine gun fire. Most times lining up on the runway for the short final run was almost impossible and that is where the pilot's skill mattered, kicking rudders and wagging wings like a mad man playing drums just so that the aeroplane landed and stopped all within that little wet and slippery runway with the sea awaiting with open jaws for a luckless pilot's mistake.

I remember my last flight to Kai Tak, in the June of '98. I left home determined to do the



"The Chequered Board was fixed to the mountainside, big board with orange and yellow squares, clearly to say turn now, beyond this is damnation".

*Picture: Courtesy - Daryl Chapman and [www.fmas.co.uk](http://www.fmas.co.uk)*

landing. Most days I would let the co-pilot fly, I've seen a lot of this airfield and the younger pilots were always grateful for a swing at Hong Kong. But this was my final flight to Kai Tak and I saved the last dance for me, just like the Drifters sang.

The co-pilot was young and he mentioned he'd never landed in Hong Kong. It was a hard call on me. I could not let this young man go and run through a flying career having never landed in Kai Tak. Maybe years later his first-officer would ask about the infamous Kai Tak approach and my friend would have to answer that he never did it.

All in all the deck was stacked against me, there is something called professional courtesy and out went my last dance, "son, you take it to Hong Kong".

The weather was bad, the winds were howling, and we went in. The young man turned at 600 feet and the aircraft was bucking and jumping and he hung in there like a rodeo kid but that wasn't enough. 300 feet to go we were pointing at mountains and the field was almost below us and then I took over and went around to the safety of the sky.

One thing I never did in an aeroplane is if I ever took over from a co-pilot, I never gave it back. I flew it and landed it – that was the golden rule, the safe approach.

The rodeo kid and I were now loitering in

the sky to await our turn to make the next run. Then it hit me like a thunderbolt, same co-pilot, years later would be a Captain and when his co-pilot asked him about Kai Tak and how it was to fly in he would have to say "I got one chance and I blew it, couldn't make the field and the Captain had to take over."

There was no way I could crucify this young man's soul, make him poor as gutter water in a field where professional prestige mattered most.

**"Son you take it in, go and land this aeroplane."**

That's precisely what he did. He waltzed with the wind and came through the clouds and turned at the Chequered Board and flew down the laundry lane and lined up the big 747 on the short runway to land as smooth as Neil Armstrong did on the moon.

Then I saw the glitter in his eye - last dance or no dance, I wouldn't have traded anything for that look. That's what flying was all about.

It is possible that my rodeo-kid friend would read what I write and remember. It was all between him and me and the old Kai Tak Airport.

He, I am sure by now is a Captain. I like to think that he too would at times give away his turn to dance just to see the gleam in a fledgling's eyes. That should be the legacy.

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I always have a quotation for everything - it saves original thinking

*Dorothy Sayers 1893-1957*

## Lord Northcliffe in Ceylon (1922)

by Roger Thiedeman.

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**I**lfred Charles William Harmsworth was born in Dublin, Ireland, in 1865, the son of an English barrister. Knighted in 1904, a year later he was elevated to the peerage as 1<sup>st</sup> Baron (Lord) Northcliffe, becoming the youngest peer of the realm. In 1917 he was created a Viscount.

As a young man, he combined his twin interests in bicycling and writing by contributing articles to specialist cycling journals. Alfred Harmsworth/Lord Northcliffe subsequently became one of the greatest newspaper magnates ever to stride London's Fleet Street. He founded the *Daily Mail* in 1896, later adding the *Daily Mirror* and the prestigious *Times* to his 'stable' of publications.

A further interest in the then new-fangled motor car at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw him move in exalted motoring circles. Northcliffe counted amongst his friends and associates such luminaries as Charles Rolls and Henry Royce. Road safety was another passion.

On July 16, 1921, an ailing Lord Northcliffe set off from London on an epic world tour that en-

compassed such countries as Canada, Hawaii, Fiji, New Zealand, Australia, Borneo, Japan, China, the Federated Malay States, Java (Indonesia), Indo-China, Siam (Thailand), Ceylon, India, etc. True to his journalistic roots, Lord Northcliffe diligently recorded his impressions of all those countries, dictating them as diary entries to his two private secretaries, John Prioleau and Harold W. Snoad, who formed part of his retinue of travelling companions, along with brother-in-law Harry Garland Milner, his chauffeur H. Pine, and valet 'Frederick'.

Northcliffe's world odyssey concluded in Marseilles, France, on February 18, 1922. But on August 14, barely six months later, he died—the cause of death being attributed to 'an illness of an undefined nature...accentuated by an increasing sense of disenchantment and mental unbalance.'

In 1923, Lord Northcliffe's travel diary, titled *My Journey Round the World: 1921-22*, was published as a 326-page volume by The Bodley Head, after editing by his brothers Cecil and St. John Harmsworth. The record of Northcliffe's sojourn in Ceylon, from January 2 to 7, 1922, occupies almost an entire chapter—from his arrival at Colombo Harbour to his departure for India from Talaimannar Pier. In common with the general tenor of his observations throughout the book, Northcliffe's mixed feelings about Ceylon and, especially, its people, are sometimes expressed in terms that may be viewed as chauvinistic, paternalistic, and even racist. Whether this was prompted, in part, by his seemingly latent 'mental unbalance', or is typical of the 'superior' attitudes espoused by Northcliffe's peers and compatriots during that era is something best left to readers of *The Ceylankan* to decide, from the complete excerpt of Northcliffe's Ceylon diary reproduced below.



Lord Northcliffe 1865-1922

Monday, January 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1922.  
Colombo, Ceylon.

Early this morning we were off the coast of Ceylon—low, flat, not very attractive (though, later, we found Ceylon as lovely as Java). At noon we arrived at the harbour of Colombo, which is an artificial harbour formed of breakwaters.

A special launch, with the Governor's A.D.C. on board, was sent to meet me, and I was taken off to Government House. The Governor himself is at the mountain station of Nuwara Eliya, and we are invited to go up there to-night.

I had the first lot of home letters for a great time. My Mother is well and evidently very vigorous, for she writes me a stiff one about the policy of my newspapers in regard to Ulster, and refers to the cable she sent me complaining of their attitude towards

Ulster.

From Government House (Queen's House) a rather dowdy old mansion, with the usual portraits of previous Governors, I drove to the Galle Face Hotel, mentioned in every Eastern novel I have read. Colombo is another kind of Clapham Junction, like Singapore, for those going to and from the East. It took me about two hours to open and look at my letters, after which we lunched in the great dining-room of this famous caravanserai.

Colombo seems to me to be a mix-up of Honolulu, Batavia, the Fiji Islands, and most of the tropical towns we have been to, but it is cooler. The streets are well laid out and wide, reminding me a little of parts of Batavia.

The waiters at the hotel wear curious little combs in their heads, indicating their caste, I am told by the A.D.C. (Capt. Holbech, D.S.O., M.C.).

I begin to think that all tropical flora is more or less alike. We see our old friend the flame tree and the flamboyant tree here.

After an excellent lunch I drove out to see some polo with Lady Knox, wife of General Knox. She and her husband are on their way round the world.

After polo we went for a walk to the grounds of the Prince's Club, and sat there in the brief twilight, with great flying foxes passing over us most of the time. Prince's Club is a very pretty scene, resembling Ranelagh.

It is curious to be away from the Chinese for the first time in a long while. We are now among the Sinhalese, a smaller dark people. We shall see no more of the Chinese, and I am sorry.

We have to be prepared for cold weather at Nuwara Eliya (pronounced Nurailia), for we shall probably arrive to-morrow in the frost.

Tuesday, January 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1922.  
Nuwara Eliya, Ceylon.

After dining at the Galle Face Hotel, where Lady Knox joined us, we drove with the Governor's A.D.C., Capt. Holbech, to the station, *en route* for Nuwara Eliya.

