



The Ceylankam

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The Ceylon Society of Australia

PRESIDENT

Pauline Gunewardene
Mobile: 0419 447 665
email: paulineg@ozemail.com.au

VICE-PRESIDENT

Dr Srilal Fernando

SECRETARY

Presenji Jayawickrema
Mobile: 0421 560 282
email: presenji@tpg.com.au

TREASURER & PUBLIC OFFICER

Deepak Pritamdas
Mobile: 0434 860 188
email: deepakps1@gmail.com

PUBLIC RELATIONS OFFICER

Vacant

PUBLICATIONS OFFICER

Nalin Karunatilake
Mobile: 0408 253 984
email: nkarunat@iinet.net.au

EDITOR

Adam Raffel
Mobile: 0407 530 139
email: adamraf2@tpg.com.au

SOCIAL CONVENOR

Amal Wahab
Mobile: 0411 888 182
email: awahab15555@gmail.com

EX-OFFICIO

Thiru Arumugam
Tel: (02) 8850 4798
email: thiru.aru@gmail.com

LIFE MEMBERS

Hugh Karunanayake
Mobile: 0448 998 024
email: karu@internode.net.au

Doug and Hyacinth Jones

Mobile: 0415 378 861
email: dougjay20@gmail.com

EDITORIAL SUB-COMMITTEE

Thiru Arumugam
Hugh Karunanayake
Nalin Karunatilake

MELBOURNE CHAPTER CONVENOR

Logan Thuraiaratnam
Tel: 0468 348 153
email: a.logendran@gmail.com

COLOMBO CHAPTER COMMITTEE

CONVENOR/LOCAL PRESIDENT

M.D. Tony Saldin
Tel: +94 11 293 6402 (w) +94 11 293 1315 (h)
Fax: +94 11 293 6377 Mobile: +94 77 736 3366
email: saldincan@sltnet.lk

IMMEDIATE PAST PRESIDENT

M. Asoka T. de Silva
Tel: +94 11 282 2933 Mobile: +94 76 566 4311
email: desilvaasoka@yahoo.com

VICE PRESIDENTS

Daya Wickramatunga
Tel: +94 11 278 6783 (SL) / +61 2 6281 0414 (Aus)
Mobiles: +94 77 3174 164 (SL) / +61 416 048 476 (Aus)
email: dashanwick@gmail.com

Rear Admiral Y.N. Jayaratne
mobile: +94 71 491 8537
email: ynjayarathna@gmail.com

LOCAL SECRETARY

Insiah Davoodbhoy
mobile: +94 77 870 5575
email: insiah.davoodbhoy@gmail.com

LOCAL TREASURER

vacant

LOCAL ASSISTANT TREASURER

Devishka Ranasinghe
Mobile: +94 76 428 1044
Email: djeromer20@gmail.com

EX-OFFICIO

Somasiri Devendra
Tel: +94 11 273 7180 Mobile: +94 71 909 2986
email: somasiridevendra1@gmail.com

Anandalal Nanayakkara

mobile: +94 77 327 2989
email: anandalal10@gmail.com



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CONTENTS

- From the Editor 3
- Our Readers Write 4
- Ceylonese under surveillance in London by LOGAN THURAIRATNAM 5
- A Poem 10
- A Bend in the Mahaweli - Final Chapters by ERNEST MACINTYRE 11
- Social History through Chitty Family Palimpsests by PROF EMERITUS NAREN CHITTY 18
- Captain Edward Henry Pedris: Executed in 1915 and pardoned in 2024 by THIRU ARUMUGAM 24
- Dr Gunadasa Amarasekara celebrates 95th birthday in November 2024 by DR PALITHA GANEWATTA 28
- APPRECIATIONS
 - BRYAN NEY DHARMARATNE 30
 - DR GPLM (LAKSHMAN) DE SILVA 31
 - DR PR (RANJI) WIKRAMANAYAKE 32
- CSA NOTICES
 - SYDNEY 27th AGM and Social on 23 November 2024 33
 - MELBOURNE CHAPTER MEETING 34
 - Announcements etc 35

From the Editor

Dear Readers

Welcome to the final issue of 2024! As another year draws to a close I urge those members who reside in Sydney and surrounds to attend our end of year knees up, commonly known as the 27th Annual General Meeting and Social, on the 23rd of November to be held at the Pennant Hills Community Centre. Details are on page 33. It should be a fun evening to socialise with each other and farewell the year.

As you may have noticed this issue doesn't have a cover story. Instead I have included a series of short articles about individual Sri Lankans, both fictional and real that I hope you find interesting reading.

Starting with Logan Thurairatnam's reporting on Ceylonese independence activists and their Indian colleagues under surveillance in London in the 1930s and 1940s and ending with a short article by Dr Palitha Ganewatta on the distinguished Sri Lankan writer, Sinhala cultural intellectual and poet Dr Gunadasa Amarasekara.

We also have the final three chapters of *A Bend in the Mahaweli*, Ernest Macintyre's fictional memoir of his university days at the Peradeniya campus of the University of Ceylon in the late 1950s. It is beautifully evocative of the times and engages in the social and political climate in Ceylon of the late 1950s with depth in a light conversational style.

One of the highlights of this year was a talk given by Professor Emeritus Naren Chitty on his family history titled *British Ceylon through a family lens from 1850 to 1950: Social History through Chitty Family Palimpsests*. The talk is reported in full in the form an article on page 18 replete with fascinating photographs of Naren's ancestors with famous Ceylonese. This is one for the history buffs!

Thiru Arumugam has penned another fascinating piece on Captain Edward Henry Pedris who was executed by the British in 1915 and pardoned 109 years later in 2024. It is a tragic story about a miscarriage of justice about a relatively unknown incident in Ceylon's history.

It is with sadness I have to report the passing of three distinguished CSA members, whose moving appreciations by Hugh Karunanayake appear in this issue. On behalf of the readers of *The Ceylankan* I pass on our deepest condolences to the families and loved ones of Bryan Ney Dharmaratne, Dr GPLM (Lakshman) de Silva and Dr PR (Ranji) Wikramanayake. May their souls rest in peace.

I was glad to receive a touching short poem by an anonymous author that Saminah Davoodbhoy Madraswala dedicated to her daughters and daughter-in-law. Saminah is the sister of Insiyah Davoodbhoy who is the Local Secretary of the Colombo Chapter.

Once again, I encourage readers and subscribers to contribute short articles, anecdotes, poems and recipes. I also encourage subscribers to go to the CSA website (<https://ceylon-society.com/>) and peruse back issues of this journal. I assure you they make fascinating reading.

Compliments of the season to you all. Happy holidays and a prosperous and peaceful 2025!

Happy reading!

ADAM RAFFEL

Ceylon Society of Australia

The Ceylon Society of Australia (CSA) is a not-for-profit organisation, incorporated in Australia, with the objectives of studying, fostering and promoting interest in the historical and cultural heritage of Sri Lanka.

It is non-political and non-partisan, steering clear of controversial issues. It is a worldwide society of like-minded people, open to receiving and imparting new ideas. While Sydney is home to the parent body and Committee, looking after the overall affairs of the Society, the Melbourne Chapter looks after the meetings in Victoria, with the Colombo Chapter tending to the membership in Sri Lanka. Quarterly free meetings for Members are held in Sydney, Melbourne and Colombo, with guests welcome to attend. Meetings conclude with a Q&A session and a mini Social.

The annual calendar year subscription covers receipt of the Society's journal, "*The Ceylankan*", published quarterly and distributed to members worldwide. The articles published are authored by members. All opinions expressed are those of the individual writers and do not reflect those of the Editor or the CSA. Articles may be reproduced in other publications, but must be credited to this journal and carry suitable acknowledgment

The CSA, when meeting in Australia, acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land in which meetings are held and pays respects to First Nations Elders, past and present, as custodians of a rich cultural heritage.

Our Readers write

Burgher Settlement League

I have read Earlson Forbes' extended piece 'Fortress White Australia', (*The Ceylankan* J 106 Vol 27(2) May 2024, p 26) in which he refers to my grandfather. My grandfather was George F van der Hoeven, who was the founder and president of the Burgher Settlement League, not J.G. van der Hoeven mentioned in Earlson's article. To quote from the article: "Besides the individual and family applications, there were proposals for mass migration put forward at this time. The most significant of such proposals was the one promoted by the Burgher Settlement League, whose secretary was Mr J. G. van der Hoeven [sic]. Mr. van der Hoeven's proposal was to set up a fund to assist Burghers ..."

Earlson has in a more recent email confirmed that the reference in his article should have been to G. F. van der Hoven and not J. G. van der Hoeven.

It's a shame that my grandfather's 'grand plan' did not pay off!

Interestingly I did find a reference to the Burgher Settlement League referring to Pat Bartholomeusz on page 99 of the booklet about the State Electricity Commission of Victoria (SEC) in La Trobe Valley titled: *La Trobe Valley Social History: Celebrating and recognising Latrobe Valley's history and heritage* (Dept Environment, Land Water and Planning (Vic), 2019):

"Wilfred Everard ('Pat') Bartholomeusz was born in the 1930s in Columbo [sic], Sri Lanka, of Dutch ancestry. He arrived in Australia as a migrant in the 1950s through the Burgher Settlement League, which assisted Sri Lankan burghers (those with European ancestry) in migrating to Australia.... On arriving in Australia, Pat had no carpentry skills and did not feel competent building his own home, which was a common endeavour at the time, and hence he was attracted to the SEC as a place to work because it offered staff housing. He and his wife moved into a house in Newborough and became active in the local community and the local Methodist (later Uniting) Church. Pat served as a councillor for the Shire of Moe and became Mayor.... Pat was employed as an accountant with the SEC and was an active union member with the Municipal Employees' Association. He is modest about his achievements. He feels that '*somehow coming to Australia changed me. I got that ability to speak up*'. He also feels that he was '*nurtured in this community*' and that helped him to develop the necessary skills to work effectively in community action. Pat is also involved in assisting new migrants to Australia and in 2010 he was awarded a Victorian Multicultural Award for Excellence."

Nick van der Hoeven
Melbourne VIC

Ceylonese under surveillance in London during the 1930s and 1940s

Logan Thurairatnam

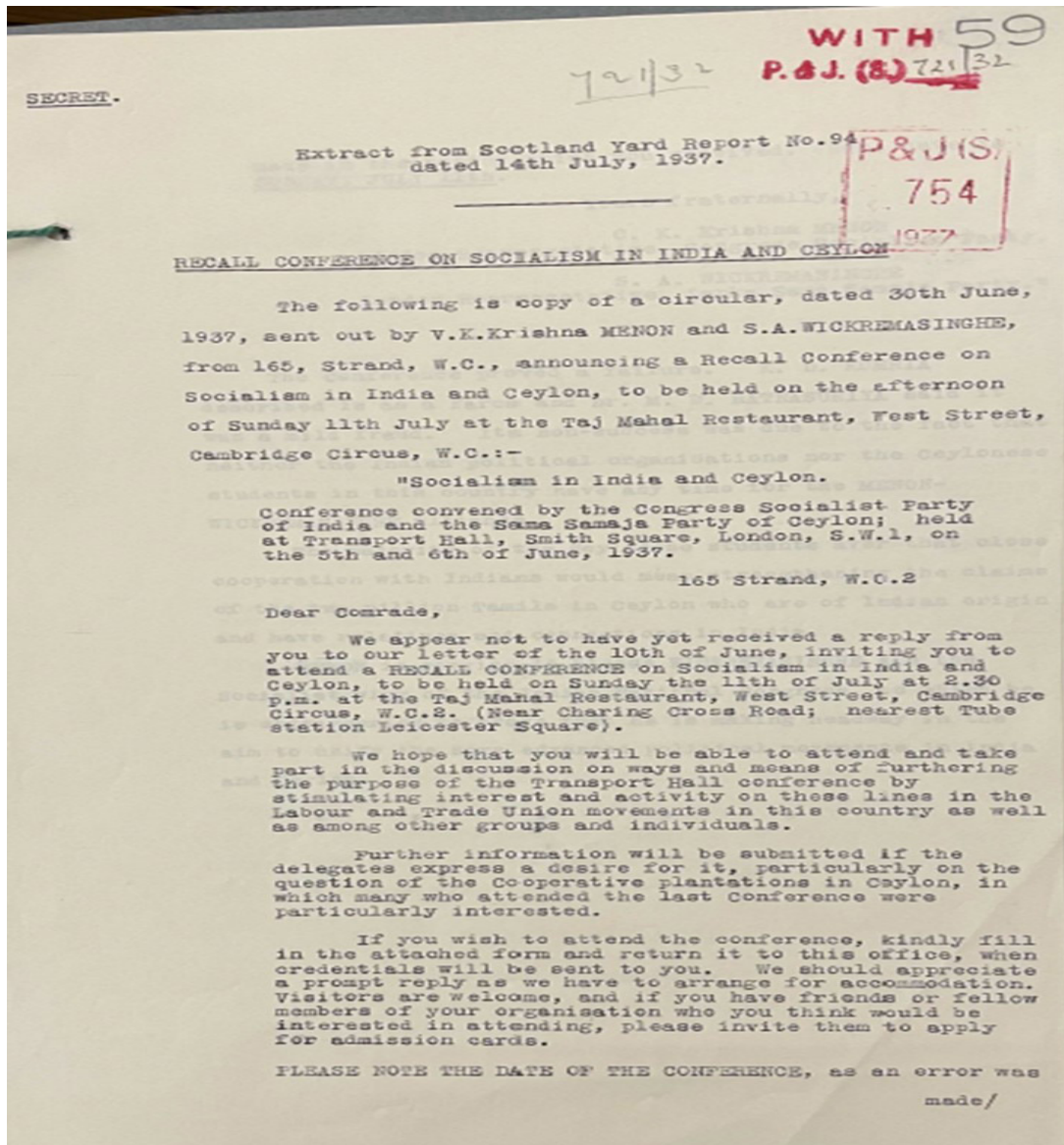
There is an extensive collection of papers and reports in the British National Archives police papers that relate to the activities of the India League. The India League was an England-based organisation established by Krishna Menon in 1928. It campaigned for full independence and self-governance of British India. These papers show that Scotland Yard's surveillance of this group was meticulous. Many of the reports were stamped "SECRET". Although the material was related to India, Ceylon's interests are also intertwined.

The examples of the pages (in the various reports) shown below consist of meetings and of those in attendance. Interestingly, many Ceylonese in London were active in the India League and consequently under surveillance. This is a mere snapshot of the information held in the archives.

Report No.94 – 14th July 1937; V.K. Krishna Menon, S.A. Wickremasinghe et al.

The report on "Recall Conference on Socialism in India and Ceylon" shows the politics within India League and other Indian organisations jockeying for relevance and importance whilst collectively projecting the Indian cause.

The British observation regarding the potential claims of the two million Tamils in Ceylon is very perceptive. The Sri Lankan ethnic issue was on the boil even as early as 1937. The "Brown Sahibs" had an accommodating environment to sow the seeds of discontent.



60

2.

made in the notice which you received. The date is
SUNDAY, JULY 11th.