The Fort Station, from which our train left, is an exact replica of any secondary station on the G.N.R. or Midland Railway, with numbered platforms and overhead bridges. The only difference I could see was in the deafening uproar made by native travellers and by native railway officials. It seems ridiculous to imagine that any people who direct the simple operations of a railway station in such chaotic fashion should ever be

capable of directing the destinies of the land of their birth. A very comfortable saloon had been placed at my disposal, in which Frederick and I had a perfect night's rest. The other members of my party, and Holbech, travelled in complete content in the sleeping car.

The travelling was most comfortable, the permanent way being as good as any we have at home. The construction of the line is a fine example of what we can do in the East, and the last fifty miles or so, over the mountains to Nanuoia, the jumping-off station for Nuwara Eliya, is as ambitious a piece of engineering as one would wish to see. The train winds in and out of deep valleys, mostly clothed in tea-gardens, skirting headlong precipices, with only a few inches between the line and the edge of the drop, climbing, always climbing. It was about six o'clock when I woke, and the sun was bathing these beautiful valleys in a rosy light. The air was deliciously aromatic, and had an edge to it and a nip which I cannot remember having felt since I was last in Scotland in September. What a change for us!

Our arrival at Nuwara Eliya provided me with one of the most vivid contrasts imaginable. We left Colombo in a Turkish-bath-like heat, dripping with perspiration and in less than ten hours we were six thousand feet up, amid forests of oak and pine, with



A further interest in the then new-fangled motor car at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century...

rhododendrons and arum lilies growing in masses alongside the road, and a temperature and climate more like Switzerland than the tropics. The sun blazed out of a cloudless sky, and the air was like champagne. The short motor drive up to Queen's Cottage, the Governor's hill station here, was delightful. The roads are excellent, and mercifully, owing to the incessant hairpin bends and their narrowness, speed is impossible. European wild flowers blossomed in the English hedges, with here and there friendly clumps of roses. I can quite understand why Nuwara Eliya is not only the heaven of Ceylon and its planters, but also one of the most fashionable hot-weather stations for Southern India. In addition to its magnificent climate, it is one of the most beautiful little places imaginable, half Scottish, half Pyrenean, and it owns what is said to be the best golf course in the East.

One of the first things we met on entering Nuwara Eliya was a Rolls-Royce, driven by a woman. She gave us the exact amount of room needed to avert an accident, and no more.

Queen's Cottage is a comfortable house of the bungalow order, with an upper story. Sir William and Lady Manning are charming hosts. With them are also staying a Miss E. and a Major S. In the evening Sir Anton and Lady B. came to dine in order to tell me something about affairs in Palestine, where he has lately been.

*Wednesday, January 4<sup>th</sup>, 1922.*

*Nuwara Eliya, Ceylon.*

H.E. left at 6 a.m. for Colombo, where he will stay till Saturday.

Lady M., very good-looking and twenty-four, got the rest of the house party up at 7 a.m. to climb to the top of San Pedro, the highest peak in Ceylon. I did not accompany her. I hear it was a wonderful experience and highly fat-reducing. I prefer my own way of getting it off. Prioleau, who has taken no exercise to speak of since he was shaken to a jelly in the Federated Malay States train, climbed to the top and back (in all, three hours of very violent scrambling up and down a gradient of about 1 in 4), without getting really blown. I am told that punishment awaits them all to-morrow, when they will be deprived of the use of their ankles, calves, and knees. From the top there is a marvellous panorama spread out, literally as far as the eye can travel, over mountains and plains and vast oceans of snowy white cloud. No doubt; but I prefer bed.

*Thursday, January 5<sup>th</sup>, 1922*

*Nuwara Eliya, Ceylon.*

How delightful to be in cold weather again! We are all full of energy—even Prioleau has begun to work. As I dictate this I can hear his typewriter thundering in the room above me. My brother-in-law, Milner, has gone golfing mad, disdaining even His Excellency's horses.

Frederick smiles all day. "This is a decent sort of place," he says. "You don't have to drink your butter out of teaspoons, and boots aren't covered with mildew in the morning. Matches will even strike on a box. Don't think his Lordship is quite as cross as he usually is in the mornings."

"Yes, Frederick, but a kerait, [*that is how he spelt krait ..Ed*] a deadly snake, was found in the house yesterday, and a man-eating crocodile was killed two miles off last night. Also there are natives all over the place, and you mustn't leave your windows open at night for fear thieves will call in." Frederick longs for the servants' hall—even for the cleaning of plate, even for seven or eight hours "on the door," or, what he very rarely gets, waiting up for his Lordship to return late at night, as other vallets do.

There are lots of things we circumnavigators would like, but which we very often don't get. The following, for example:—

(1) A nice cup of tea or coffee on waking, with a newspaper less than a month old.

(2) A bath with hot and cold taps, and not a barrel full of water, a tin dipper, and a concrete floor.

(3) A climate where you are not wet through by one or two swings at golf, and where you need not change your clothes all day long.

(4) A telephone and regular daily work.

(5) A lunch which doesn't need two or three tablespoons of Lea and Perrins' sauce to help it down.

(6) An afternoon nap with no flies to bite you.

(7) No black, yellow, and other polyglot reporters asking "Will master kindly say few words?" Two called last night. "May we report the master staying with Governor?" they said.

(8) An evening paper. My! what a treat an evening paper will be!

(9) A little twilight.

(10) A dinner without punkahs or electric fans or black servants.

(11) A bed, not a mosquito cage. Smoking inside mosquito bed nettings is dangerous. It can only be done if Frederick sits by with a bucket of water ready, as he has done.

(12) A bedroom in which you don't have to

search for snakes before going to bed.

(13) A night without noises, such as that of the lizards up and down the ceiling calling each other, the distant tom-toms, the flapping of wings of flying foxes—those horrible bats as big as turkeys.

*Friday, January 6<sup>th</sup>, 1922  
Nuwara Eliya, Ceylon*

It is very difficult to believe that one is not in the Highlands, and to add to the illusion there are quite a number of places with Scotch names about.

I went for a motor drive yesterday with Lady Manning, who is in the very responsible position of *Gouvernante* of Ceylon, with three houses, and the eyes of the whole European and native community upon her. Although I am very tired of motoring, I enjoyed the drive. As we drove along I noticed the curious caste marks over the lips of the natives.

Ceylon is a real British Colony. There are between eight and ten thousand British planters here—planters of tea and rubber. I know nothing about the Sinhalese—not Singalese, as we call them. I am told that they get as cross if you call them Singalese as the Chinese get if you call them Chinamen. What thousands of little things one has to learn in order to be successful with Eastern people! Fraser, *The Times* Correspondent in Pekin, told me that *The Times* sent out asking for the ages of various Chinese notables, which, he said, was about the most deadly insult possible. We know nothing about other peoples.

I should like to have seen something of the remains of the Dutch in Ceylon. They were here for many years, but, beyond meeting what are known as Burghers (Eurasians with Dutch names) and seeing some obviously Dutch bungalows, not unlike the old bungalows in Java, I have not seen anything of the Dutch occupation; nor anything, either, of the Portuguese occupation, except a number of Portuguese names like da Silva and Mendosa.

Such of the Sinhalese as I have seen seem docile. I do detest the chignons, combs, and skirts of the men. The more I play golf here the more I feel at home. The greens are absolutely perfect. I should say that the course is as good as Woking. One half of it is very difficult owing to the intertwinnings of a trout stream.

As far as I can make out Nuwara Eliya was discovered in 1826, and came as a boon to the English troops then ill in Ceylon. It consists of cottages, some of stone, some of wood,

exactly like English cottages (though called bungalows); two or three clubs; a row of shops, and a very excellent golf club. The people are all from England or Scotland. It might be Hook Heath or Kingsgate. Some of the people stay four or five years, some for twenty-five years. On the whole, I think it is the most astonishing change we have had since leaving England, that of living in the tropics for months, and then, in the course of a single night, being transported to Scotland. People who arrive here direct from home are very disappointed, for they want to know where the tropics are, and didn't expect they were coming to Scotland. The Scotch mist we have had the last day or two has added to the illusion, yet we are six thousand feet up, and seven thousand miles away from home. If you were to put Sinhalese in a Scotch mountain resort you would have Nuwara Eliya. What a boon it is for the people who swelter in the plains of Ind!

Reading [The Earl of Reading] sent me a "clear-the-line" wire last night, inviting me to come to Delhi, and, as he was the first person to send me an invitation before leaving England, I am afraid we must accept it, though it involves a tremendous journey, as one can see by looking at a map showing the distance from the middle of Ceylon to Delhi *via* Colombo—a journey not at all amusing to me. I have done much of India before. It is very expensive, tiring, and very dusty. However, I think that I have mastered the simpler Sinhalese affairs fairly well. I have read everything, talked with all sorts of people; the Chief Justice, my correspondent, Charles Tower; aides-de-camp; various planters; and some Sinhalese agitators. If I were Governor here I should nip these last in the bud. There are no poor whatever in the island. Like everybody else in the world, they have a grievance, and, like all Orientals, they are quite ungrateful.

We start to-night for Colombo at 9.30. It will be very cold when the train starts, but the dawn will be as hot as blazes.

*Saturday, January 7<sup>th</sup>, 1922.  
Colombo to Madras.*

I slept almost without waking from Nuwara Eliya to within a few miles of Colombo. Leaving on a winter's night, we arrived at Colombo at 7 a.m. in unbearable heat and glaring sunlight—probably the greatest contrast of any popular resort and commercial capital in the world.

Shaving in the train, I made the discovery that strong tea is excellent to shave with.

It is quite strange to be among the rickshaws, crowds and motors of an Eastern town after the British quiet of Nuwara Eliya. Owing to the leakage of the news of my movements into the native Press, there was quite a crowd at the station to look at me. Orientals like looking.

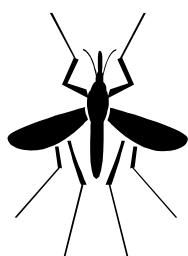
The Governor's secretary, who is a great expert on gems, took me to the best Ceylon gem shop, where, after much bargaining, I got away in an hour and a half. Ceylon is one of the choice gem markets of the world. Rubies and emeralds are washed up every day by the gemmers—that is to say, the people who sift the mud for gems. How oily and polite these Orientals are! What lies they tell! If I had not been guarded by the Colony's best authority on jewels, whose private collection is unique, I should have been skinned alive.

It was the night of the sixth of January that we started from beautiful Nuwara Eliya on the longest railway journey on my World Whirl, longest as regards time, that is to say (six nights seven days in the train), fortunately in private cars all the time, some of them very beautiful ones. If you look at the map you will see that it is a long way from the centre of Ceylon to Northern India *via* Colombo.

His Excellency gave me a small luncheon at the Colombo Club, a delightful place, dark and cool, with plenty of electric punkahs going.

There are many kinds of local good things to eat in Ceylon, especially sweets made of jaggery sugar (made from the sap of the palm, I believe). My thinning regimen, on which I have started, doesn't allow me to indulge in them. Here let me rise up and declare that by not drinking an hour before meals and an hour after meals and depriving myself of everything that is pleasant to eat, I have removed almost one stone of my charms. When I left Totteridge I weighed thirteen stone thirteen pounds. When I first touched at Singapore I weighed exactly the same amount. To-day, I stand tall and erect, facing the world unflinchingly, at thirteen stone. Twelve stone six is my goal, and twelve stone six it shall be at Marseilles, or I will "eat my topee" (sun hat), as they say here, or "toby," as Frederick calls it.

From Colombo to the port, or rather the swamp of embarkation for Southern India, was hot, hot, hot and damp—a night's journey. There were no mosquitoes in the Governor's car, but the mosquito curtains got full of what I am told are lake flies—and don't they bite? I was marked for a full fortnight by these brutes.



## The Coming of Olcott

by S Pathiravitana

# T

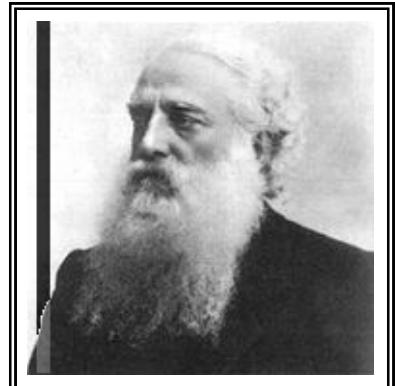
**he coming of Olcott** to Ceylon towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was a turning point in the history of the country. Had he not come then the prediction of James de Alwis that Buddhism would disappear from this country at the turn of the century would have come true. His timely arrival not only disproved that gloomy prediction but also gave a tremendous boost to Buddhism in Sri Lanka that keeps it rocking even today.

Under the British occupation Sinhala and Sinhala Culture had decayed so

much that it was not difficult for de Alwis, Sinhala scholar and devout Christian, to make that prediction. When Olcott visited this island the Sinhala Buddhists who, though a majority in the country, were an underprivileged group in their land of birth. To the

802 Christian schools that had come up there were only four Buddhist schools. Nor was Sinhala taught at a privileged school like Royal College at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

So delighted were the Sinhala Buddhists when Olcott arrived with his colleague, Helena Blavatsky, that they turned out to give them a right royal welcome. The ship



Col Henry Steel Olcott  
1832-1907



Helena Blavatsky  
1831-1891

that brought Olcott and Helena Blavatsky had anchored 500 yards away from the shore of the Galle harbour. A decorated boat with banana trees and colourful strings of flowers fetched the distinguished visitors from ship to shore. When they stepped out of the boat and into the jetty the Sinhala equivalent of the red carpet, *parada*, was laid over the steps leading up to the carriage. And to cries of Sadhu! Sadhu! that arose from the people, Olcott and Blavatsky stepped into their carriage.

"The multitude," Olcott writes, "hemmed in our carriages and the procession set out for our appointed residence...The roads were blocked with people the whole distance and our progress was very slow. At the house, three Chief Priests received and blessed us at the threshold, reciting appropriate Pali verses. Then we had a levee and innumerable introductions; the common people crowding every approach, filling every door and gazing through every window. This went on all day, to our great annoyance, for we could not get a breath of fresh air, but it was all so strong a proof of friendliness that we put up with it as best as we could..."

From the day of their arrival to the time of their departure people turned up in their thousands to see and hear Olcott speak wherever he went. All such inconveniences Olcott took up with great good humour as you can see in his writings when he sat down to recall them in his book *Old Diary leaves*. One of his first assignments was to give a public lecture on Theosophy. "I made desperate attempts to think over my subject and prepare some notes. For I was then quite inexperienced in this business and was afraid to trust myself to extemporaneous discourse." And amidst all that Babel going on around him with friendly mobs going in and out of their rooms throughout the day, it was not the best of times to think about a speech.

"I think my first lecture in Ceylon is worth a paragraph. It was delivered in a large room in the Military Barracks, imperfectly lighted, and packed to suffocation. A temporary platform had been erected at one end and a figured canopy suspended over it. Besides our delegation there were upon it Sumangala Maha Thero, the Chief Priest Bulathgama, Chief Priest Dhammadrankara of the Amarapura Sect who had come 28 miles to meet us, and number more. The whole European colony (forty five persons) was present, and, inside and outside, a mob of some 2000 Sinhalese.

"I was not at all satisfied with my discourse, because, owing to the interruptions above

noted, my notes were fragmentary, and the light was so bad that I could not read them. However, I managed to get through somehow, although a good deal surprised that not even the taking passages elicited applause: from the unsympathetic Europeans that was to be expected: but from the Buddhists!"