Yours fraternally,

C. K. Krishna MENON
London Representative, Congress Socialist Party.

S. A. WICKREMASINGHE
London Representative, Lanka Sama Samaja Party."

.

The conference proved a failure. K. D. KUMRIA
described it as a farce and Dr. M. D. RATNASURIYA said it
was a mild fraud. Its non-success was due to the fact that
neither the Indian political organisations nor the Ceylonese
students in this country have any time for the MENON-
WICKREMASINGHE alliance.

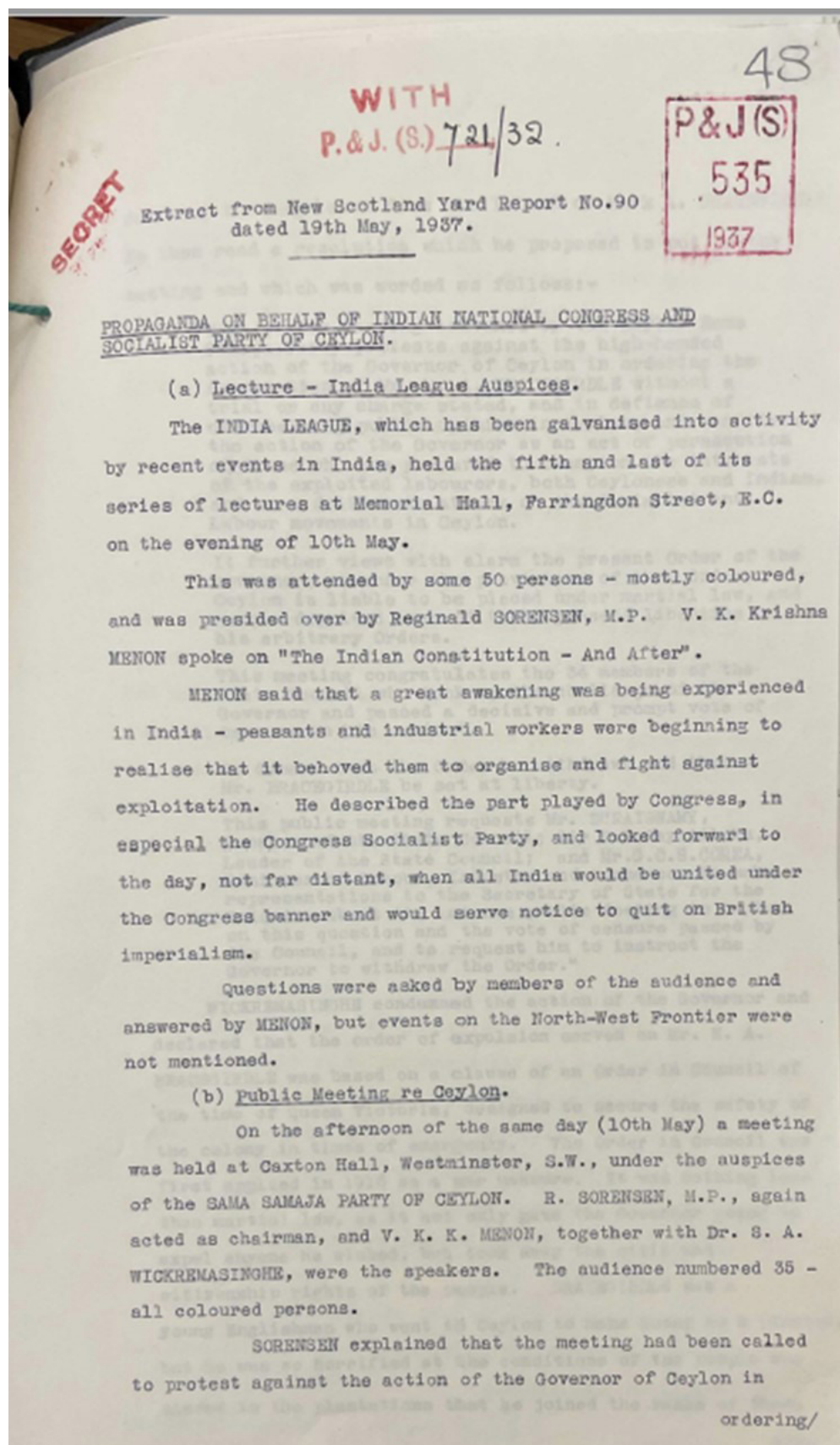
The majority of the Ceylonese students aver that close
cooperation with Indians would mean strengthening the claims
of the two million Tamils in Ceylon who are of Indian origin
and have relatives and connections in India.

MENON is trying to please WICKREMASINGHE and the
Socialist wing of the Indian National Congress, to which he
is endeavouring to prove that he is making headway in the
aim to unify the more advanced political movements in India
and Ceylon.

* * * * *

Report No.90 – 19th May 1937; V.K. Krishna Menon, S.A. Wickremasinghe et al.

The report on "Propaganda on behalf of Indian National Congress and Socialist Party of Ceylon" has a reference to the case of Mark A. Bracegirdle whose deportation from Ceylon was ordered by the Governor. The protestations of the Ceylon Sama Samaja Party are included in this report.



ordering the expulsion from the Island of Mark A. BRACEGIRDLE. He then read a resolution which he proposed to put to the meeting and which was worded as follows:-

"This public meeting convened by the Ceylon Sama Samaja Party protests against the high-handed action of the Governor of Ceylon in ordering the deportation of Mr. M. A. BRACEGIRDLE without a trial or any charge stated, and in defiance of overwhelming public opinion in Ceylon, and considers the action of the Governor as an act of persecution of those who are prepared to champion the interests of the exploited labourers, both Ceylonese and Indian, and as a deliberate attack on the Socialist and Labour movements in Ceylon.

It further views with alarm the present Order of the Governor, as under the provisions of that Order, Ceylon is liable to be placed under martial law, and people deprived even of their present liberties by his arbitrary Orders.

This meeting congratulates the 34 members of the State Council who took up the challenge of the Governor and passed a decisive and prompt vote of censure on his conduct.

We demand that the Order be withdrawn and that Mr. BRACEGIRDLE be set at liberty.

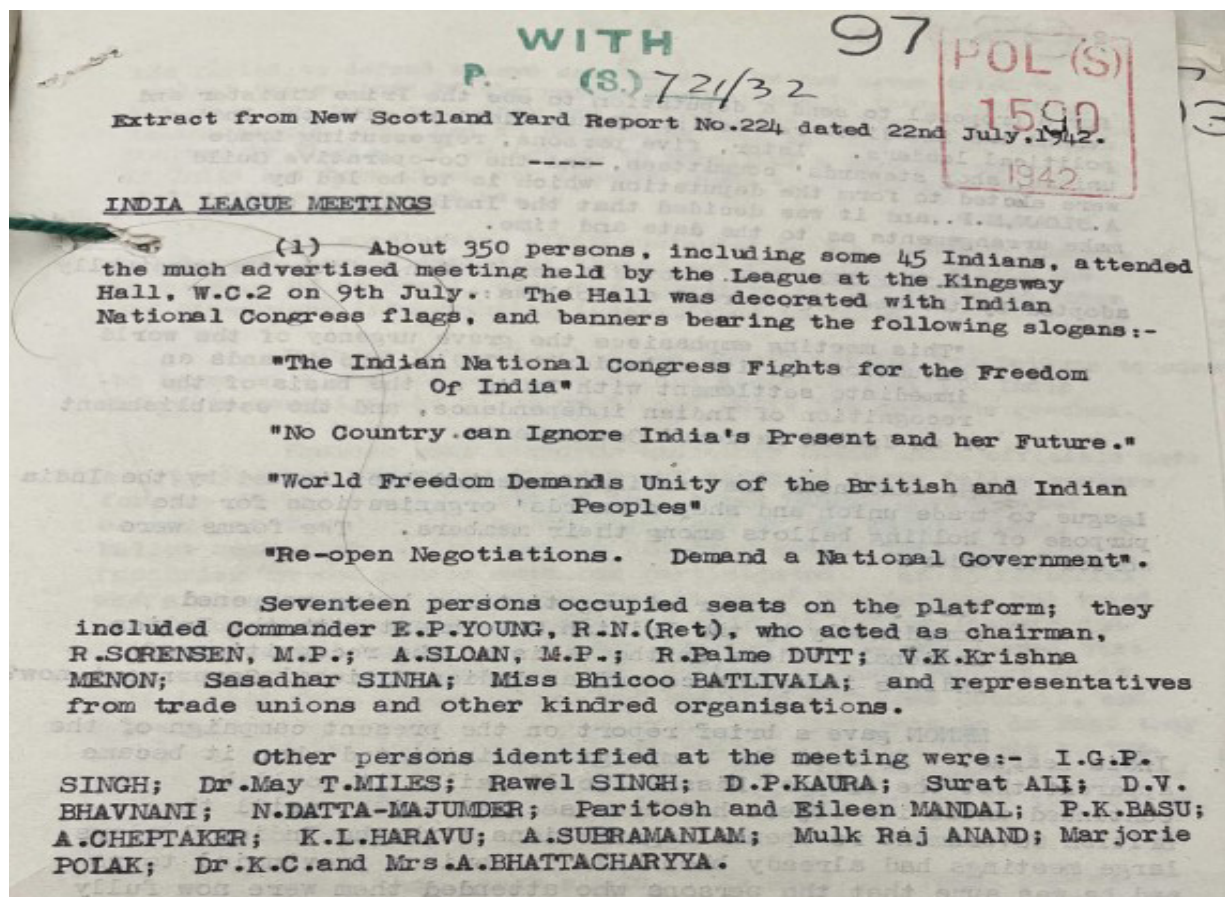
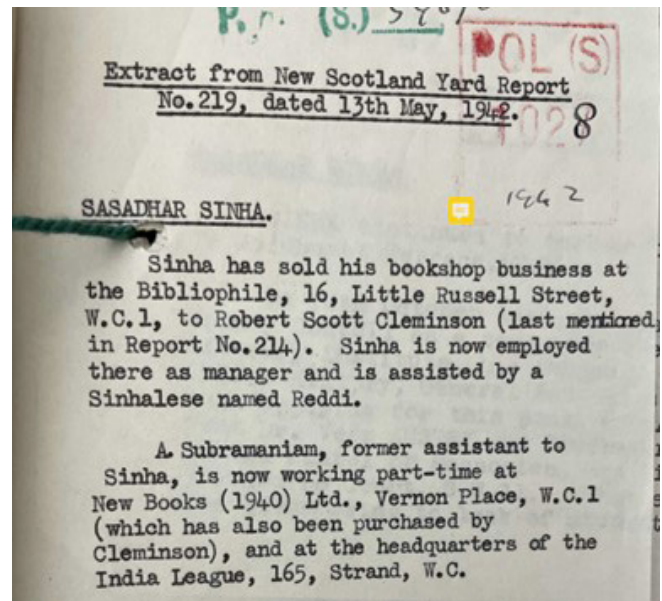
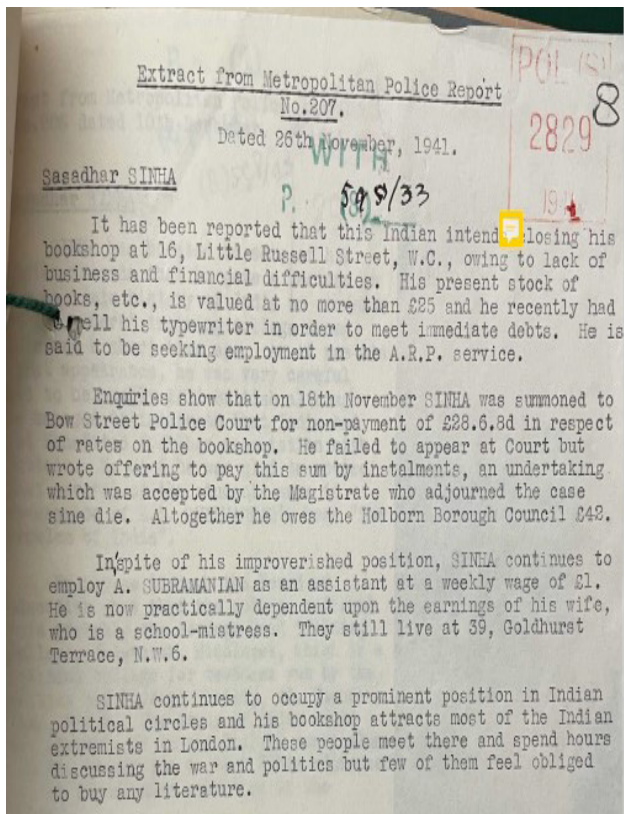
This public meeting requests Mr. DURAISWAMY, Speaker of the State Council; Sir D.B. Jayatilaka, Leader of the State Council; and Mr. G.C.S. CORREA, Minister of Labour, Industry and Commerce, to make representations to the Secretary of State for the Colonies about the intense public feeling in Ceylon on this question and the vote of censure passed by the Council, and to request him to instruct the Governor to withdraw the Order."

WICKREMASINGHE condemned the action of the Governor and declared that the order of expulsion served on Mr. M. A. BRACEGIRDLE was based on a clause of an Order in Council of the time of Queen Victoria, designed to secure the safety of the colony in times of emergency. The Order in Council was first applied in 1916 as a war measure. It was nothing less than martial law, as it not only gave the Governor power to expel anyone he wished, but took away the civil and citizenship rights of the people. BRACEGIRDLE was a young Englishman who went to Ceylon to make money as a planter but he was so horrified at the conditions of the people who slaved in the plantations that he joined the ranks of those

who/

1941 – 1942; Sasadhar Singha & Alagu Subramaniam

Reports related to Sasadhar Sinha (prominent Indian in the anti-colonial movement) & Ceylon author and barrister Alagu Subramaniam.



END NOTES

1. Krishna Menon was an Indian academic, independence activist, politician, lawyer, and statesman. He was appointed the Minister of Defence and also held numerous diplomatic posts. Ref: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/V._K._Krishna_Menon
2. The reports spell the name as S A Wickremasinghe whilst Wikipedia lists it as S A Wickramasinghe
3. Tarzie Vittachi, *The Brown Sahib*, 1962
4. S A Wickremasinghe, S. A. Wickramasinghe - Wikipedia, He was the first Leftist to be elected to Ceylon State Council in 1931. He is considered one of the leading political figures in the twentieth century of Sri Lanka.
5. Alagu Subramaniam, 'Alagu Subramaniam' - *Wikipedia*

POEM

♥ I FREE YOU, DAUGHTERS ♥

Anonymous

dedicated by **Saminah Davoodbhoy Madraswala*** to her daughters



From left to right: Raeqah Lokhandwala, Sakina Lokhandwala (Insiyah Davoodbhoy's daughters), Shaheda Madraswala, (Saminah Davoodbhoy Madraswala's daughter) Saminah Davoodbhoy Madraswala and Shazeen Zaveri Madraswala (Saminah's daughter-in-law)

♥ I free you daughter's from being what I wasn't and from having what I didn't have. I free you from carrying my frustrations and adjusting to my limitations. I give you all the strength I took from my mother so that every step you take is originally yours.