That worried him so much that while moving out of that crowded room with Blavatsky clinging on to one arm, he turned to her and wanted to know how the lecture was. She said it was rather good. But why was there no applause, he wanted to know, why was it received in dead silence? "It must have been very bad" Olcott repeated. "What? What? What are you saying?" interrupted the host who was holding Blavatsky by the other arm. He wanted to know who said the speech was bad and went on to reassure Olcott and tell him, "Why, we never heard as good a one in Ceylon before." Then why, Olcott asked was there not a hand-clap or a cry of satisfaction. "Well, I should just have liked to hear one; we should have put knife into the fellow who dared interrupt you." Then he explained that the custom was never to interrupt a religious speaker. He should be listened to in silent respect and think over what he said when walking away."

This was the first of several visits that Olcott was making to the island. In this his first visit, along with Blavatsky; they journeyed to Kalutara after a memorable though exasperating trip with frequent stops on the way, from Dodanduwa to Payagala, to address people who gathered in their hundreds to welcome the white Buddhists. At Kalutara they were welcomed by Ponambalam Arunachalam who was the Police Magistrate at Kalutara. Olcott was quite impressed with Arunachalam who says of that meeting: "We made a charming acquaintance today - a graduate of Christ College, Cambridge: one of the most intellectual and polished men we have met in Asia. Mr Arunachalam is a nephew of the late Sir M. Coomaraswamy [Ananda Comaraswamy's father] the well known Orientalist...His eldest brother is the Hon Mr Ramanathan, who is a warm friend of mine, and the official representative in the Legislative Council of the Tamil community. We breakfasted in Mr Arunachalam's house, and his courtesy drew out HPB's (Blavatsky's) most charming traits, so that the visit was in every way a pleasing episode."

In contrast to this pleasant experience the GA of the district adopted a very hostile attitude to the visitors. He had ordered that no government building or the veranda of a school or even its steps should be given to hold any lectures. Ol-

cott's comment on that was, "The poor creature acted as if he supposed the Buddhists could be overawed into deserting their religion, or into believing Christianity a more loveable one, by excluding them from the buildings that had been erected with their tax money and that would be lent to any preacher against Buddhism," But that 'poor creature' could not prevent the people from immediately converting an adjoining field into a hall and rostrum by drawing strings and making a canopy and placing a chair and sounding board on top of a table to make a rostrum.

In Ratnapura, the city of gems, one of his supporters, a gem merchant, invited him to try his hand at gemming and if successful, the proceeds to be given to a fund that Olcott was setting up. He took up a spade and scraped the ground around for a while, then tiring, he handed it to the more sturdy young men around to do the digging. They found some stones and Olcott imagined for a moment that the money he could get from this single gem pit would be sufficient to meet all the needs of his funds he was setting up. But his dream collapsed when he found that gem shops declined to even make an offer because the gems were worthless. But Mr Solomon Fernando, the gem pit donor, gave Olcott a much appreciated gift. It was a magnifying glass cut out entirely from a rock crystal.

The work that Olcott set himself to do involved a lot of travelling, and that he did in all sorts of vehicles - "from the railway carriage to the ramshackle little hackney, jutka and ekka drawn by a single pony or bullock." This was all rather adventurous but a bit hard on the old man's bones. "So great was my discomfiture that at last I set my Yankee ingenuity to work and had built for me a two wheeled travelling cart on springs." Finally it turned out to be the last word in travelling comfort. There was sleeping accommodation for four, lockers on the side to hold table furniture, space for stacks of vegetables and all that is needed to run a mobile home. Fifteen years later this mobile home was still functioning and many notables like Leadbeater used it for their work. Among these notables was Anagarika Dharmapala who used it to waken the Buddhists from the stupor into which they had fallen.



**REMINDER  
MEMBERSHIP  
DUES  
SEE PAGE 30**

## Book Preview



### Sri Lanka Cricket at the High Table

Author, historian and internationally well-known cricket commentator, **Mahinda Wijesinghe** has compiled a meticulously documented saga of the meteoric rise of Sri Lanka's cricket during the 25 years after this island nation played her first Test match in 1982, along with the records of all the One-Day International and 20/20 matches played until 31 December 2007. It is a saga certifying that Sri Lanka's track record unequivocally surpasses all the feats achieved by other Full Members of the ICC in a like period. Included are a few thought-provoking articles written by the author over the years, e.g. How Gilchrist "squashed a century and diddled the Sri Lankans", "Is money coming between players and administrators?" About a Sri Lankan who was described by Sir Frank Worrell as "The best batsman I've ever seen", and of the Sri Lankan "Who turned down an offer to play for England" etc.

By highlighting the glorious feats achieved by Sri Lankan cricketers in the face of daunting odds of a Third World country such as the lack of playing facilities and an infrastructure comprising officials not too conversant with the norms necessary for international cricket, especially during the initial stages, whilst not forgetting the civil unrest in the country, Wijesinghe has succeeded in proving the assertion in his Foreword that: "25 years after having played her inaugural Test match the number of records and achievements by the Sri Lankans are, to say the least, remarkable and unmatched by any other Test-playing nation during a like period."

The icing on the cake is the Appendix where the author's contributions, with documentary evidence, to international cricket makes for fascinating reading and would make readers wonder just as Oliver Goldsmith described 'The Village Schoolmaster': "How one small head could carry all he knew". The documents listed include:

- (a) An excerpt from the London *Daily Telegraph* by renowned and respected English cricket correspondent and author, Christopher Martin-Jenkins, confirming **Wijesinghe as the pioneer of the concept of the Third Umpire**.

- (b) Letter from the Secretary of M.C.C. accepting the error detected by the author in the 250-year old **Laws of Cricket**. The first and only occasion such a detection was made.

- (c) A hand-written letter of thanks from the President of the M.C.C. on a suggestion for the change in the Laws of Cricket

- (d) Similar letters from CEO of the ICC, and Indian cricket icon **Sunil Gavaskar**.

Published as an attractive coffee table presentation with carefully selected colour photographs (on 150 gsm art paper) adds spice to Wijesinghe's maiden effort. This carefully documented book (140 pages) should not only serve as a definitive

record of the first 25 years of Sri Lanka Test Cricket but also would enhance the image of the level of cricket played by the island's cricketers. Needless to say the acquisition of this book should be a 'must' amongst the large expatriate community spread across the globe, by libraries and our embassies abroad and amongst national and international cricket aficionados.

**Alluring Sri Lanka: Sri Lanka's Wildlife - a personal photo journey by Stefan D'Silva**



Bustling about in the chaotic throng of dusty Pettah, sipping a *kahata* in a wayside 'boutique' in some rustic hamlet or capturing a spellbinding 'jungle' moment on his trusty Canon, every moment Stefan D'Silva spends in Sri Lanka is another step on a therapeutic journey.

"Consider it a prescription," his doctor in Sydney once told him when, after having returned from Sri Lanka, tests proved he was in the pink of health. This, after having had a heart-attack at 41, must have been birdsong in Stefan's ears. After all, there's nothing he enjoys more in this world than spending time in the land of his birth with which he maintains a 'deeply stirring,' passionate and almost spiritual bond.

One wouldn't however go so far as to say his love for the land of the sunning leopard and the tit-ttering *polkitchcha* is beyond description. For, Stefan, the 52-year-old prison superintendent from Sydney, has translated his passionate love of Lanka into an exquisite 135-page coffee-table book where rare and beautiful moments from the wilds of Sri Lanka have been captured and presented in what can only be described in a cliché – 'a labour of love.'

Stefan who migrated to Australia at 21 is disturbed by the general picture painted of Sri Lanka as 'a bombed out shell.' He believes it is the perspective that makes the difference and sees only the beauty of a troubled but exquisite land. That was one reason he was motivated to do a book of photographs, Alluring Sri Lanka, to showcase to the world the incredible beauty, the rich diversity and yet the simple charms of a land that many have written off as a 'war zone.'

Photography has been a lifelong interest, one which he took up actively again after recovering from his heart attack and realising he had neglected his hobbies. Old and rare books from Sri Lanka and improving the standards of rugby at his alma mater St. Thomas' College, Mt. Lavinia, are among the other passions of this father of two who says his family have supported him all the way through his shutter-bug forays in to the wilds.

Raine Wickrematunge

## 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.

**Poems to the Creator:** Shelagh Goonewardene. A collection of 35 poems, accompanied by 20 colour photographs by Devinda Theo Goonewardene. Cover on Matt Art, text 95 pages on satin art paper. ISBN: 978-0-9805491-0-2. Published in September 2008. Aus.\$15.00 + \$1.85 pp to all states.  
Email : shelaghlu@yahoo.com.au

**Alluring Sri Lanka: Sri Lanka's Wildlife  
a personal photo journey by Stefan D'Silva**

Available direct from Stefan. Contact Stefan@alluringsrilanka.com or P O Box 180 Sutherland NSW 1499. A\$30 + P&H. For a preview visit [www.alluringsrilanka.com](http://www.alluringsrilanka.com)

**Cricket at the High Table:** Mahinda Wijesinghe, 140pp coffee table presentation.

Price in SL—Rs 2,750 + Rs 250 P&H. Others visit web site [www.mahindawijesinghe.com](http://www.mahindawijesinghe.com)

**The Sri Lankans - A Portrait of Developing Nation;** Martin Pieris. 304pp A mosaic of portraits and interviews of a cross section of Sri Lankans. \$ 60 + P&H. Contact Martin—[pieris@ozemail.com.au](mailto:pieris@ozemail.com.au)

**The Christian Heritage of Jaffna Sri Lanka..work of the American Missionaries :**

Samuel Arnold.

available from Sam Arnold, 33 Elford Crescent, Merrylands, NSW 2160 - Ph: (02) 9681 4620  
email: samvilmarnold@ozemail.com.au

A \$10 plus postage.

Every dollar of sale proceeds is sent to Jaffna College to the fixed deposit a/c "Prof J R Arnold Scholarship fund".

**Yesterday is Another Country:** A Collection of Legends of Life by Somasiri Devendra, 160pp softcover Published by Sridevi Publications Sri Lanka. Available in Australia at \$ 10 + P&H from CSA Librarian Sumane Iyer. Contact: [sumane@pacific.net.au](mailto:sumane@pacific.net.au). Other countries contact Somasiri Devendra—details on page 30.

### Web Sites worth a visit

[www.alluringsrilanka.com](http://www.alluringsrilanka.com)  
[www.lib.mq.edu.au/all/journeys/menu.html](http://www.lib.mq.edu.au/all/journeys/menu.html)  
[www.sellipi.com/srilanka](http://www.sellipi.com/srilanka)  
[www.lankalibrary.com](http://www.lankalibrary.com)

# Some Memories of my years in Jaffna

## Part 6

by Neville Jayaweera

T

### The pompous Puisne Judge

There was this pompous Puisne Judge who insisted on being addressed as "My Lord" wherever he went, even on social occasions. The only concessions he made to civilian life was to leave his ermine robes at home when venturing out. One evening he and his wife had gone for a social event at the Jaffna Public Services Club, where young doctors and other staff officers tend to get drunk and



forget themselves and where the Judge's pompous ways were known and loathed by all. It so happened that a young doctor who did not care for any Supreme Court protocol, got drunk and walking up to the judge, put his arm round him and addressing him as "I say, Judge!" said, "why don't you and your wife get on the floor and dance?" Taking serious offence at the young doctor's seeming impudence, the Judge stormed out, trailing his wife behind him. The following morning, from his chambers in the Town Hall, the Judge telephoned me "officially" and relating the incident wanted me, as Fiscal, to have the doctor arrested and produced before him in court. In my capacity as Fiscal, I have to carry out the sitting judge's instructions on all matters relating to court cases and court procedure, but I did not see that obligation to include having to pander to every whim and fancy the judge may entertain in his pompous little mind. So, I asked the judge what offence the doctor had committed and he said that he had committed "contempt of court". I asked the Judge with heavy sarcasm, "But was the Assize Court in session at the club that evening?" The Judge replied pompously that wherever a serving Supreme Court Judge happens to be at any given moment his court is deemed to be in session. "Even on the toilet or in the bath"? I asked, with even more sarcasm, risking a con-

tempt charge even against myself! I went on tell the judge that even if the doctor's action in putting his arm round him and addressing him as "I say, Judge!" would constitute "contempt", it was very imprudent for him, being a Supreme Court Judge, to attend a club evening, where it is the custom for young men to get drunk and let down their hair, for which reason, I myself never attend club evenings, much less with my wife!! I pointed out that if the doctor in question chose to contest a ruling against him for contempt, the Judge would have to give evidence as the principal witness and that he would not look very dignified being cross examined in his own court. He growled and let the matter go.

### Those gentle breezes

This happened on a hot, steamy April evening (only those who have lived in Jaffna know what a hot steamy April evening in Jaffna is like). These two dear sisters, both spinsters who had seen better days, called formally on Trixie and me. The atmosphere, heavy with the heat of the day was like a thick blanket thrown over the land and not a leaf stirred. Even the insects of the night who normally start up an interminable cacophony the moment the sun goes down, seemed to have retired early. As we sipped at our glasses of orange juice, the clinking of the ice cubes against glass and the droning of the ancient ceiling fan the only noises disturbing the silence of the evening, except for our conversation of course, I apologised to the dear ladies for the intolerable heat of the day. Whereupon, the elder of the two, said with a comforting assurance, "You know Mr Jayaweera, where we live it is not like this at all." And, as if to drive the point home, she emphasised, "Not like this at all". Which of course was quite understandable, because they lived in a spacious house by the sea, from where gentle winds would spring up, especially in the evenings, and flow through all their rooms. She continued, "Really Mr Jayaweera, you and your wife must come round some time and feel the gentle breezes that come from our backside" (sic). Trixie looked at me, her eyes popping out, as if she was choking on an ice cube, but having assured myself that she was all right, with total composure and stiff upper lip and all that and deploying my best diplomatic skills, I remarked, "Really! Miss --- yes of course, we must come round some time and experience those wonderful breezes you speak of."

### A fishy story

I had always been a fresh-fish fancier, not only having a fish pond wherever I went but also breeding them. So it was that in Jaffna also I kept some giant

gurami fish in a large pond within the Residency park. Under favourable conditions giant gurami grow to about 24 inches, reach a weight of 10 kg, and live from 20 to 25 years. When I was leaving Jaffna I had one of these gurami, at that time only a few inches in size, introduced into the large fish pond which I had got the PWD to sink right in front of the new Secretariat and left instructions for the OA (Office Assistant) to feed it with a loaf of bread every two days and some *kankun* (a vegetable rich in iron and much favoured among the people) which is the gurami's staple food, every week, and charge the cost to the Secretariat maintenance budget. What I did not know was that my staff had thought that I was a complete crank! They just could not wrap their minds round acts of such wanton profligacy bestowed on a mere fish!!