♥ I give you the treasure of knowing us, always having your back, in tribe, in herd, to all the women of your bloodline. Walk free from my fears, my darkness and my experiences.

♥ May my footprint serve as a guide but never condition you. May the history written with pain in our wombs be released and only be part of a narrative of the past.

♥ While an old world that fears free women dies, you all and I are creating one that loves and honours us.

♥ Be free, let us be free. We're together now, all together. Free Herd.

* Saminah Davoodbhoy Madraswala is the sister of Insiyah Davoodbhoy, who is currently the local Secretary of the Colombo Chapter of the CSA.

A BEND IN THE MAHAWELI - Chapters 10 - 12: A story of Ceylon's first university

by Ernest Macintyre

EDITOR'S NOTE: These short stories are the final three chapters of a 12-chapter memoir *A Bend in the Mahaweli* about Ernest Macintyre's time at the University of Ceylon – Peradeniya. It is important to note that each chapter in Ernest's book can be read as an episode in itself. The Introduction appeared in *The Ceylankan* J 100 Vol 25(4) November 2022, Chapters 1 and 2 appeared in *The Ceylankan* J 101 Vol 26(1) February 2023, Chapter 3 appeared in *The Ceylankan* J 103 Vol 26(3) August 2023, Chapters 4 and 5 appeared in *The Ceylankan* J 105 Vol 27(1) February 2024 and Chapters 6, 7, 8 and 9 appeared in *The Ceylankan* J 107 Vol 27(3) August 2024. There is no need to remember what happened in previous chapters as there is no plot in the conventional sense, just a collection of short stories. The characters are drawn from Ernest's play *Rasanayagam's Last Riot*, written and performed in 1996.

Ernest Macintyre, *Rasanayagam's Last Riot*, (Colombo: Vijitha Yapa, 1996)

Rasa, Philip and Sita, the fictional characters in this story, are the same as the 1996 play. The characters Philip and Sita are loosely based on Ernest and Nalini Macintyre, both CSA members.

CHAPTER 10 – THOUGHTS FROM '58 RIOTS

Parallel with the growth of *Maname* was an increase in the movement towards separateness between the north-eastern Tamil minority and the majority Sinhalese in the larger part of the island. It grew very much bigger than the short prologue in 1956 in May of 1958 and connects with our Peradeniya story. Philip, Sita and Rasa happened to be in Colombo at the time. Rasa had information the Ceylon Pharmaceutical Company was interviewing even people who were soon to graduate. His interest in medical drugs had started while still in Jaffna. Dr Rajasunderam who started the organization, *Gandhiyam* to reduce disease and poverty in the underprivileged Tamils in Sri Lanka, was a friend of Rasa's father and visited their home. Philip and Sita decided to join Rasa for the Colombo visit and Rasa stayed at Philip's home on Mary's Road, Bambalapitiya. Rasa never made his interview with the pharmaceutical company on the 24th of May. For on the 22nd, the riots began and spread island wide.

The Federal Party was to hold a convention in Vavuniya. Sinhala hardliners decided to attack party members travelling there by rail. Polonnaruwa station was the first to be attacked, on May 22. Those Sinhalese policemen who tried to protect Tamils were attacked by the mobs; they had their brains bashed in. Soon gangs began beating Tamils in Colombo and several of its suburbs. Shops were burned and looted. Across

the country, arson, rape, pillage and murder were spreading. Some Sinhalese did try to protect their Tamil neighbours, often risking their own lives to shelter them in their homes. Nearly 12,000 Tamil refugees had fled to camps near Colombo. The total number of deaths is estimated to be 300, mostly Sri Lankan Tamils. Rasa and Philip were confined in Philip's home till the first of June, when some kind of order had been restored by the army. On this date Sita felt it safe enough to venture out to Philip's home in Bambalapitiya. She was dropped by her Sinhalese neighbour in her car. Sita arrived at about ten in the morning, and Philip arranged for her to wait till after lunch. They got talking.

Sita: I can't figure out the intricacies of why this happens...

The other two remained silent and Philip continued:

Philip: I have been thinking ... and Aristotle's theory of tragedy came to mind. Most students give prominence to Aristotle's a Fatal Flaw in the principal character, they don't see that Plot is crucial in Aristotle. I think of Fatal Flaw as Inner Nature of a person, and Plot as Circumstance. It is circumstance that brings out or even creates what I call, inner nature, and I begin to thank it is circumstance that creates an inner nature in the Sinhala people, the middle classes mainly.

The other two still remained silent. They waited for this circumstance which creates an inner nature in the Sinhalese to attack and kill Tamils, but Philip appeared to diverge.

Philip: We all know *Maname*. The tragedy there is set off when Prince Maname has the tribal chief of the forest, who desires Princess Maname, down on the ground well in his grip, after they wrestled the prince stretches out one free arm and asks for his sword, which the Princess has in her hands, to kill the tribal chief. The prince is shaken in disbelief at what she asks. She pleads that the chief's life be spared because he could have got the prince killed with the force of all his tribal men but agreed to single combat wrestling instead. The prince is so shaken by her plea that his grip on the chief loosens. The tribal chief gets the sword and slays the prince. The tragedy is well on its way and the different inner natures of the princess, and the prince appear to be the causes of tragedy. This is too simple because it leaves out that all this would not have happened, inner nature causing this, if they did not have to cross the forest which had to be crossed because it was between the kingdom of the prince and the land of the princess. The circumstance, what Aristotle calls "Plot".

Now, if you look at a map of the area covering Sri Lanka and Tamil Nadu you will see that from the southern border of Andra Pradesh, the northern border of Tamil Nadu, to Vavuniya in Sri Lanka, and further south a narrow strip down to Amparai, live about 71.5 million Tamils, 70 million called Tamil Nadu Tamils and 3.5 million called Sri Lanka Tamils. What is significant for our Aristotelian argument regarding plot or circumstance is that both Tamil Nadu and Sri Lankan Tamils are together in a geographical area that is contiguous. The narrow sea strip separating the northern border of Sri Lankan Tamil territory and the southern border of Tamil Nadu is too narrow to be of consequence. What the middle-class Sinhalese see is the numerical threat of a single contiguous land mass of about 72 million Tamils just above their heads. They think they are far thinking enough to disregard the legal technicality of Tamil Nadu being in a separate sovereign legal state and Sri Lanka having its own sovereignty. Geography and history are more realistic...

Sita:
(cutting in)

Philip:

I remember, in our first year at Peradeniya I learnt that there were about three million Germans on the borders of Czechoslovakia, four hours by train from Germany. And they had settled there in ancient times and in the Middle Ages. In 1938 Germany invaded and annexed these areas...

Whether such lines of thinking of some of the Sinhala middle class is rational and legitimate I don't know, but their use of the masses to attack Tamils calculatedly is irrational and brutal and must be condemned.

If there were even two hundred million Tamils in a state well separated by distance from north and east Lanka, those Sinhalese who fear the virtually contiguous Tamil territory from Ampara in Lanka to the southern border of Andra Pradesh in India, would not cause our tragedy. The contiguity of our Tamil territory with Tamil Nadu, is the situation from which our tragedy emerges. The circumstance, what Aristotle called the Plot. Here Plot created by nature, geography, providing the conditions for the fears, Tamils seen as a huge majority looming over the Sinhala minority. The apparent inner nature of the Sinhalese then emerges in riots against the Sri Lankan Tamils.

Sita:

Yes, the geographical continuity of the Tamils of northeast Lanka with Tamil Nadu does align with your way of looking at Aristotle's theory of tragedy, of circumstance.

I have also been trying to work out "the why" of the problem and what came into my mind is not the particular situation in Sri Lanka, but something universal, applying to all humanity. I got it from my memory of Leonard Woolf's autobiography.

Has it crossed your mind that no single individual attacks another single individual of a different ethnicity or religion? It is always a mob, a mass of one ethnicity attacking either an individual or a group of another ethnicity. This, I think, suggests that the conditioning of humans has not led to a realization of the special individuality of every human. I made a note of what Sarachchandra said at the first *Maname* meeting when talking about Sumana Manamperi's statement that the evil princess of the folk tale represented a particular individual woman, not womankind.

She takes a paper out of her bag and reads:

Sita: (*reading*) “An individual is **that which exists as a distinct entity**. Individuality (or self-hood) is the state or quality of being an individual; particularly (in the case of humans) of being a person unique from other people.”

I also typed on this paper something from Leonard Woolf’s autobiography:
 (*reading*) “In human history we know of, not only in some countries, but across the world, it is the submerging of this precious individual in what was conceived as a mass of people that caused terrible inhuman brutality. It conceals the unwitting practice of treating Humanity as a generality. The man who massacres can do this only if he regards his victims not as individuals like himself but as vague figures of general friends or general foes”

Philip: (*nodding*) Yes, and it applies also to international wars. The other army is not, to its opposing army, a collection of very separate individuals, but Germans, Russians or Japanese. When the bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, they were dropping it on Japanese, not on individuals who may have had a diverse range of attitudes on the second world war. And at the time of the first world war, Thomas Hardy composed a poem, some of the words of which, I still remember from Ludowyk’s first year lectures:
 (*reciting from memory*) *Had he and I but met*

*By some old ancient inn,
 We should have sat us down to wet
 Right many a nipperkin!
 But ranged as infantry,
 And staring face to face,
 I shot at him as he at me,
 And killed him in his place.
 Yes; quaint and curious war is!
 You shoot a fellow down
 You'd treat if met where any bar is,
 Or help to half-a-crown.*

They then sat down to lunch, and Rasa who had listened to Philip’s and Sita’s separate theories to understand the ethnic situation saw a connection.

Rasa: Most important of all, Aristotle said, is the structure of the incidents. For tragedy is an imitation not of men but of an action and of life, and life consists in action, and its end is a mode of action, not a quality. Aristotle considered the plot to be the soul of a tragedy, with character in second place. Yes, the reducing of the Sinhalese to a minority because of the continuity of Tamil territory from Ampara in Sri Lanka right up to the southern border of Andhra Pradesh in India can be the unstated fear that explains the tragedy.



India Administrative Map 2015 Source: Rainer Lesniewski Alamy Stock Vector

CHAPTER 11 – THE DEATH AND REBIRTH OF A LION

Other Peradeniya versions



The Singhaya (Lion) asks his son Sinhabahu: “Me mage putha novetha?” (Is this not my son?)

It was the last occasion when three students who awaited their final exams thought they could have a diversion. Sarachchandra’s new play “*Sinhabahu*” was to have its first tryout within the campus, in the openair theatre situated in the earth on a verdant area of land. It was not the official opening, which was to be many months later. This was a tryout, without entry by ticket. It was free. Most of the attendees were first- and second-year students. Philip, Sita and Rasa were among the few final year students whose exams were to commence the next day. It was circular in design with the seating in terraced formation on one half of the circle, the acting area in the middle. For short it was called the “*Walla*”, Sinhala for “Pit”, Mahinda Dias from Colombo had installed the lighting on tall metal poles.

A single spotlight, right front, revealed the *Pothe Gura* chanting the opening words.

Sinhabahu, a play using overtly, a tale from the first part of the *Mahavamsa* legend, about the origin of the Sinhala Nation, began.

The tragedy unfolded in music, dance movement and the poetry of Ediriweera Sarachchandra.

As the stage lights went out, to end the experience, almost abruptly, when Sinhaya fell dead, on stage, from his human son’s third arrow in his chest, the dumbfounding silence, lasting, seemingly to continue without let up, conveyed that the creator of *Man-ame* had, in his *Sinhabahu* covertly suggested other considerations beyond the *Mahavamsa* story. The word ‘theatre’ as a performed event, usually satisfied at closing curtain that the subject matter, the story was rounded off as a whole. When this performance, of *Sinhabahu* ended in the way it did, it seemed to invite the audience to think of what was left unperformed in a larger story than in the *Mahavamsa* which the audience were familiar with. The origin of the Sinhalese.

Sinhapura

The isolation of this first part of the story may also suggest that it was not to do with the origin of the Sinhalese. Or it had to do with the story of the Sinhalese but left it to the imagination of the audience to complete the narrative in their minds.

All three of our Peradeniya friends had this feeling, experiencing in their minds a second play arising out of the first. It was virtually a new theory of theatre. The actors and the director, still at the unseen back of the circle seemed to have felt what the audience was feeling in silence, though not yet reasoned out, why. They delayed coming forward, and eventually when the cast appeared in the lighted front, the measured clapping from the open-air suggested clapping accompanied by thought.

The implications of this unusual response to the end of a play were in Sita’s mind as they finally left the open-air theatre. Sita had obtained special permission from her warden at Sangamitta Hall to come back late, that night.

The three walked to the New Peradeniya Hotel just three quarters of a mile away. They sat down to await their dinner. Glasses of Arrack, in the two men’s hands, they started discussing Sarachchandra’s “*Sinhabahu*”. Sita was clearly excited.

Philip:

What we experienced tonight could be, in effect, a new theory of theatre. It has to be worked from what we experienced, because, I think, it is unwritten anywhere. The prolonged silence when the play ended suddenly, and the thoughtful measured clapping, conveyed something.

Sita:

The plot line is from the *Mahavamsa* legend of the origin of the Sinhala people, is very well known to Lankans, especially Sinhalese. Unselfconsciously, the legend is a part of a people’s being. Do you realize what Sarachchandra may have done? He ends the play, the moment the Lion father falls dead, with a sudden blackout in the lighting. Play over! So, in the theatre he leaves unperformed, the rest of the legend, stopping at a point of a modern Darwinian influenced story.

Philip: How does Darwin

Sita: (interrupting)

Mythology is a complex phenomenon. Not mythology where the source is unknown, but mythology when we know that a thinking human or humans wrote the story, like the *Mahavamsa*. It is not history, like Darwin’s Evolution, where there is verifiable evidence. The written mythology like the *Mahavamsa* is belief through imagination of a human writer of mythology that man had to “put behind him”, in theatre literally killing the animal from which the human evolved. It suggests the

evolutionary process which came from science many thousands of years later. The writer of the *Mahavamsa* anticipated it in imagination, in the only way he knew, copulation of beast with human, the only reasonable and expected way his imagination could work before the birth of modern science...

Philip: (*cutting in*)

But humans existed during the *Mahavamsa* story, that is, evolution of man had already taken place. This was a one off of a beast producing human progeny from an existing human, one of millions that had already evolved. So it cannot be that the play is about human evolution having to put animals behind you, to move on. That had happened long before Sinhaya took Suppa Devi onto the grass!

Sita:

I'm saying what came to my mind, without any evidence. That is not abnormal.

I'm not saying that in *Sinhabahu* Sarachchandra conceived his play in Darwinian terms assigning a long shot unintended prequel to evolution in the *Mahavamsa*. What I say is that a great work of art shift into the common possession of humanity after it escapes the first close embrace of its creator. I am entitled to react to it using my own imagination, outside what impelled the creating artist.

I remember a trip my parents took me on, to Rome. In the Sistine Chapel of the Vatican, I was looking at the ceiling painting of Michelangelo, *The Creation of Man*. After we had gazed at it for some time my mother said to me, "I saw the opposite". I asked her what "opposite".