Ten years passed and I was now GA Vavuniya, having been exiled there by Mrs B in 1970 for being a "UNP man". One Sunday I decided to drive up to Jaffna to look up some former friends and so it was that my chauffeur Banda and I were driving past the Jaffna Secretariat when I remembered the gurami fish. So, asking Banda to pull up outside the Secretariat gate, we both walked into the premises. A watcher who was obviously new on the patch and did not know me at all came up to us, a *beedi* in his mouth, his sarong tucked up behind, and accosted us *Enna vanum?* (What do you want?) I simply ignored him and Banda and I walked up to the pond and waited, hoping to catch a sight of the fish. We did not have long to wait when the fish, now grown to a full 20 inches or so, came up for air. Pointing to it excitedly, I exclaimed to Banda, *anna, anna, balanna maaluwa* (look! look! there is the fish). Whereupon the watcher, his *beedi* still dangling between his lips and with complete nonchalance, remarked in Tamil *Athu thaan Neville Jayaweera*" (that is Neville Jayaweera). I saw Banda, my chauffeur, freeze. Recovering, he shot back angrily in Tamil, *Adai, vayapothtu da, athu arashanga athipar thaan nj* - (Hey! shut up you ----. NJ is the Government Agent) to which the watcher replied, with evident disdain, *neengal suuma irunga, namakkku theriyum, athu periya meen thaan nj* (you just don't try to teach me,. I know what I am talking about, Neville Jayaweera is that huge fish) In order to head off another Sinhala-Tamil clash which seemed imminent, I led Banda away as quickly as our legs would carry us, leaving the watcher to watch over his domain.

Obviously, what had happened was that after I left, the staff, tickled no end by the departing GA's eccentric ways, had named the fish "Neville Jayaweera" and as far as the watcher was concerned, being new to the job and never having met

me, nj was just a giant gurami fish that swam about in the Secretariat pond! Actually, the gurami called Neville Jayaweera had a more distinguished career than its two-legged name sake! Another 15 years passed and the IPKF (Indian Peace Keeping Force) were now in occupation of Jaffna having come there to quell the rebellion by Tamil militants. One day, a hungry IPKF sergeant, tired of stuffed *chappati* and all that, and deciding that he preferred fried gurami for dinner instead, was trying to net Neville Jayaweera out of the pond for his frying pan, when the LTTE local commander, hearing the news on the grapevine (the LTTE were then on friendly terms with the IPKF) quickly sent the sergeant a note, saying that Neville Jayaweera belonged to the people of Jaffna and no one is to touch it! For the LTTE as well, Neville Jayaweera was just a venerable gurami fish!

Eventually, one day in the late 1980s, the much revered gurami Neville Jayaweera, having lived out its life span of over 25 years on earth, fulfilled and much adored by the people of Jaffna, was found floating in the pool upside down, dead of natural causes!. The saga of the gurami fish was told me by Panchalingam who was the GA Jaffna in the late 80s. Ironically, Panchalingam himself was later assassinated by the LTTE, who apparently did not value their current GA's life as much as it did a gurami's. What a world!

After serving the people of Jaffna for three years, that my name and identity amongst them should have endured only thanks to a gurami fish, was perhaps the most salutary corrective my ego had received, at least up that that time! On that humbling note ended my exciting Jaffna saga and I praise God for small mercies!

*Excerpts from unpublished memoirs concluded*



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## Synopses of Meetings

### Sydney: 17 August 2008

After President Sunil de Silva's brief introduction of the guest speaker, Stefan D' Silva launched his talk entitled *My fascination with the diversity of Wildlife in Ceylon* on a personal note by stating that he was no where in the league of the professional photographer but just an amateur cameraman with a passion for recording wildlife in a beautiful and exotic island. Nor did he claim, he said, to be an authority on the subject matter, but a mere observer of nature which he saved on film for future generations to enjoy, study and pursue.

Prior to describing the diverse fauna of Sri Lanka, Stefan commented that, sadly, in the last twenty years or so, news in the world media was confined to reporting on the racial conflict in the country and the real beauty and splendour that Sri Lanka had to offer had been missed or ignored. No matter what changes may take place, the ancient history of Sri Lanka is testimony that its charm and beauty will outlast all upheavals taking place in the country.

Illustrating his talk with his own excellent photographs, Stefan stated that one does not need to visit remote jungles to encounter some of the country's precious animal and birdlife. If observant enough, much of the birds and small animals are regular visitors to many gardens of Colombo, giving enthusiasts an insight into their habits in their own backyards.

Grey Langur and Toque monkeys commonly roam residential and picnic areas. Another regular visitor to city gardens is the Black-headed Oriole adding a strong splash of gold against the foliage. Among other birds that are frequent visitors to gardens that have preserved trees and hedges are: Brown-headed Barbets, Sun birds, Taylor Birds, Magpie Robins, House Sparrows, White-rumped Munias, the scavenging Greater Coucal and the Red-vented Bulbul that will nest even inside private homes. Then there's the Asian Koel and the gorgeous Paradise Flycatcher flitting from branch to branch picking up one insect after another, the Plaintive Cuckoo, the White-bellied Drongo and Rose-ringed Parakeets who nest in holes in trunks of trees and even the Indian Pond Heron, standing stock still and blending well into dirty banks of Colombo's storm water drains.

Garden Lizards are commonly seen in residential areas, as is the Water Monitor, Sri Lanka's largest lizard, which frequents the canal banks of Colombo. While Five Line Palm Squirrels are seen frequently in country gardens, the occasional Giant Rock Squirrel can be found darting from tree to tree seeking a fruity morsel.

Of course, the serious enthusiast had to go off the beaten track, visiting the many National Parks and Bird Sanctuaries. Herds of elephant roam the jungles all over the country. One of the most beautiful big cats of the world, the Leopard, abounds in Yala, Wilpattu National Park maintains its reputation for Leopard sightings. Along with Leopard, Wild sambhur also roam the Horton Plains National Park. Varieties of deer, wild boar, sloth bear can be encountered in the wild.



Stefan D'Silva

In the three-lagoons of Anaivilundawa Bird Sanctuary, the wetlands of Bundala Bird Sanctuary, Kuda Oya and the Tissa Lake, in addition to the huge Mugger crocodiles, many migratory birds, brilliantly blue common kingfishers, Grey Herons, flocks of Cormorants and water birds abound. The Changeable Hawk Eagle and Crested Serpent Eagle, said to be associated with the legendary Devil Bird, are found in Yala and elsewhere. Whilst the White-bellied Fishing Eagle and the Grey-headed Fish eagle frequent the Uda Walawe National Park. Pheasant-tailed Jacanas, Spoonbills, Wooly-necked Storks, Painted Storks and Open-bill Storks are frequent callers at these waterways. One might also be lucky to sight the very Rare Black-necked Stork.

Doug Jones

### Colombo: 30 August 2008

The President opened the meeting welcoming all and introducing the CSA to guests and the Secretary Daya Wickramatunga introduced the speaker of the evening - Tissa Devendra. He said, Mr Devendra had spent many decades in the provinces as a senior administrator and later as a UN expert and would share with us his experience of the Kachcheri system of Provincial Administration in the post-independence era

Tissa Devendra prefaced his talk on **THE KACHCHERI – 1948-2008** by saying that he would draw only from his memory and nothing else.

#### Preamble

'Cutcherry' was a Tamil word for the office of mid 19<sup>th</sup> century colonial tax-collectors in Madras (Chennai - India). The colonial government developed the classic administrative device, widely used in India and Africa, of a senior civil servant exercising full authority over a district. In Ceylon he was designated "Government Agent" (or GA), whose office was called the "Kachcheri". British civil servants after a brief cadetship were appointed as GA.s of Provinces or as Assistant GA.s (AGA) of Districts. Ceylonese who entered the Ceylon Civil Service early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century were never appointed GA.s or AGA.s but shunted off, as Paul Pieris was, to Magistracies etc. It was only in the early 1940s that they were appointed GA.s and AGA.s probably under pressure from the elected members of the State Council.

#### The original structure

The Colonial civil servant had to collect revenue, administer law & order, allocate "Crown" land, supervise irrigation etc. Initially GA.s used the existing Sinhala administrative framework of Divisions *Korales or Pattus* each headed by a member of the former ruling class: *Rate Mahattayas* in Kandyan areas, *Mudaliyars* in the Maritime and Tamil areas. Rumblings against this feudal practice (and power) came to a head with the emergence of a new ruling class - elected Members of the State Council. Geographically, Divisions generally covered the same area as Electorates. As a result the Government decided on a Sub-Civil Service – the Divisional Revenue Officer (D.R.O.) Service in place of the old officials. They were selected at a competitive exam, open to non-graduates, and given a pretty thorough training. The cadre was divided into ethno-linguistic groups – Sinhalese (Low Country & Kandyan), Tamil and Mus-

lim and they were accordingly assigned to their “traditional homelands”.

But DRO Divisions remained Village Headman’s Divisions under Headmen from a prominent local families selected by GA, on the DRO’s recommendation. This system of appointment prevailed till the 1960s when it was replaced by open competitive examination. The Village Headman Division was, and yet remains, the vital cog of Kachcheri administration – as anybody who has to get a new National Identity card knows! Before continuing, he digressed to discuss the name changes that took place in this job. The *Headman/ Aratchchii* designation was considered too grandiose and 1956 saw them downgraded to *Grama Sevaka* [village worker]. These officers felt slighted, agitated and became *Grama Seva Niladhari* – Village Services Officer [the all important word]. Today, the concept of “Service” has disappeared and they are *Grama Niladhari* quite in line with the inflationary trend of government designations.

### The ‘Classic’ Kachcheri

1948 to 1989 was a period of comparative stability as far as Kachcheris went. They were headed by GA – initially from the CCS and later the Sri Lanka Administrative Services (SLAS). The GA was vested with tremendous authority as THE representative of the central government. His original responsibilities for law & order, revenue collection and land administration were handled with a small group of executives – AGA and Office Assistant.

Gradually the GA’s span widened. Food rationing, land distribution, social welfare, rural development, small industries, ‘planning & development’, local and national administration were added to the duties. In those districts with harbours, the GA was also Collector of Customs – and Receiver of Wrecks! The GA’s network of district authority went far wider than the Kachcheri. He had authority over the Police and over every department, ranging alphabetically from A to Z. (as GA I have participated in Archaeological excavation and despatched captured bears to the Zoo.) During the demonetisation of 1970, the GA had sole custody of the new currency and responsibility to issue it. In times of disasters, natural or man-made, it was the GA’s staff which distributed food, built shelters etc. During the 1971 Insurgency, in the ‘garrison town’ of Trincomalee, the GA was the Competent Authority with unified command over the Army, Navy, Air Force and Police in addition to confiscating firearms and rationing food, fuel and issue of curfew passes

Senior GA’s always ran their districts on the basis of delegation and trust. Staff officers had a free hand to do their work and exercise the GA’s authority. It was an ‘honour system’ based on a shared university background and an unwritten code. Looking back, when I was a District Land Officer in my twenties, I am amazed at the authority I so blithely exercised over poor farmers and fishermen in the districts where I worked under the trusting avuncular eye of my GA. Crises, [natural disaster, elections, insurgency, national emergency] were the Kachcheri’s finest hour. To a man, the Kachcheri rallied round the GA. It always reminded me of “all hands on deck” on a ship in a storm. The GA had unfettered access to the heads of departments and ministries. In turn, they had one all-powerful official they could rely on. The Kachcheri scenario began to gradually change with the

times and the benevolent despotism I have described earlier came to be battered by the winds of change.

### The Winds of Change

The first sign came in 1956 with the introduction of Sinhala into administration – rather into the filing system. In reality it was no great change as Sinhala had always been the language in which district conferences and village level activities were conducted by Kachcheri staff officers. The Republican Constitution of 1972, by abolishing the Public Services Commission legitimised political control over the administration. All ‘sensitive’ appointments now served political needs. Government MPs presided over district level meetings. In 1974 a District Political Authority was appointed by a District Minister to give political direction to the GA, but it lacked legal legitimacy and depended on the respective ‘clout’ the minister and the GA wielded in Colombo.

The major assault launched on the Kachcheri system was by the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Constitution imposing elected Provincial Councils (PCs), with their own political leadership and parallel bureaucracy. But the central government, (never enamoured of PCs), kept faith with the GA and the Kachcheri and quietly subverted the importance of the Chief Minister.

Two recent examples illustrate the government’s never-ending need for GAs.

1. Few are aware that a network of GA’s and their AGA’s yet bravely cover the ‘uncleared’ Northern Province, providing a channel for relief and an unacknowledged line of communication with the LTTE. If and when the history of these times is written, the names of the GA’s of Mulaitivu and Kilinochchi should be in letters of gold.
2. The other, lesser example, is when the Minister in charge of consumer affairs recently admitted that the re-established Paddy Marketing Board has failed in the purchase of farmers’ paddy and has released the money to, whom else but, the G.A.?

In my experience of 25 years in district Kachcheries I have seen that no government can ever do away with that “universal joint” the GA and his/her Kachcheri. But that does not mean that I consider its composition ideal. I see a growing insularity in appointments that bodes ill for the inclusive character of our administrative machine. Kandy District, for example, has been reserved for ‘Kandyans only’ since the 1960s. There is also the apparent permanency in this transferable post, of sons/daughters-of-the-soil: GA’s firmly anchored in their ‘gama’ are never totally objective.

To sum up, although politicians may view the Kachcheri and its GA, like the oldest profession, as “a necessary evil”, I firmly believe that it is necessary, and far from evil!

After the talk and exchange of ideas, fellowship over snacks and iced coffee brought the pleasant evening to a close.

*Daya Wickramatunga*

The Chairman Dr. Srilal Fernando introduced the speaker, Mr. Neville Turner, a well known cricket writer and a commentator, whose subject for the day was, ‘***The History, Literature and Culture of Cricket in Sri Lanka***; A Foreigner’s Point of View. Mr. Turner, who is a past president of Melbourne’s Australian Cricket Society and Australian

Sports Society is very highly regarded in cricketing circles world-wide and has close affinity with cricket in Sri Lanka.

Dr. Fernando also welcomed the cricketers of the yester year who were present and conveyed his gratitude to them for being the guiding lights for present day cricketers.

Mr.Turner had witnessed over 2000 test matches in 33 grounds including in Sri Lanka.

During his visits he had attended matches at SSC, Sarawana-muttu Stadium, Colombo Club, Premadasa Stadium, Moratuwa, Galle, Matara, Kurunegala and Kandy grounds for first class matches.

He observed that Sri Lankans display a great enthusiasm for cricket which is far beyond the rest of the cricket playing nations. He cited the practice of *haila* music played at the matches as a manifestation of this great enthusiasm. Mr. Turner maintained a diary on all his visits to Sri Lanka and in a 1992 entry he recorded that Muttiah Muralidaran will attain international recognition. In 2004, Mr. Turner's observation came true; Muralidaran attested to be the greatest bowler of all time and was proclaimed as an apostle for Sri Lanka. In 1992 after witnessing the magnificent Esala Perehara in Kandy, he shared the excitement of an extraordinary test match in history against Australians, the first test match after five years. Sri Lankans obtained an impressive score, but were overconfident and they lost despite three players scoring centuries. Undaunted, Sri Lankans celebrated the event with Percy the mascot dancing to loud music in the pavilions and grounds.

Mr. Turner paid tribute to many Sri Lankan authors who have written definitive books on the sport. He mentioned some of them: *History of Sri Lankan Cricket* by Mr. S.S. Perera, Dr. Michael Robert's monograph titled *Forces and Strands in the Cricket History of Sri Lanka* and *Essay in Cricket. Willow Quartet* by Mr. Channa Gunasekara describes the distinguished Sri Lankans who laid the foundations for the present pre-eminence of their country long before they achieved test status. *Thinking Cricket; A Players Guide to Better Cricket*, compiled by Mr. Ajith C.S. Perera was also commended.

Early history of Sri Lanka's cricket is linked to British military and also to the tea planters in Colombo, Galle and Trincomalee. The Colombo Cricket Club, the first in Sri Lanka, was established in 1832 and still exists. The first international team to visit Sri Lanka was the English, captained by Ivor Bligh in 1882.