She replied, "What I imagine. That man places God in a high position as in the painting, but it is man creating God in man's image, in his own image."

I just said "hmm..."

She continued, "We have been conditioned to think of God as a person" My mother who taught Physics at university, added, "Einstein believed in a God, but said God is a spirit that pervades the universe, not a physical body like us".

Da Vinci lost control to us, of what Mona Lisa was smiling about!

A further implication from Darwin's theory, in much post Darwinian thought, is that while the human as a species evolved from the animal, the animal never got the "acknowledgement" for it. Humans killed off the animal from which they came, in effect, by the way the animal is generally treated today.

In the play, From the moment the Viceroy offers a reward, for killing the Lion that is ravaging the countryside, in search of its human family, and the son accepts the offer, it is conveyed that for the human son to continue to progress, as human, the Lion father has to be eliminated. In Darwinian theory, the animal has to be left behind. In the theatre, literally killed.

It is a modern play, with Darwinian implications. Its intended impact and meaning, that is the play by itself, has only overtly to do with, the *Mahavamsa* legend. Like the folk tale of *Maname* which Sarachchandra transformed into a contemporary play, with the crucial continuity of its premodern form.

You may conceive of the play in another way, apart from the Darwinian.

Philip: What?

Sita:

The playwright is aware that his audience cannot but create another longer play in their thoughts and feelings, relating to this play. The question "did Sarachchandra do this consciously, probing a new idea about theatre theory?" That theatre experience can extend from a play seen to another conceived in the mind. But political factors, social attitudes and psychology embedded in society holds him back.

The legend that Sinhabahu, who killed his Lion father, to progress in the human story, moves on to the origin of the Sinhalese.

At that point it was getting late. They were ready to walk back from the hotel along the Galaha Road. There was some moonlight. After walking for a short while ...

Sita:

The continuity to the abruptly paused *Sinhabahu* had already formed in my mind...

Rasa: Tell us...

Sita: (*relating it, stopping on the road now and then, at points in her imagined story whenever she feels like an excited discoverer*)

I don't think that Sinhabahu as King, after killing his lion father, would have got laid down on cloth, for a flag, a figure representing the life he put away to move on as a human.

Philip: Logical.....

Sita:

The *Mahavamsa* does not tell us, what his son prince Vijaya was rebellious about, to make his father expel him and his followers from the kingdom.

Philip:

True, the epic does not say what Vijaya was rebellious about.

Sita:

Yes, Sinhabahu, as a young boy, did not ask why they lived in a cave, like animals. He asked that

question only when he grew to manhood. It was when Vijaya had passed from childhood that he first noticed that his father's two hands looked different, more like the paws of an animal, he did not know about a lion grandfather who had been killed. Sinhabahu's explanation to his very young son was that sometimes hands in people are deformed at birth in this way. The barely passed childhood Vijaya, accepted the story.

Vijaya grew up further, becoming a young man. It was his turn to ask why they left one kingdom for another. But his father kept putting him off, saying things like, "I have no time now, another time". This happened too many times, not to arouse some kind of suspicion and mystery in Vijaya. He then went to his mother Sinhasevali. She was as sympathetic as Suppa Devi (her mother) was when Sinhabahu asked why they were confined in a cave. Sinhasevali told her son the whole story.

Vijaya was not only stunned but distressed. His distress soon turned to anger against his father. It became visible.

His anger was so great that he had to tell his friends and followers. One day a friend who was a good painter of temple murals, offered an idea. He said he could paint on cloth a lion and that Vijaya could proclaim it as the flag of the kingdom. His followers would support him. Vijaya was enthusiastic about the idea and the work began.

When it was created there was great joy in Vijaya. The reborn lion was of the colour of gold, and he stood against a background of reddishness, boldly, with a sword held up by his right paw.

It didn't take long for Vijaya and his followers, about seven hundred, to walk and run boldly through the country. Waving the flag, high on a staff, they proclaimed it the flag of the kingdom.

This rebellious behaviour of his son had a complex effect on father Sinhabahu. Complex, because there was a related history before Vijaya turned against him. Though he had knowingly killed his father Sinhaya, gradually a feeling of guilt crept into Sinhabahu. Though he had consciously put his father "behind him" to move on in his human story, deep seated was the semi -unselfconscious feeling of guilt that it had to be that way. Now with Vijaya treating him with disdain his feeling of guilt accompanied him more frequently.

The result was a compromise, when King Sinhabahu's close court followers, reacted in extreme to Vijaya's growing rebellion in the country. The King's supporters proposed that Vijaya be put to death. The guilt-ridden father's compromise instead was to expel from the kingdom Vijaya and his many hundreds of rebellious followers, with their families.

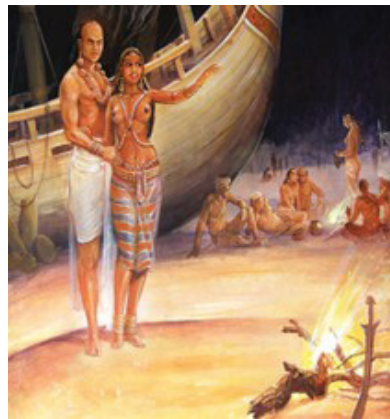
With his army doing the work, they were all seized, put into boats which were pushed out to journey into the ocean. The flag wrapped up, was unseen.

You know the rest, landing in an island called Lanka, the beginning of the Sinhalese and Vijaya

becoming their first king, and the unfurling of a flag for the new nation.

Maname and *Sinhabahu* were not the only stories that grew out of Peradeniya. Many more, remaining unhatched in the minds of its fertile population. Rasa did not contribute much to the content of the evening. He could not. But he listened intently to the story of the Sinhalese.

They reached a point on the road where, at a distance, they could now see in the still remaining moonlight, the quiet and empty open-air theatre, "*Walla*". The next morning the final days of university life would begin and end, for these adventurous students who ventured out this night, with the final exams starting in the morning.



Prince Vijaya lands in Lanka and greeted by Queen Kuveni



CHAPTER 12 – THE BEND IN THE RIVER, A MEMORY

By the fourth of July, after their physically peripheral, emotionally close, experience of 1958 the friends were safely back, enclosed by a bend in a river and a range of mountains, again.

Three friends and four years. It all seemed to go quickly. They readied themselves to pass the final exam. Rasa felt confident from lectures by H.A.D.S. Gunasekara that the meeting point of two straight lines moving upwards, slanting in opposite directions, was where Supply and Demand met to determine Price. This was written firmly into an exercise book of notes and confirmed for Rasa by an impressive volume on economics by Stonier and Haig, possessed by everyone.

Similarly, Sita and Philip had a book by A.I. Richards verifying for them what E.F.C. Ludowyk had told them about *Practical Criticism*.

On their last day at Peradeniya Rasa while walking from Jayatilleka Hall for his final exam paper, saw Sahaguru going for his last paper, Ceylon History, shouting loud on the corridor to Wijedoru, also moving for the end, “Wije! How many tanks did Parakramabahu build?”

“Thirteen machang” shouted back Wije, with confidence.

“Thanks, machang” shouted Sahaguru. “That is sure to come today”.

It is difficult to say what this residential place of learning resting within a bend in the Mahaweli gave to its occupants over three to four years. Sita was thinking about this after her last exam paper as she walked back to Sangamitta Hall to pack her bags. She remembered what Sarachchandra had said at the inaugural *Maname* meeting.

“Exams have their important place, for you need to have jobs when you leave. But that is only a part, not the whole, and the word “university” derives from universe, whole.”

Sita had another thought to add, after her recent experience of July ’58 “whole” of Sarachchandra must be widened to the island expanse in which her university was enclosed beyond the river and the Hantana range of mountains.

The next morning, she took her packed bags, one by one, to a taxi she had ordered. Her mind was still on a dream she experienced during her last night’s sleep at Sangamitta. She would relate the dream when she met Philip. The taxi was to take her to the outer front garden of Jayatilleka Hall. There, Philip and she would get into a van to take them to the station. As the taxi began to move, she looked back at Sangamitta in farewell. She was now passing Kissing Bend and the Hilda Obeysekera Hall, and her mind began to shift in the direction their train was to take them. She thought of the terrors in the country outside a year ago. she felt something like a leaving of the secure segment of the bend in the river, the Peradeniya story, and going into the larger story of the whole country, now uncertain. But she also felt that because of the close friendships she had made at university amongst those now also leaving for the country at large, the Peradeniya story would continue.

And Philip close to her for the rest of her life guaranteed it. She thought of Rasa who after one more final paper the next day, would meet them in Colombo.

The taxi reached the D’Alwis memorial roundabout with the shallow pond around, climbing rightwards to Jayatilleka Hall. There was Philip standing on the lawn. The van all packed and ready was nearby.

In a short while they were at the small railway station for the last time. Boarding was easy and quick for the numbers were nothing like the crowd when they arrived four years ago. Sita and Phillip found isolated seating. The train began moving slowly. After gazing out of the window in silence for a short while Philip spoke.

“In the van you mentioned a sad dream you had last night. What was it?”

“You may guess. It was a sad dream about the end of what we saw today”, Sita said, “and the dream did not stop there. It went on.”

“Tell me” Philip said, almost inaudibly.

“It was sad, but I thought, in the morning, also beautiful.”

Sita noticed Philip’s facial expression, conveying the need for clarification. Sita continued, “Sadness, can be beautiful. It is about loss, and nature brings into our feelings, that during a life span we were also once bestowed with what we have lost. “Tell me”, said Philip.

Sita:

“At a beautiful waterfall, in the Nuwara Eliya district, where the Mahaweli begins, a small twig from a nearby growth, a water plant, dropped into the bottom of the waterfall. It went along the river, and with the soil and water nourishing it, the tiny twig began growing. It took some time before it reached the bend in the river. When it came into the bend where our university is, the little twig had grown into a big young shape, and very green with its new leaves. It was not alone. A large number of similar young green formations were clustered around it, close together.

Because of the bend, these had all paused in their journey. They floated at the bend for some duration. And then, in time, the river began to gush them on again. They all, left the bend and began floating away, up and down with the swells and shallows of the water after the bend. It looked a long time, and the leaves gradually turned brown, but eventually they reached the place where the river ends, and the great ocean receives it. The river is narrow and slows down as it ends, so these that floated along it, now frail, entered the unknown vastness in ones, twos or small batches.”

It was almost as if the gentle, nearly silent, movement of the train as it began leaving the station was in mood with Sita’s dream, as she related it slowly. Silence again, as both looked out of the window at the last green patches of Peradeniya. The rumble of the train began as it gathered speed and the scene outside changed. It was already a memory.

End

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**CSA General Meeting and Social  
Sunday 25 August 2024 at 6.30pm  
at the Pennant Hills Community Centre  
Ramsay Road, Pennant Hills NSW**

**SPEAKER: Professor Emeritus Naren Chitty AM**

**TOPIC: British Ceylon through a family lens 1850 to 1950: Social History  
through Chitty Family Palimpsests.**



**INTRODUCTION**

British governors relied on mostly unsalaried Mudaliyars (leaders) from select families who exchanged service for land grants.<sup>1</sup> Educated in public schools Mudaliyars' Anglophile sons increasingly inhabited a Jane Austenian lifeworld, particularly as they donned European attire in the middle of the nineteenth

century. Unfolding around them was a countervailing Buddhist revival associated with Sinhala cultural resurgence.<sup>2</sup> After 1850 residents of Kotahena and Mutwal saw (1) themselves as Ceylonese with expectations of freedom; (2) education and public service as means of advancement; (3) leafy suburbs with modern homes in Kurunduwatte and Kollupitiya to be attractive. Families mastered the art of cultivating wealth, prestige, and influence through education, intergenerational friendships, strategic marriages, and service to the Crown. There is a view that '[t]he leaders of the elite were firmly ensconced in a vision of a better place for themselves under the benign eyes of the British Raj'.<sup>3</sup> Sir Christofel Obeysekera, lamenting circa 1930 that Colombo Chetties had withdrawn from public service, suggested 'inspiring those that remain ...to properly educate themselves...without forgetting that other communities of the same plane as yours, are your best friends'.<sup>4</sup> Franchise, sought in the twentieth century, was soon linked to free education. Looking back at a century of change through the lens of one family may appear distinctly out of place today when proficiency has replaced prestige in pursuit of power. However, discussion of variations in pursuit of education and politics in the Chitty family adds a little piece to the jigsaw puzzle of social history.

**ANCESTORS**

Accounts about Colombo Chetties have been described as an unstructured 'pot pourri which presents legends, fables and facts ... which may not relate to

the ...community as we know them — dating say from Dutch times.' Proof is sought 'they were an identifiable collectivity, both in their own estimation and in the understandings of articulate and powerful others (Portuguese, Sinhala kings and elites) in Portuguese Ceilão'.<sup>5</sup> Going back to Rajasingha II each of us has thousands of ancestors. Yet we only discern imprints on the tracks of time. Others are absent in narratives about valour, wealth, rank, influence, prestige, or even infamy. Mudaliyars are remembered, the abject and ordinary forgotten. Nilaperumal a.k.a. Kalukapuge (late 15th /early 16th C.) is described as the Bandara-naike clan's founder. Obeysekera identify Portuguese Naval Lieutenant Owen Fernandez (circa 1630) - named Obeysekera (or 'your leader') by a Buddhist priest. Aserappas look back to Tandava Aserappa, a ship owner, with Persian roots, who sailed from Nagapatnam around 1653. Ondaatjes record Michael Jurie Ondaatje, the King of Tanjore's physician, summoned (1659) by Dutch Governor Adrian Van der Meyden. Don Adrian Wijeyesinghe Jayawardene, President J.R. Jayawardene's ancestor (b.1768) is identified as a Colombo Chetty with partial Persian roots.

Linguistically proficient influencers (often Brahmans, Chetties, or Nayaks) -who facilitated operations of colonists, East India company factors, and governors — were called *dubashes*.<sup>6</sup> Chetties were South and Southeast Asian mercantile groups from southern Indian principalities, originally from India's north and northeast. Several were Mudaliyars in Portuguese Ceilão - Christian and Hindu. Chetty was a postnominal in Dutch times - as in Aserappa Chetty, Casie Chetty, Coenje Chetty, Christenty Christfel Chetty, Colaas Chetty, Fernando Ondaatje Chetty, and Rodrigo Chetty.<sup>7</sup> Interestingly Aserappa uses the terms Ceylon Chetties and Ceylon Christian Chetty Community in 1930.<sup>8</sup>

The Chitty Family shares an antecedent with Allegakones, Candappas, Casinaders, Kadirgamars, Muthukumarus, Sethukavelars, Somanaders, and Tambimuttus - Udayappa Chetty of Cuddalore, eleven miles south of French Pondicherry. A *dubash*, Udayappa

traded with Kandy under the protection of Rajasingha II.<sup>9</sup> His son Francesco moved to Batticaloa after the Dutch captured the Fort in 1636. Some *dubashes* financed governors' personal projects and played roles in famine relief, such as in 1687 and 1688, when Udayappa may have procured Kandyan grain for British troops. A contact in Rajasingha's Court would have helped, such as the accountant in a watercolour (1825) by Hippolyte Silvaf [sic] housed in the Victoria and Albert Museum, See also Silvaf's 1839 cartoon of a Colombo Chetty.



**Colombo Chetty**

**Accountant in the Court of Kandy**

Udayappa was not a 'Colombo Chetty'. Some descendants joined Christian Chetties of different origins who later became Colombo Chetties, perhaps when 'the once-picturesque costumes of the Chetties had given way to the more modern, tailored suits of Bond Street'.<sup>10</sup>

## MODERN CHITTY FAMILY

The modern Chitty family was founded by the wealthy Christian Chitty (d.1899?) and his French Huguenot wife, the beautiful blue-eyed Matilda Augusta Morrel aka Mitzi (d. 1917).<sup>11</sup> Their romance and marriage in 1860<sup>12</sup> blended conservative values in education and progressive practices apropos marriage. I draw on recollections of two granddaughters—Lylie Chitty (James Chitty's daughter) and her cousin Laurel Tambimuttu (Laura Chitty's daughter) and other records. There are tales of shipwrecks, French military officers, aristocratic roots, French Royalists exiled to Ile St Maurice in Napoleonic times, property in France, and an elopement.

A great grandson of E.R. Tambimuttu has discussed the role of education for the Tambimuttus.<sup>13</sup> Approaches to women's education of sons and sons-in-law of Christian and Mitzi were somewhat Kantian and van Schurmanian respectively, though they would not have used these labels. I admire Immanuel Kant's (1724-1804) critique of pure reason and deontology but not his relegation of women to excellent household management.<sup>14</sup> In contrast Dutchwoman Anna Maria van Schurman (1607 – 1678), - artist, poet, classicist and philosopher - argued aged nineteen in favour of education in science and letters for women.<sup>15</sup> Christian and Mitzi did not seek matriculation for their children, though two sons trained for the Bar. Many other landed families were committed to higher education though, like the Chitty children, theirs' were taught by governesses. Lives of landed families in Kotahena and Mutwal resonated with those in Jane Austen

novels. Ladies managed large households. Children rode horses, played tennis and croquet, and engaged in artistic pursuits such as painting, crocheting, singing, and playing musical instruments. Self-rule advocate Charles Ambrose Lorenz (1829-1871) promoted a 'Ceylonese' identity at the time in *The Ceylon Examiner*, which he co-owned.

Hybridity is a universal entropic feature; I am averse to criticising any identity within or without an 'Euro-Asian' or other intercontinental spectrum.<sup>16</sup> A French-Ceylonese marriage accentuated the Chitty's hybridity. They were modern in not being wedded to arranged marriages, or a particular community. The eldest child, Marion, married David Jansz, a Dutch Burgher lawyer. James and younger brothers George Edmund Snr (my grandfather) and Wilfred, married Colombo Chetties. Charles married a Kandyan. Three sisters married Tamils. Laura and Maude married the Brothers Tambimuttu - The Hon. E.R. (advocate, legislative and state council member) and Rev. J.R. respectively. Younger sister Rose married Dr. E.V. Ratnam (doctor, hospital owner, and Colombo municipal council member). The Tambimuttu's father, a descendant of Udayappa Chetty, headed St. Andrew's School in Batticaloa. Around 1880, visiting from Colombo, Bishop Reginald Copleston (1845-1925) was impressed by E.R. and sponsored him at St. Thomas' College, Mutwal.<sup>17</sup> J.R. followed soon after. The brothers were captivated by Laura and Maude Chitty when the sisters alighted from a four-in-hand carriage in the churchyard of St. Thomas' Church, Gintupitiya. Romance ensued. Later, threatening to elope, Laura (aged thirty-three) married E.R. following Christian's death. Maude (aged thirty-eight) married J.R. when he became Incumbent of Christ Church, Tangalle.



**Standing (L-R): Christian, Wilfred, George Snr, Marian, Charles. Seated (L-R): Mitzi, Rose, Maude, Laura, James. Chitty Family in 1899. Oil on canvas, 6' x 4'. Figures sourced from photographs**

## MOVING FROM COTTONCHINA TO CINNAMON GARDENS

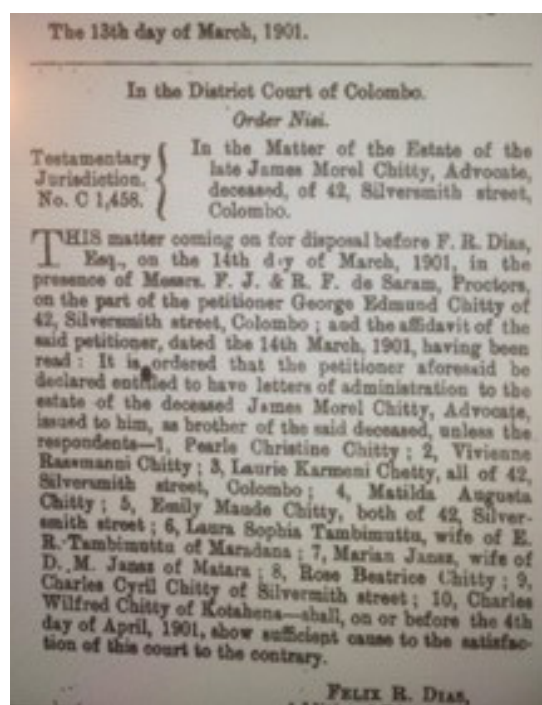
'Cottonchina', the Mutwal-Kotahena ward of Colombo, hosted celebrated properties. The fourteen-acre *Elie House* property once belonged to Lorenz. A later owner, Mudaliyar Tudor Rajapakse, leased it in 1898 to Maha Mudaliyar Sir Solomon Bandaranaike whose son S.W.R.D. was born there in 1889. As discernible in his memoir *Remembered Yesterdays*, Sir Solomon



who abandoned *Elie House* in 1903 when it was requisitioned for a reservoir, significantly enhanced his family's prestige. Later, S.W.R.D., in tune with public sentiment of an expanded national electorate, converted prestige into political power. James Weinman (1860-1933) referred to *Udagaha Walauwa*, Solomon Bandaranaike's residence, locating it at 42 Silversmith Street, at the time, further down from another notable property, *Hill Castle*- residence of James de Alwis, brother-in-law of Harry Dias and father-in-law of JP Obeysekera.<sup>18</sup>

Early in the COVID-19 pandemic, an article entitled "Bandaranaike Mawatha: Glimpse into its Glorious Past" (*Ceylon Today*, May 5, 2020) caught my attention. It described 42 Silversmith Street as one of the grandest houses in Colombo and Solomon Bandaranaike's favourite townhouse; and the ancestral *Udagaha Walauwa*, where in 1876, Solomon's father celebrated the announcement of Queen Victoria as Empress of India. No. 40 was identified as Mudaliyar J.M.P. Peiris's residence, No. 41 as the *Congress Hall*, and No. 5 as Christoffel Obeysekera's *Hill Castle*. The article contradicted *Remembered Yesterdays* where Sir Solomon tracks his residential history. His days at St. Thomas' College, Mutwal, began as a dayboy living with his uncle Canon Dias. He next lived at *Green Lodge*, a paternal property on Skinner's Road South, *Paradise Garden*. Following this, he was boarded at St. Thomas', returning to *Green Lodge* circa 1890, aged twenty-eight. He resided at *Summer Hill*, Mutwal home of elder sister Mrs. J.P. Obeysekera, before moving in 1898 to *Elie House*, only to leave *Elie House* for Horagolla in 1903. He next mentions Silversmith Street in 1914.

Soon after reading the article in *Ceylon Today*, I stumbled on an Order Nisi dealing with the deceased estate of James Chitty of 42 Silversmith Street (*Ceylon Government Gazette* March 22, 1901).



*Order Nisi 13 March 1901*



*Emily Maude, Rose Beatrice, & Laura Sophie Chitty 1899*

When Christian Chitty passed away circa December 1899 the law of primogeniture made James Chitty sole beneficiary of Christian's estate. With James dying soon after on March 5, 1901, primogeniture made George Chitty Snr the beneficiary. In the Order Nisi George Snr sought letters of administration for James' estate naming those entitled to make challenges as James' children—Pearle, Vivienne, and Lylie; Christian's widow Mitzi; Mitzi's children Maude, Rose, and Charles, all residing at 42 Silversmith Street, identified as James' residence. Also named were Laura, married to E.R. Tambimuttu and living in Maradana; Marian, married to David Jansz, residing in Matara; and Willy, married to Antonina Candappa who lived in Chetty Street, Kotahena.

The testamentary matter was brought before Felix Reginald Dias, District Judge, on March 14, 1901. Dias, a cousin of Sir Solomon and two years senior to James at St. Thomas's, was also the great-grandfather of my childhood friend and neighbour Gitendra (Git) Wickremasinghe when I lived at *The Rotunda*, in the 1950s. Git, a member of the Bandaranaike clan, identified a house in a 1930s photograph of the Nomads Tennis Club as likely to be 42 Silversmith Street. I believe Sir Solomon moved into it circa 1910. The Nomads Club sought to engender advantageous marriages for its youthful members. Sir Solomon having sold 42 Silversmith Street circa the late 1930s the club met according to Git on the tennis courts at *The Rotunda*.

James' wife, mother of Lylie and her sisters Viva and Pearle, died in May 1890 when Lylie was fifteen months. When James died Lylie was two and her sisters, Viva and Pearle, were three and five respectively. Interestingly Lylie, born at 42 Silversmith Street in 1898, and S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, who lived there possibly after 1910, are seated next to each other in this photograph from circa 1936.





*State Councillors and wives circa 1936. Clockwise from the left, Lady Mallika Jayatilaka, Don Stephen Senanayake, Philip Gunawardene, Sirima Bandaranaike, Sir John Kotelawala, SWRD Bandaranaike, Lady Lylie Corea née Chitty, Sir Don Baron Jayatileke, Molly Senanayake and Sir Claude Corea.*

Following their marriage, George Snr. and his bride, Mabel (Pullenayagam) who hailed from *The Ark* in Chilaw, became guardians of Lylie and her sisters. The family moved from Kotahena around 1807 to houses in Ward Place (*Gladysville* and *Deepdene*) in succession. President J.R. Jayawardene revealed that his bride Elena and he lived in *Deepdene* as newly-weds in 1935.<sup>19</sup> The Chittys maintained *The Ark* and *Hornby* in Chilaw, the latter sited next door to the Corea's '*Sigiriya*' where Mahatma Gandhi once stayed. After James died, the court assigned the house to George Chitty Snr who renamed it *Courtview*. It was leased to the Chilaw Post Office, circa 1940. I viewed its twin turrets from the Puttalam Road in the 1950s. While photographs are elusive, Geoffrey Bawa recalled that he drew inspiration from *Courtview* in remodelling Sunethra Bandaranaike's smaller stables as a residence.

The Chittys moved in 1917 into their modern custom-built *Stafford House* on a twelve-acre property. The main house, outhouses, and stables were at the Kynsey Road end and warehouses of Chitty & Co. were at the Norris Canal Road end. *Stafford House* was home to Lylie Chitty and her sisters, and later to George Chitty Snr's children, some other nieces, a governess, a lawyer's clerk, as well as domestic, stable and garden staff. Without foresight of the Wall Street Crash of 1929, the family over-extended itself with coconut plantations, three carriages, Australian horses, Minerva and Chenard Walcker automobiles, and a rickshaw. Arnold Wright's research of Ceylonese houses in 1906 predated *Stafford House*. The house is not in *Twentieth Century Impressions of Ceylon*, but there is reference to George Chitty Snr. as an advocate and landowner. His known plantations were located around Bangadeniya Station, at Kusalai, Mandaline, Rajakaduluwa, and Villatava.

## EDUCATION

The 'van Schurmanian' E.R. Tambimuttu's daughter, Laurel, was among the first five women admitted to University College, graduating in economics. Two

sons of E.V. Ratnam became doctors. The 'Kantian' George Chitty Snr's nieces, and daughters, did not attend university. According to Laurel, initially boarded at Bishop's College, Lylie and her sisters were removed from Bishops in their teens to be taught by a series of governesses. Attributing intelligence and beauty to them Lylie regretted further education had not been a consideration. She believed that had Lylie been allowed to study further she would have been a star.<sup>20</sup> She likely meant an academic or professional star rather than the scintillating star Lylie - known as 'the lady with the diamond in her nose' - was in the diplomatic firmament. Lady Lylie Corea née Chitty offers an example of how charisma and cultural capital could transcend higher education at the time. Her own account aligns with Laurel Casinader's observations about limitations placed on her education. Despite her own modest assessment of her skills, she was a legendary diplomatic hostess - with leading families among her friends in New York:

I saw it in the *Life Magazine*, one full page with my picture... and only at the bottom there was 'Lady Corea, she is known as the lady with the diamond in her nose'... asked what my hobbies [were]... I would always say my hobby is browsing about... I was not good at anything... I knew a very little of everything... the Acheson's, the Rockefellers, they were our greatest friends.<sup>21</sup>

## MARRIAGE AND SOCIETY

Laurel recounted that, post-World War I, wives of high-ranking English administrative officials began showing interest in Ceylonese. Laurel and Lylie often were guests at *Governor's House*. She recalled in a memoir that Sir Sydney Bell, a British engineer working on the Sydney Harbour Bridge, who regularly transited through Colombo, befriended them, likely at soiree at *Governor's House*. Virginia Woolf's sister-in-law, Bella, Lady Southorn, encouraged then Legislative Council member E.R. Tambimuttu to allow Laurel and Lylie (staying with Aunt Laura at the time) to join the Girl Guides in connection with Prince George's visit to Ceylon in May 1925. However, the socially conservative E.R. was adamant that they should not hold up staves for the Prince of Wales to walk under, saying, "No girls of mine are going to hold a stick over any man's head except their husbands."<sup>22</sup>



*L-R: Doris Chitty, Georgie Wadsworth, Lady Lylie Corea, Prime Minister Sir John Kotelawala, Rajah Ratnagopal, Sir Claude Corea, London 1955*

Lylie and her sisters' and their cousins' marriages were not arranged. Laurel aged twenty-two wed Justin Casinader, another descendant of Udayappa Chetty, circa 1925. Pearle aged twenty-eight married T.V. Saravanamuttu around 1923. Viva aged seventeen married Shelton Storer circa 1914. Lylie aged thirty-seven married Sir Claude Corea in 1936. His first wife died in 1922.