In 1982 Sri Lanka gained test status, but regrettably lost the first test match. They also lost the first test match against Australia in 1983 at Kandy but won the World Cup in 1994 and beat the Australians in 1999 at Kandy. A comprehensive chronology of Sri Lanka's cricket history was presented. Mr. Turner concluded his presentation with a warm wish for the future Sri Lankan cricket.

Mr. Barney Reid won the customary raffle drawn by Ms. Ayoma Perera. Tea and refreshments followed prior to the closure of meeting.



Neville Turner

## RECIPE CORNER

### PORT WINE JELLY

You will need -



1 pkt Port Wine Jelly Crystals, 2 teaspoons Gelatine  
1 Cup Hot Water  
2 Cups Dry White Wine  
1/4 Cup Sugar  
1 Strip each of Orange & Lemon Rind, about 1" wide  
425g Pitted Black Cherries

Dissolve jelly crystals and gelatine in hot water. Combine in a saucepan, the white wine, sugar, orange and lemon rinds and stir over heat until sugar dissolves. Stir in dissolved jelly mixture. Strain into bowl. Cool, then refrigerate until mixture thickens to consistency of unbeaten egg white. Stir in drained, halved Cherries. Pour into mould, about 1 litre (4 cup) capacity. Refrigerate until set. Dip mould in hot water for a few seconds and unmould on to serving plate. Serve with whipped cream or ice cream.

This quantity will serve 4 to 6. So for a larger number you do some math and perhaps do it in two moulds for ease of unmoulding. Quite light and delicious for summer and looks nice as well.

*Contributed by Rosemarie Udabage*

## LEVITY CORNER

A British passenger in a taxi in Dublin leaned over to ask the driver a question and tapped him on the shoulder. The driver screamed, lost control of the cab, nearly hit a bus, drove up over the curb, and stopped just inches from the edge of the bridge over the Liffey River .

For a few moments everything was silent in the cab, and then the still shaking driver said, 'Be-Jesus, I'm sorry, but you scared the devil out of me.'

The frightened Brit apologised to the driver and said he didn't realise a mere tap on the shoulder could frighten an Irishman so much.

The driver replied, "Will the Saints in Heaven forgive me, it's entirely my fault. Today is my first day driving a cab.....

**I've been driving a hearse for the last 25 years".**



# The legend of the Devil Bird

by Stefan D'Silva

T

wo of the birds associated with the legend of the Devil Bird are pictured below. I recall as a child my Father rushing back to Colombo from a work related trip to Trincomalee because he had heard the cry of the *Devil Bird* in Habarana and sensed that it signified ‘bad luck’. When he got home in the wee hours of the morning, sure enough my eldest sister was suffering a very high fever and was quite unwell. The superstition attached to the cry of the Devil Bird was firmly established in my parents mind. The Sinhala term for the bird is *Ulama*.

The central theme to the legend states that a villager killed his child and cooked the flesh in a curry for the evening meal. He fed the curry to his wife, who during her meal realised she was eating the flesh of her child and rushed into the jungle where she killed herself. One version tells she stuck a wooden ladle into her hair (or head) as she rushed into the jungle in anguish and it is that ladle that is represented by the crest of the Changeable Hawk Eagle (and strangely enough it does not seem to apply to the crest of the Crested Serpent Eagle)

What is not disputed by all those who have heard the cry of the bird (at night) is its awful sound, closely resembling the strangled cry of a woman in anguish. There are slight variations to the central theme of the legend. Dr R. L. Spittel describes in “*The Devil Birds of Ceylon*” some of the versions and provides a most interesting read. Similarly Jayantha Jayawardene also describes a few versions in his contribution to “*Jungle Journeys in Sri Lanka*”.

What has not been agreed upon by the experts and researchers is the positive identification of which bird is the Devil Bird. The general acceptance is that it may be one of these birds with another popular contender for the “title” being the Forest Eagle Owl. In the mean time the *Ulama* continues to trouble the rural folk in Sri Lanka, with its awful cry. Indeed it also troubles many Colombo folk too.

The two birds are found quite widely in wooded country areas in Sri Lanka.

Reference; *The devil Birds Of Ceylon* by Dr R. L. Spittel

*The Lure and Lore of our jungle* by Jayantha Jayawardene: *Jungle Journeys in Sri Lanka*

Pictures by the Author



Changeable Hawk Eagle



Crested Serpent Eagle

## A CORDIAL WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS



**Dr Gnani Thenabudu & Dr Conway Goldfinch**

*Glebe, NSW*

**Dr Gamani & Malkanthi Goonetilleke**

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*Battaramulla, Sri Lanka*

**Steuart de Silva**

*Normanhurst, NSW*

*...and Gift Subscription recipient of four issues of  
**The Ceylankan** awarded by a member:*

**Anne S Fraser**

*Florida, USA*



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2007 calendar year subscriptions are now over-due and 2008 are due. Australian members may send personal cheque/MO in favour of the Ceylon Society of Australia to Srikantha Nadarajah 50A -The Esplanade - Thornleigh NSW 2120, or arrange direct payment to the Society's account BSB 062-308 Acc# 1003 8725 at Commonwealth Bank. A standing order on your bank to debit your account on a given date will ensure your subs are never in arrears. Overseas members are kindly reminded to send their remittances by Bank Draft in Australian currency or pay by using SWIFT Code CTBAAU2S. Personal cheques in foreign currency cannot be accepted. Those making direct payment to Bank are requested to inform the Treasurer by email where possible. Sri Lankan resident members have the option of paying in Rupees to local Treasurer. Please see contact details in adjacent panel.

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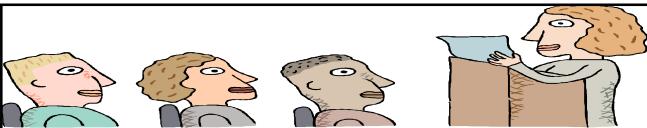
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## NEXT SYDNEY MEETING AGM & DINNER

7.00 PM Saturday November 29 2008

Venue: Thornleigh Community Centre  
Corner Phyllis & Central Avenues  
(off Pennant Hills Road)  
Thornleigh

AGM will be followed by a Buffet Dinner and  
a Sing-along of Carols & perennial favourites  
thereafter

Live music by Anston Francke

Bookings & tickets contact any Committee member  
(see facing page) or Treasurer S. Nadarajah (9980 1701)  
Social Convenor Chandra Senaratne (9872 6826)

## NEXT MELBOURNE MEETING

TBA

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

Info: Shelagh -03 9808 4962 Or Srilal -03 9809 1004

## NEXT COLOMBO MEETING

Saturday, November 29th. at 5.30 pm

**M.D. "Tony" Saldin**

will speak on his readings and research on  
**The O'Deens of Australia**

(A Malay-Sinhala family exiled to N.S.W. in 1815)

Venue:

Organisation of Professional Associations (OPA),  
Stanley Wijesundara Mawatha, Colombo 7

Info: Somasiri - 2737180 - Mike - 0775412420  
Daya - 2786783

## How to become a member of the Ceylon Society of Australia

Contact Treasurer Srikantha Nadarajah  
50A The Esplanade Thornleigh NSW 2120  
Ph: 02 9980 1701  
E-mail: vsnadarajah@bigpond.com

### In search of speakers

The committee would welcome nominations of knowledgeable and academic persons to speak at our regular meetings, in Sydney, Melbourne and Colombo. You may have friends, relations who live in or visit Australia./Sri Lanka 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 :

**In Sydney** -President :Sunil de Silva

Ph: 02 9983 1116 E-mail: sunsil@optusnet.com.au

**In Melbourne** - Vice President Srilal Fernando

03 9809 1004 or E-mail: srilalf@bigpond.net.au

**In Colombo** - Local President Somasiri Devendra

2737180 - somasiri@edisrilanka.com

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

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*Two views of Mt Lavinia Hotel - circa 1865*