## SERVICE

Laurel's mother, Laura, and George Edmund de Silva's (1879-1950) wife Agnes Marian de Silva neé Nell (1885-1961) of the Women's Franchise Union argued before the Donoughmore Commission on Constitutional Rights for voting rights for women. Agnes was a niece of Lorenz. Laurel served as Executive Vice President of the International Alliance of Women, an institutional descendant of suffragette movements. The friendship between the Chittys and de Silvas endured across generations. The husbands of Agnes and Lylie were in the Cabinet in 1936. Agnes's daughter, Minette, was a lifelong friend of Lylie Chitty.<sup>23</sup>

George Chitty Snr practiced law until circa 1922 when, aged 51, he retired to run his plantations and business. The conversation around George Snr was related to freedom. Elder sister Laura was a suffragette. Her husband and that of George's niece Lylie were in the legislature - as were several of his closest friends. His obituary (1947) noted his friendship with prominent freedom fighters E.W. Perera, C.E. Corea, the Jayawardene brothers, and the lawyer Douglas de Saram. His pallbearers included Sir Gerard Wijeykoon, the first president of the Senate; Dr. Frank Gunasekera, deputy president of the Senate; H.V. Perera KC; and S.J.K. Crowther, editor of the *New Daily*. I have seen a record of George Snr being an attendee of one of Armand de Souza's speeches on reform. A retiring personality may have kept him away from public service, but he engaged in community service through his church affiliation. The wives of George Chitty Snr and George Chitty Jnr were active on YWCA and Church committees in first half of the 20th Century. Colombo Chetties 'contributed by way of social service programs.'<sup>24</sup>

## CONCLUSION

George Chitty Snr and his descendants were quick to embrace many aspects of modern life; new neighbourhoods, contemporary houses, new technology, and marriage practices. They remained conservative about higher education and political engagement unlike similar families. They generally avoided government positions. That members of political families married Chittys while the latter had limited direct involvement in politics themselves might be construed as reflecting a strategic approach to maintaining influence and connections without taking political sides. However, none of the marriages with political families were arranged. George Snrs' descendants' conservatism about attendance of universities, much less pursuance of academic careers, persisted to my own generation. I was not pushed toward civil service, medical, legal, or corporate positions growing up in my family. This could

have been an extension of the retreat from public service observed by Christophel Obeysekera in 1930. I surmise that Chetty families were satisfied with inherited landholdings and did not think of trading service for land. Also, the Chitty Family belonged at the fin-de-siecle to a lingering antiquated lifeworld more akin to that of Jane Austen's literary time than infant 20th Century, one that became unsustainable as the century grew old. I was aware that I was swimming against the current in my family in seeking university education and a career in government service, though I was in two minds about these paths, I ended up as a professor.

I recall my father showing me Universität Heidelberg on a visit to Germany in 1955. He said he would send me there - but only to gain a *schmisse* or duelling scar on my ear. When my progressive mother wanted to work my father agreed but arranged for her to work in a friend's travel agency sans emoluments. It is striking how descendants of Chitty ladies who married professionals embraced higher education. Nearly ten medical doctors are descended from sons of Dr. E.V. Ratnam and Rose Chitty.

The character of hybridity remains unhidden. Indeed, as a ten-year old I proudly raised my hand up as an 'other,' during the class census at Trinity College in 1959. Mitzi and Christian's descendants have genetic links with a huge number of ethnicities. African American, Chinese, Colombo Chetty, Danish, English, Finnish, French, German, Goan, Irish, Japanese, Kandyan Sinhalese, Low Country Sinhalese, Moorish, Parsee, Polish, and Tamil. The resultant hybridity resonates well with the multicultural character of Australia.



*Bust of Christian Chitty*



*Christian Chitty*



*Standing L-R: Christian Chitty, unknown, Willy, unknown, Morell brother, George Snr., Morell brother circa 1890s*





*Lady Lylie  
Corea and Sir  
Claude Corea  
outside No. 10  
Downing Street  
before dinner  
with the British  
Prime Minister.  
Circa 1955*



*L-R: Doris Chitty, Doris Ondaatje, Mabsy Vanderkoen, Janet  
Ondaatje, Michael Ondaatje, Laurel Casinader, Boyd Peris, Lady  
Lylie Corea, Minette de Silva, Lynette Peris.  
Rear garden of Residence of the High Commissioner of Ceylon,  
21 Addison Road, Kensington, SW London circa 1955*

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# Captain Edward Henry Pedris: Executed in 1915 and pardoned 109 years later in 2024

by Thiru Arumugam

One of the last official acts of Ranil Wickremasinghe, former President of Sri Lanka, was to grant a posthumous Presidential Pardon on 12th September 2024 to Edward Henry Pedris who was executed on 7th July 1915 by the British Government of Ceylon after a court-martial which found him guilty of treason. Who was this 27-year-old Edward Henry Pedris and what were the circumstances which led to his unfortunate death by execution by a firing squad?

## Edward Henry Pedris (1888-1915) (Fig. 1)



was born in Galle and was the only son of Duenuge Disan Pedris, who was a leading wealthy businessman with extensive interests in in plumbago mines, plantations and real estate. He owned over 120 houses in Colombo and elsewhere. The mines were in the Kalutara District but the plumbago sorting

facility was at No. 3, Alston Place, Hunupitiya. The family also owned a drapery establishment located in one of the Cross Streets off Main Street, Pettah. The family residence was at 'Vimal Villa', No. 9, Turret Road, Cinnamon Gardens. Henry Pedris was educated at Royal College and at St Thomas College. He was keen cricketer and had the possibly unique distinction of being a member of the cricket teams of both of those Colleges.

His father's ambition was that he would succeed him in running the family businesses. However, his son's abiding interests were in horses, horsemanship and marksmanship, at which he was adept (Fig. 2). In 1914 he was engaged to be married to 21-year



old Hilda Fernando-Wijesekere, daughter of his uncle N S Fernando-Wijesekere, who was also a leading businessman. In the same year, when World War I broke out, the British Government created the Colombo Town Guard. This was a

volunteer unit to help defend Colombo in the event of a German invasion. Henry Pedris immediately enlisted in the Colombo Town Guard as a private. His marks-

manship and horsemanship skills were, however, promptly recognised and he was soon commissioned as an Officer and quickly rose to the rank of Captain.

## The 1915 Riots in Ceylon

On 28 May 1915 communal riots broke out in Kandy and soon spread to the Central, North-Western, Sabaragamuwa, Southern and Western Provinces. By 31 May the riots had spread to Colombo. The British Governor in Ceylon at that time was Sir Robert Chalmers. He was educated at Oxford University where he was a Pali scholar. He joined the British Civil Service and worked in the UK Treasury for 31 years. As a reward for drafting a significant British Budget speech, he was appointed Governor of Ceylon on 18 October 1913. He was a recluse by nature, with limited administrative experience.

The Officer commanding the British troops in Ceylon at that time was Brigadier General H H L Malcolm. On 02 June 1915, Chalmers under the mistaken impression that the riots were the beginning of a general insurgency against British rule, declared martial law. Chalmers ordered Malcolm to suppress the riots by any means. Malcolm ordered the police and military to shoot anybody whom they deemed to be a rioter. He asked them not to waste ammunition and to aim for the heart.

On 01 June 1915, Pedris was in the family-owned shop off Main Street, Pettah when he saw a mob advancing towards the shop with the clear intention of looting the shop. It is alleged that Pedris pulled out his revolver and fired, and that one of the shots wounded a Ceylonese police constable with a non-fatal injury. It was later established in Court that the shot that injured the constable was not fired by Pedris. Pedris was arrested and accused of "treason by levying war against our Lord the King" by means of "firing two revolver rounds into the air".

Pedris was arraigned before a Field Court Martial Board of British Officers on 01 July 1915. It must be noted that he was court martialled, and not tried before the normal courts, bypassing his legal rights, even though the alleged offence took place the day before martial law was declared. The trial lasted three days and Pedris was found guilty of treason and sentenced to death, the sentence to be carried out on 07 July 1915. Normally a death sentence has to be ratified by the Governor of Ceylon, but Pedris's sentence was never referred to the Governor by Brigadier General Malcolm. The family filed an appeal to the Supreme Court, but the appeal was denied by the three Judge Bench of the Supreme Court led by Chief Justice Sir Alexander Wood-Renton, who said that they lacked jurisdiction over the military courts that were functioning under martial law. An unsuccessful appeal was also made to King George V.

After Pedris's arrest, the British Government feared a rebellion and immediately arrested and locked up in Welikade Prison, 86 prominent Ceylonese including future leaders like D S Senanayake, F R Senanayake, D R Wijewardena, F R Dias Bandaranayake, H Amarasuriya, A H Molamure, D B Jayatilleka, Dr W A de Silva, Dr C A Hewavitharna, A E Goonesinghe, Arthur V Dias and others.

## The execution

Additional District Judge Arthur Charles Allnut was entrusted with the task of carrying out the execution on 07 July 1915. He was an Oxford University graduate and a member of the Ceylon Civil Service. He lined up the 86 Ceylonese leaders being held at Welikade on a verandah, so that they could see Pedris being marched to his execution. Pedris was made to sit on a chair and was asked by Allnut whether he had any last request. Pedris said that he wanted to be executed by an Asian, non-Christian, firing squad. This was agreed and the firing squad was composed of Punjabi soldiers from the 28th Battalion of the Punjab Regiment of the British Indian Army. Pedris rejected the offer of a blindfold and tied his handkerchief over his eyes.

P K Balachandran describes the events that followed in an article titled "The execution that triggered the struggle for self-rule" in the *Ceylon Today* issue of 07 July 2012 as follows:

At 8 a.m. sharp, gunshots rang, signalling the end of the young man. Twenty minutes later, Allnut arrived at L-Hall with a posse of prison staff carrying the blood splattered chair on which Pedris had died. Showing the chair to the Ceylonese leaders lined up there, Allnut declared: "Any person who commits an act of treason against the government by forming organizations like the so-called Anti-liquor Movement, will have to die facing such a fate as this."

An infuriated F.R. Senanayake shot back: "Are you such a cowardly and timid nation to shoot one of our young men and bring the chair splashed with his blood? Aren't you ashamed to parade the results of your foolish and stupid act to us when we are sorrowing at the demise of one of our people? Each drop of blood of this young man Pedris, who I treat as one of my own, should be considered as sacrificed in the name of the nation. If the stream of blood wetting that chair is counted in drops of blood, the British will definitely have to pay compensation."

In keeping with the regulations for burial of executed traitors, he was buried in an unmarked grave. In order to avoid demonstrations by the public, the burial was carried out at midnight. Pedris's father, however, had arranged for some of his men to secretly follow the proceedings to see where the burial took place. It was found that the burial was in Kanatte cemetery in a burial plot owned by the Pedris family. The burial had not been recorded in the Cemetery Register. Many years later, in 1987, the remains were unearthed and identified as those of Henry Pedris by the coat buttons. The remains were given a proper burial and a tomb was also erected at the spot (**Fig. 3 next column**).



D D Pedris had taken out a life insurance policy for his son for Rs 25,000, a considerable sum of money at that time. The Insurer was Manufacturer's Life Insurance Co., but the Insurer refused to make any payment on the grounds that Henry Pedris was lawfully executed. A case was filed in the District Court of Colombo by the family, but the action was dismissed. An appeal was made to the Supreme Court and the decree of the District Court was set aside and the Insurer had to pay the amount due.

## The Ceylon Indemnity Order in Council, 1915

By August the country had calmed down and martial law was lifted on 30 August 1915. On the same date, Governor Chalmers issued "The Ceylon Indemnity Order in Council, 1915". This Order indemnified himself, Brigadier General Malcolm and anybody else who carried out acts to promote peace and suppress rioting during the period of martial law. Furthermore, sentences passed by Military Courts were considered as sentences passed by the Courts of Ceylon. In effect, Chalmers and all Government officials were indemnified against legal action for any illegal acts carried out during the period of martial law. This was based on an indemnity proclaimed by King George V, the full text of which is given in the Appendix at the end of this article.

E W Perera was a Barrister, politician and freedom fighter, later to become an elected Member of the Legislative Council and the State Council of Ceylon. Together with Sir James Peiris he drafted a memorandum and travelled to London through the German submarine infested waters of World War 1. He was accompanied by George E de Silva and in England, Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan and Sir D B Jayatilleka joined them. They lobbied the Secretary of State for the Colonies by enlisting the support of Irish Members asking questions in the British Parliament about the conduct of the Government of Ceylon. The mission was successful because the Secretary of State

for the Colonies called for a report and the net result was that Chalmers was recalled from his post of Governor of Ceylon and replaced by Sir John Anderson.

### Subsequent events

In 2023, retired Supreme Court Justice Anil Gooneratne, whose grandfather and Henry Pedris were cousins, campaigned for a Presidential pardon for Henry Pedris. On 11 December 2023, the Sri Lanka Cabinet approved a proposal by President Ranil Wickremasinghe to re-open the case of Henry Pedris. A three Member Committee was appointed to study the details of Henry Pedris's court martial and execution and submit a report, in order to bring justice to him. Based on this Report, Ranil Wickremasinghe issued a posthumous Presidential pardon to Henry Pedris by a Gazette notification dated 12 September 2024 (Fig. 4). The text of the Gazette Notification reads as follows:

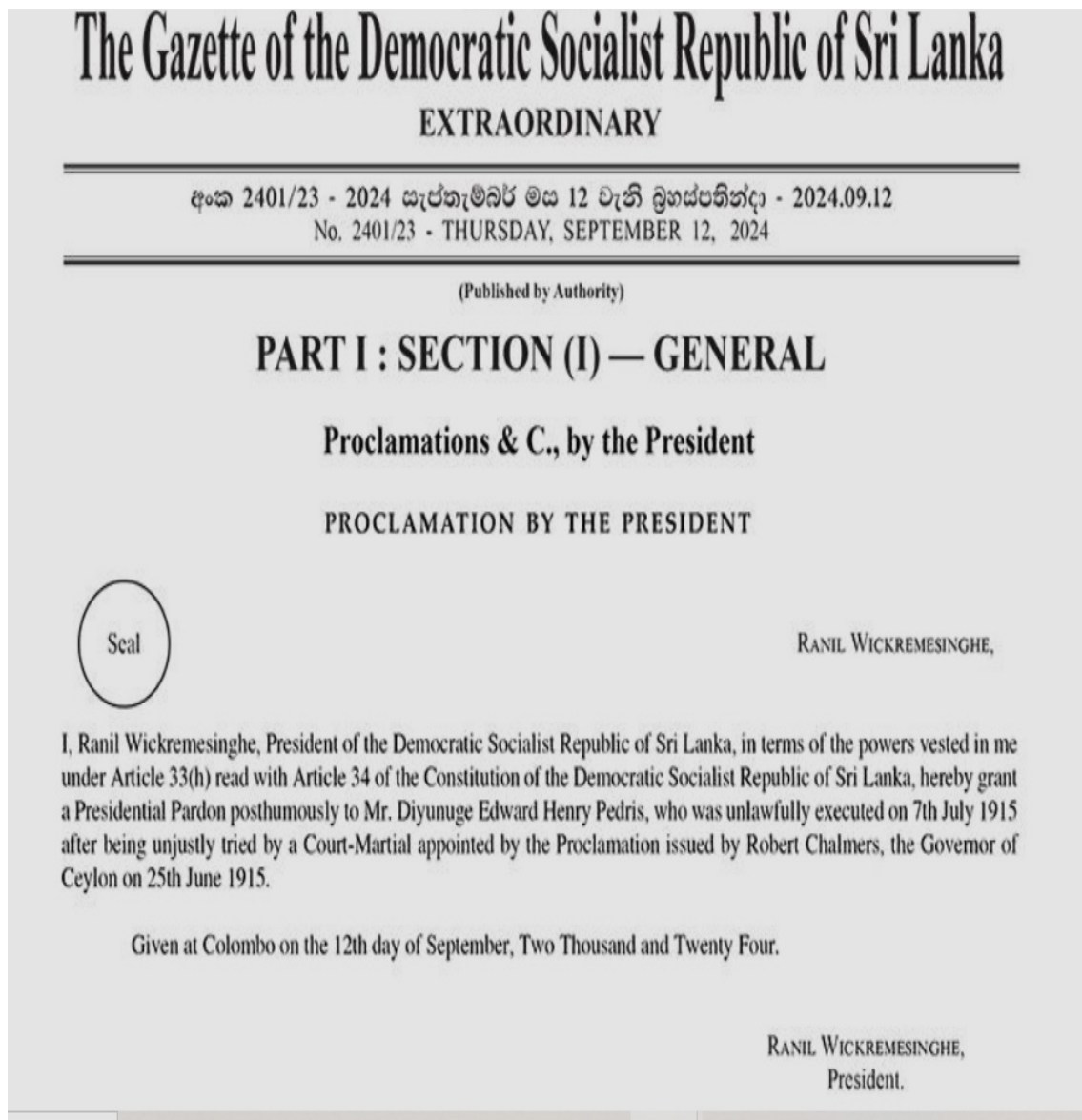
I, Ranil Wickremasinghe, President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, in terms of the powers vested in me under Article 33(h) read with Article 34 of

the Constitution of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, hereby grant a Presidential Pardon posthumously to Mr Diyunuge Edward Henry Pedris, who was unlawfully executed on 7th July 1915 after being unjustly tried by a Court-Martial appointed by the Proclamation issued by Robert Chalmers, the Governor of Ceylon on 25th June 1915.

Given at Colombo on the 12th day of September, Two thousand and Twenty Four.

Justice had been done at last to Edward Henry Pedris, even though it took 109 years.

*Figure 4*





## APPENDIX

### **The Order of Indemnity of His Majesty the King made by and with the advice of His Privy Council. SCHEDULE TO THE PROCLAMATION.**

At the Court of Buckingham Palace, the 12th DAY OF August, 1915.

Present: The King's Most Excellent Majesty, Lord President, Lord Stamfordham, Sir G. Fleetwood Wilson.

Whereas His Majesty has power to make laws for the peace, order and good government of the Colony of Ceylon (in this Order referred to as the "Colony"):

And whereas it has been found necessary by the Governor of Ceylon to proclaim that certain Provinces of the Colony shall be subject to martial law for the time being:

And whereas it is desirable to withdraw martial law from the Provinces in which it has been proclaimed and to indemnify acts, matters, and things in good faith advised, commanded, ordered, directed or done while martial law was in force:

Now, therefore, His Majesty, by virtue of all powers vested in Him in that behalf, is pleased, by and with the advice of His Privy Council, to order, and it is hereby ordered, as follows:

1. No action, prosecution or legal proceeding whatsoever shall be brought, instituted, or maintained against the Governor of Ceylon, or the person for the time being or at any time commanding the troops in the Colony, or against any person or persons acting under them or any of them respectively in any command or capacity civil or military, or in pursuance of any orders general or special given by whomsoever in good faith advised, commanded, ordered, directed or done for the maintenance of good order and government or for the public safety of the Colony between the date of the commencement of martial law and the date of the taking effect of this Order.
2. Every such person aforesaid by whom any such act, matter, or thing shall have been advised, commanded, ordered, directed or done for the purposes aforesaid shall be freed, acquitted, discharged, released and indemnified against all and every person and persons whomsoever in respect thereof.
3. Every such act, matter, or thing referred to in the preceding articles shall be presumed to have been advised, commanded, ordered, directed or done as the case may be in good faith until the contrary shall have been proved by the party complaining.
4. The several sentences and orders pronounced by military courts held in the Colony during the continuance of martial law are hereby confirmed, and all persons tried by such courts and confined in any prisons or other legal places of confinement in the Colony under or by virtue of such sentences shall continue liable to be confined there or elsewhere as the Governor may direct until the expiration of the sentences respectively passed upon them or until their discharge by lawful authority; and such sentences shall be deemed to be sentences passed by duly and legally constituted Courts of the Colony and shall be carried out or otherwise dealt with in the same manner as the sentences of duly constituted Courts of Law of the Colony and shall be carried out or otherwise dealt with in the same manner as the sentences of duly constituted Courts of Law of the Colony.
5. All persons who have been in good faith under proper military or police authority arrested or detained during the existence of martial law shall be deemed to have been lawfully arrested or detained.
6. Every bond taken during the existence of martial law upon which any person so arrested or detained has been admitted to bail shall be and is hereby declared to be of full force and effect.
7. Every bond executed during the existence of martial law for the payment of any contribution in respect of damages caused by mobs or any expenses incidental to or consequent upon such damages shall be and is hereby declared to be of full force and effect.
8. This Order may be cited for all purposes as The Ceylon Indemnity Order in Council, 1915' and shall come into operation and take effect upon the date on which martial law shall be terminated in the Colony by Proclamation of the Governor of Ceylon.

(Picture credits: Figs. 1 and 2, Daily News; Fig. 3 Wikipedia)

## Dr Gunadasa Amarasekara celebrates 95th birthday in November 2024

by Dr Palitha Ganewatta



**The author (right) presenting his Chekhov translations to Dr Amarasekara (left)**

Dr Gunadasa Amarasekara, is no doubt the foremost Maha Gathkaru of Sri Lanka in this 21st Century. He has contributed enormously and creatively to the Sinhala literary fields of novels, short stories, poetry, and literary criticism during the last six decades. His vivid contribution to the modern political affairs of the country under the name of *Jathiyaka Chinthanaya* on the verge of 21st century is also noteworthy. The most pleasing and encouraging phenomenon is, he a nonagenarian, continues to produce literary creations, as evident by the release of his latest novel, *Maha Gedara*. It is therefore appropriate, I believe, to shed some light on certain aspects of his literary contribution now, rather than waiting, despite the commonly accepted practice of evaluating the legacy of great writers posthumously.

I first met Dr Amarasekara at his Nawala residence in 2001 when I presented to him my collection of short stories, *Le Huru Suwanda*, which he admired and repeatedly said afterwards that he had read the collection completely and will write a review for a newspaper. The following decades show a harmonious literary collaboration with this great writer, who participated in my three book launches held in Colombo. Those books were collections of short stories of the great Russian writer, Anton Chekhov, translated from the original Russian into Sinhalese. I had the rare privilege of interviewing Dr. Amarasekara

over the Special Broadcasting Services (SBS, Australia), where I was the executive producer of the Sinhalese Language radio program during the first decade of this century. The collection of those interviews was later published by Wijesuriya Grantha Kendraya under the title '*Gunadasa Amarasekara Sanvaada*'.

I thought it appropriate to share some thoughts, expressed by Dr Amarasekara, during those radio interviews, which I believe were not widely discussed amongst the contemporary literary circles in Sri Lanka.

It was interesting to note during the very first interview, Dr Amarasekara, referring to the well-known saying of Anton Chekhov that 'medicine is his lawful wedded wife, and literature is his mistress', said jokingly that literature is his lawful wife, and medicine is his mistress.

Although a dental surgeon by profession, Dr Amarasekara spent most of his time dedicating himself to producing literary creations. He was a contemporary of the greatest literary giants of the last century, Martin Wickremasinghe and Ediriweera Sarachchandra. Prof Sarachchandra was responsible for introducing Gunadasa Amarasekara to the literary field by selecting one of his early short stories for a collection of international short stories in the early 1950s. Despite the initial support and encouragement provided by Dr Sarachchandra, Dr Amarasekara had an antagonistic literary encounter with the Peradeniya literary circle led by Dr Sarachchandra in the early sixties of the last century. During one of my interviews, responding to a question regarding Peradeniya Literary influence, Dr Amarasekara elaborated on the negative influence of the Peradeniya literary circle to our society. Dr Amarasekara pointed out his main reasons to get away from Peradeniya circle, in which he was an active contributor at the early stage of its existence. After publishing his two early novels - *Yali Upannemi* and *Depa Noladdo*, he had understood that those two were written under the influence of Peradeniya literary circle, which he believed was encouraged to produce imitative literary works under western influence, with no understanding of the deep-rooted Sinhala Buddhist culture of our society. He later denied those novels, not allowing their re-publication, realizing their negative impact to budding novelists, making them gain illusionary values alien to Sinhala Buddhist culture. While discussing the above mentioned two literary giants, Dr Amarasekara revealed the contradictions of Ediriweera Sarachchandra's literary legacy. He was of the opinion that Dr Sarachchandra, despite his comprehensive knowledge of the history of Sinhalese literature, was unable to produce a successful novel due to his inability to comprehend the social and cultural roots of Sinhala society, which I disputed in my response. Although, he highly regarded the contribution made by Martin Wickramasinghe to the Sinhala literary sphere, particularly to the development of the realistic novel, he believes that Piyadasa Sirisena,

although his novels contain artistic shortcomings, was the first to introduce the realistic novel to the Sinhala literary sphere.

One of the novel ideas expressed by Dr Amarasekara regarding Martin Wickramasinghe's literary criticism is worth mentioning. Responding to one of the interview questions, he denied that Martin Wickramasinghe's conclusion, elaborated in his critical work titled, '*Japan Kama Katha Hevanella*', (The Sinhala Novel and the shadow of the Japanese erotic novel, published in 1969) that the Peradeniya literary circle produced novels imitating the post-second world war Japanese novel, was incorrect. While accepting Peradeniya literary circle as imitators, Dr Amarasekara believes the major inspiring factor for Peradeniya literary production was the blind imitation of the self-centered illusionary novels which appeared between the two world wars in Western Europe.

Talking about his short stories, he believes the '*Ektamen Polovata*' published in 1972 was an attempt to get away from Peradeniya literary influence. This collection and the consecutively published collections of short stories, he believes, were not adequately comprehended by the Sri Lankan literary public. The reason for this, he describes, is the absence of sound literary criticism and the inability of the literary public to adapt to a wider society with its social cultural and historical aspects. Dr Amarasekara draws the same conclusion responding to the question of inadequate response received from the literary critics and the general reading public to his autobiographical genealogy, beginning with '*Gamanaka Mula*'. This nine-volume series of novels, depict the life journey of the middle-class Sri Lankan society during the last century. Dr Amarasekara believes the trilogy of Martin Wickremasinghe, *Gamperaliya*, *Kaliyugaya* and *Yuganthaya*, only depicts the upper-class life journey of our society in the context of socio-political upheaval of the pre-independence Ceylon. Literature, he further mentions, should be an advanced conversation within any civilized society in the context of its social and cultural norms and the lack of this elevated conversation, he believes, is the major drawback to produce much required literary critics and literary criticism in our society.

Referring to his contribution to Sinhala poetry, Dr Amarasekara defined the *Nisadas Kavi* (free verse) as a weed germinated in the Sinhala poetry field. He delineated that his first two collections of poetry, namely '*Amal Biso*' and '*Bhava Geetha*' were not free verse but had been composed using traditional metres.

Dr Amarasekara encapsulates at the conclusion of his '*Sinhala Kavya Sangrahaya*', an exhaustive treatise of Sinhalese poetry, that western poetic patterns cannot and shouldn't be employed to save Sinhalese poetry from its current pathetic state. During the interview he alluded to Sinhala Folk poems, with which Sinhala Poetry evolved during its past deteriorating stages, as the only sensible and essential way to develop contemporary Sinhala Poetry. He considered *Piya Samara*, a poem by Cumarathunga Munidasa, which blends the folk and intellectual norms of Sinhala, to be the only vivid example illustrating the way to develop modern

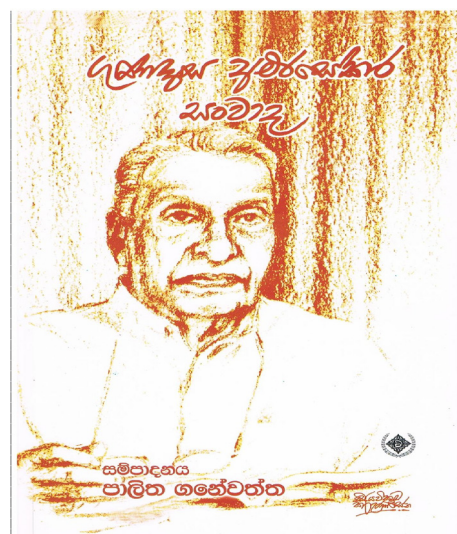
Sinhala poetry through folk poetry forms. He refers to Sinhala poetic language as the language of the heart (*Hada Basa*), which he believes should be evolved through Sinhala folk language.

Dr Amarasekara has enthusiastically responded during an interview dedicated to the modern Sinhalese novel. He emphasized that his critical work, *Nosevuna Kedapatha* (Unused Mirror) was an attempt to invite educated readers to save the modern Sinhala novel from its deteriorating state. He further stated the negative impact of the Peradeniya literary circle, which is still overshadowing the sensible development of the modern Sinhala novel. He believes a novel should depict the elevated social and cultural conversation (*Uththara Sanvadaya*) of the society, the lack of which, he believed, is the major contributing factor for the decline of the contemporary Sinhala novel.

This short essay is an attempt to present my thoughts on the unparalleled literary contribution made by Dr Gunadasa Amarasekara, who has inspired me with his thoughts expressed during interviews I conducted with him. I believe that this note will serve as a small tribute to this giant literary figure, who is a unique Sinhala cultural intellectual and a poet of distinction, who has contributed enormously to widen the social and cultural awareness of people of our motherland.



Dr Palitha Ganewatta (second from left) with Dr Amarasekara (third from left) at Colombo book launch in 2023



Front cover of the book containing the interviews with Dr Gunadasa Amarasekara



# Appreciations

## Bryan Ney Dharmaratne (15 June 1932 - 31 August 2024)



Bryan Ney Dharmaratne, an illustrious son of Sri Lanka, passed away as quietly as he lived for most of his 92 years. He passed away in a nursing home in Sydney on 31 August 2024.

A sportsman with an outstanding school record in both cricket, and rugby in Sri Lanka,

Bryan resided in Baulkham Hills, Sydney for over 50 years, and subsequently moved to a retirement home together with his wife Jean.

A rare, fifth generation old Royalist, Bryan epitomised the words of the Royal College anthem "School where our fathers learnt their way before us". The recorded line of descent of his family has Ven Dharmarama Therrunnanse as its 19th century progenitor. In 1818, Ven Dharmarama accompanied the outgoing Chief Justice of Ceylon Sir Alexander Johnstone, to England together with another Buddhist monk Ven Siri Gona Muni Ratne. Both monks converted to Christianity during their stay in England. Ven Dharmaratne was baptised as Alexander Dharmaratne. Alexander Dharmaratne continued his education at the Colombo Academy, where his eight sons too received their education. One of the sons George Alexander Dharmaratne, was a Barrister at law and one of the first Sinhalese to be admitted as a Barrister. George Alexander's son named Ney Alexander, also educated at Royal College was a Proctor in Chilaw. Ney's son Hildan also educated at Royal college, played cricket and soccer for the school. Among his teammates in the school cricket team was JR Jayewardene, former President of Sri Lanka. Hildan kept wickets for the school First Eleven, as did his son Bryan many years later. Hildan and his son Bryan are the only father and son combination to keep wickets for Royal, and indeed is a record. Bryan in addition was in the third successive generation to play cricket for Royal College.

Bryan was also a rugby player for Royal and was a key member of the Invincibles team of 1951 (see photo in next column).

With an excellent sporting record at school, Bryan was an automatic choice for any of the cadships on offer for appointment to the fledgling armed services of post-World War Ceylon. He was among the four selected from the "Invincibles" rugby team of Royal College to be trained as Cadets at Dartmouth prior to enlistment as officers in the Royal Ceylon Navy.

On leaving the Navy, Bryan worked as an Executive in Mercantile service in Colombo, and then migrated to Australia where the family settled down in Baulkham Hills.

Bryan was three years my senior at school, so apart from seeing him playing cricket at the Royal Thomian, and at Bradby Shield rugby matches I did not know him personally until I migrated to Australia.

It was at the home of our mutual friend Alan Henricus that my late wife Tulsi and I met Bryan and his wife Jean, almost 40 years ago. Our friendship grew over the years, bonded by many sharing of meals at various homes and restaurants. The Dharmaratnes were gracious hosts with a well-stocked bar housing a range of the best that Scotland could offer. Around 8 years ago Bryan and Jean moved to the Anglican Retirement village in Castle Hill.

Bryan was an honourable family man, who lived a quiet and genteel life. He loved company and his game of bridge. He is survived by his dear wife Jean, daughters Jennifer, Jaqueline, and Colleen, and son Nigel and five grandchildren. His brother Fritz having predeceased him, two brothers Cecil and Mike survive him.

REST IN PEACE BRYAN.

*Hugh Karunanayake*



(Members of the 1951 "Invincibles" Royal College Rugby team" Standing from left SP Wickremesinghe, Norman Gunewardene, C Balachandran, GC Wickremesinghe, Alan Henricus, SD Gunaratne, TLK Mendis, MA Rahiman. Seated W Molligoda (coach) Trevor Anghie, Humphrey Wijesinghe, JCA Corea (Principal) Devaka Rodrigo, Brian Van Twest, MT Thambapillai (Master In Charge) On ground: Bryan Dharmaratne, the Bradby Shield, Lalith Hewavitarne

## Dr GPLM (Lakshman) De Silva

(24 March 1935 - 21 September 2024)



It is with utmost sadness that I pay this tribute to a dear friend I have been fortunate and privileged to know for the past 80 years. GPLM were his initials but is better known to his friends as Lakshman. I met Lakshman first as a ten year old enrolled in Form 1A in Royal College, in 1946. The school was still in tempo-

rary premises (the school buildings requisitioned in 1941 for the war effort) and the lower school housed in *Carlton Lodge*, in Turret Road on the grounds of *Turret House* which was accommodating the Upper School.

Lakshman together with a few other boys came from Ladies College, whereas I was promoted together with about 80% of the intake, from the Primary School of Royal College, then known as Royal Preparatory School. The cohort from the Prep School besides being large in numbers, knew each other well and tended to dominate classroom activities, socially. The boys from Ladies College not to be outdone also ganged up when necessary and they included the late Gamini Nayakkara, Colin Abeysinghe, Bryan Wickremaratne, and Lakshman de Silva. The total intake was around 100 boys plus a few stragglers who were required to repeat from the previous year. There were three parallel forms and it was my destiny to be included in form 1A together with Lakshman and about 30 other boys, our Form master being Aubrey Collette the famed cartoonist.

Before joining Ladies College, Lakshman had studied in the Primary School of Dharmarajah College, Kandy, where the Buddhist educational environment had got a deep seated hold on him. He was a great believer in the philosophy of Buddhism which he tried to emulate right through his life. A man of high principles he never seemed to waver from the straight and narrow path ahead. Lakshman's father David de Silva a lawyer, and an old Royalist to boot, I suspect, saw Lakshman as the one in the family to 'rise above the rest'

There were many good students in our batch including two future Civil Servants viz Gamini Iriyagolle, and Olcott Goonasekera, and amongst them in the scholarly stakes was Lakshman. A studious and reflective soul, he was never seen on the sports grounds and had his own reservations about "contact sports" which of course included rugby football, and to his mind the game of cricket too! He was no "nerd" however, and when the occasion arose would engage in banter and argument without pulling any punches.

In school he was not known by his given name Lakshman but was called by his initials GPLM or by his nickname which was derived from his initials, and which he detested. Lakshman progressed through

school effortlessly and entered the Ceylon Medical School where he completed the course with honours, and went overseas where he qualified as a Virologist. In school he was the Secretary of the Music Society, western classical music being his favourite leisure time indulgence. Surprisingly, he veered away from classical music and was at one time in later life an unabashed fan of Julio Iglesias.

After acquiring his post graduate qualifications in Virology, Lakshman worked in London and about 50 years ago migrated to Australia.

Lakshman married the love of his life Lakshmi, daughter of Dr MH Saddhasena, one time Member of Parliament for Ambalangoda. Their progeny, son Suresh, and daughter Keshani both emulating dad by qualifying as doctors. Suresh is a radiologist, while Keshani is a paediatrician. Keshani married to Dr John Moore, haematologist have three boys two of whom are medical doctors, and the third Mathew protesting that there are too many doctors in the house, chose to do a degree in engineering!

When I migrated with my family to Sydney 40 years ago, my old pal Lakshman lost no time in inviting us for a meal to which he had invited a few friends. My late wife Tulsi and "Lucky" became great friends, and when Keshani married, my talented Tulsi not only made the wedding cake, but also the bridal trousseau and the outfits for the maids.

When the Ceylon Society of Australia was formed 25 years ago, I invited Lakshman to join. He dithered at the start as he felt that such initiatives run out of puff before long, but joined within the first year and even made a very interesting contribution on the activities of the Royal College Music Society of which he was the Secretary, and during his tenure received a massive grant from the Asia Foundation to purchase new instruments for the school orchestra, very efficiently managed by Paul Marcus Jeyarajan, son of Dr SC Paul, and formerly of the Indian Civil Service. He wrote under the pseudonym "A Music Tragic".

During the last decade or so, Lakshman and Lucky lived in a serviced apartment in the heart of Chatswood. After Lucky's departure, Lakshman continued to plod his weary way through life. Both Suresh and Keshani living in the adjoining suburb were always there to support him, but Lakshman was not a gregarious person. We used to chat on the phone often, and on our last visit to Sydney about 6 years ago we stayed in the same block of apartments.

During recent months his health issues were increasing, and it was no surprise to hear of his demise. Lakshman's departure has impacted on me considerably, and my world reduced now to a few close friends. "We'll meet again, don't know where, don't know when, we'll meet again some sunny day"!

May Lakshman attain the Supreme Bliss of Nibbana.

*Hugh Karunanayake*

## Dr P R (Ranji) WIKRAMANAYAKE

(17 January 1932 – 30 July 2024)



A few weeks ago, the Sri Lankan community in Australia lost one of its most distinguished sons, Dr P R Wikramanayake, known as Ranji to his friends, an accomplished and highly regarded endocrinologist. He was 92 years of age and hailed from a distinguished

family with its origins in Galle. The ancestry and genealogy of the family is well recorded in the book *Galle as quiet as asleep* (1993) by Norah Roberts.

The elder son of E.G. Wikramanayake, Queens Counsel, Ranji was born into the lap of luxury. Like his father before him, Ranji attended St Thomas College, Mount Lavinia from where he entered the Ceylon Medical School, and from where he graduated, and proceeded to the UK for postgraduate work. On his return from London with the M.R.C.P. he was appointed consultant physician at the Outpatients Department of the General Hospital, Colombo. He soon was interested in the study of diabetes and read a paper at the Plenary Scientific Sessions of the Ceylon College of Physicians, thirty years ago. After serving a Nuffield Fellowship in the UK, he moved to Australia where he worked as Diabetologist at the Prince Edward Hospital where he worked for over 10 years. He then took charge of the Diabetic Clinic at the Concord Hospital where another Sri Lankan Dr Medduma Kappagoda served as ophthalmologist.

It was through my close friend and former schoolmate Dr Medduma Kappagoda that I first met Ranji who Kappa brought home one day about 30 years ago, in order to assess my blood sugar. That visit was the foundation on which a strong friendship developed and through which I had the great pleasure of enjoying a dear friendship with his brother Nimal later after I moved to Melbourne. Ranji lived in the affluent and desirable seaside suburb of Vaucluse and his great hobby was horse racing. His father Guy, a leading Queens Counsel, had owned a string of race-horses in Colombo and was the winner of several trophies when racing was the pastime of “kings and squires”. Ranji too owned at least a couple of thoroughbreds in Sydney whose activities kept him occupied during his leisure. Ranji married Amara Weerasooriya daughter of the late Dr and

Mrs SE Weerasooriya. Amara was Head Girl of Visakha Vidyalaya and an outstanding netball and tennis player. Their combined qualities had to produce extraordinary children. Their only son Priyan is a popular gastro surgeon in Bowral, and the two daughters Roshanara a lawyer and Shemara is a highly successful leader in the corporate world of Australia.

It was during the course of last year, and earlier this year that I had close interaction with Ranji. It was during this period that Nimal fell ill and passed away about three months ago. Ranji was highly solicitous of Nimal's welfare and chose to convey his medical advice to Nimal through me. Ranji the elder brother was generally of a quiet and unruffled disposition. When Nimal was hospitalised, he chose not to disturb him, and instead telephoned me for progress reports. About six weeks ago he rang me from his hospital bed in Prince Edward Hospital where he worked previously, to say in a feeble voice that his heart is failing on him. He left this world a few days later.

Ranji Wikramanayake was of a rare breed, sadly lacking in the old country today. Dedicated to his profession, and guide and guardian to his family, he was honest, hardworking and generous. He was a founder member of the Ceylon College of Physicians, and a member of the Ceylon Society of Australia for many years until his demise.

A little-known aspect of his generosity was his donation of Rs five million in January 2016 to the Ceylon College of Physicians, the interest earned from the donation to be awarded annually to the best research paper on diabetes. Ranji was to personally present the donation, but on their way to Colombo, his wife Amara fell ill in Singapore and had to return to Australia. He was not a man for excuses and made sure that the gift was made on his behalf by his close friend Tilak de Zoysa.

Ranji Wikramanayake certainly earned his rest; may he now rest in peace.

*Hugh Karunanayake*

### Obituary notices published in *The Ceylankan*

All Obituary notices and Appreciations of Life recorded on these pages are restricted to deceased CSA members only. In keeping with that policy all notices are accompanied with a note indicating such membership status.





### CSA Meetings (Sydney)

**Venue:** Pennant Hills Community Centre Main Hall, Level 1, Ramsay Road, Pennant Hills (cnr Yarrara Rd, enter via Ramsay Rd for parking).

**Please note:** Events that go ahead will be held strictly in compliance with safety regulations as required.

## The Ceylon Society of Australia



### *27<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting and Social*

on Saturday 23 November 2024  
at the Pennant Hills Community Centre  
Ramsay Road, Pennant Hills, NSW 2120

6.00 – 6.30pm: AGM for Members  
6.30 - 11.00pm: Social with Dinner for  
Members & Guests

Tickets: \$65 per person  
Drinks: BYO, and soft drinks provided  
Dress: Smart Casual

Dinner, Dancing & Singalong  
Music by Roger Menezes  
Dinner by Flavour of Ceylon

*Come and Enjoy!*

For reservations and tickets contact:

|                     |              |
|---------------------|--------------|
| Deepak Pritamdas    | 0434 860 188 |
| Pauline Gunewardene | 0419 447 665 |
| Amal Wahab          | 0411 888 182 |

MELBOURNE CHAPTER  
General Meeting

# CEYLON SOCIETY OF AUSTRALIA MELBOURNE CHAPTER

will present an illustrated talk on

## “Sri Lankan Wild Elephants: From Conflict to Coexistence”

by Srilal Miththapala



Sri Lanka's wild elephant population is rapidly declining, largely due to the escalating Human-Elephant Conflict (HEC). In 2023 alone, approximately 470 elephants were killed, mostly by farmers trying to protect their crops. Despite various efforts to address this issue, advocating for a holistic solution that promotes human-elephant coexistence is essential.

The fragmentation of elephant habitats and increased human activity

have resulted in the alarming decrease of the elephant population. The concern is whether we have already reached the ‘tipping point’ where the population dynamics has deteriorated to an extent that the species can no longer survive.

There can be ‘no one size fits all’ solution or magic bullet. The solution has to take into consideration many factors: not only environmental but also socio-economic issues. A holistic approach is required that is tailored to suit the ground situation.

Sri Lanka’s HEC is unique because of its topographical features, farming methods and human settlements.

### **Srilal Miththapala**

is a lifelong wildlife enthusiast with a particular interest in Sri Lanka's wild elephants. Over the past 30+ years, he has visited numerous National Parks in Sri Lanka, observing, and studying these majestic creatures in their natural habitats. In 2002, he conducted formal research on Sri Lankan elephants, sponsored by the US Fish and Wildlife Service, focusing on the population dynamics in the Uda Walawe National Park. His findings led to the publication of two books: *Tranquil Footsteps*, the story of a herd of elephants in the National Park and their day to day life as told thru the eyes of the Matriarch elephant and *Elephantine Tales*, a collection of his anecdotes and experiences in the wild. Srilal has given talks on Sri Lankan wildlife and elephants to the Werribee Open Zoo in Melbourne and the curators of the National Zoo & Aquarium in Canberra, Australia.

**Saturday, 30<sup>th</sup> November 2024, 5.00pm**  
**at ASHWOOD HALL (small hall)**  
**21a Electra Avenue, Ashwood**

for enquiries contact Logan 0468 348 153

[Please note that this event is being held on a Saturday instead of the usual Sunday]

## MEMBERSHIP RATES

- **General Subscriptions for Australia:** \$35 per calendar year;
- **Pensioners' subscriptions:** \$25 per calendar year;
- **Sri Lanka:** Rs.3000 per calendar year;
- **Overseas members from USA/UK/Canada/Israel/Thailand and other countries:** \$50 per calendar year. If payment is not possible in Aust Dollars, please pay by Bank Draft or Bank Transfer in US Dollars or Pounds Sterling and add Aust \$10 to the Aust \$50 for bank charges due here for converting a foreign currency payment to Aust Dollars.

### Payment Methods

1. Pay by cheque in favour of the Ceylon Society of Australia and post to Deepak Pritamdas, Treasurer, PO Box 489, Blacktown, NSW 2148, Australia.

2. Pay by Bank Transfer to:  
Account Name: Ceylon Society of Australia  
Bank Name: Commonwealth Bank of Australia  
Bank BSB: 062 308  
Account No: 10038725  
Swift Code for overseas remittances: CTBAU2S  
Reference: Payee Name

**Note:** Please email all payment details in confirmation to deepakpsl1@gmail.com

(Please Note: In Deepak's email address:- it is lower case L followed by the number 1)

\*\*\*\*\*

### Congratulations and a warm welcome to our New Members

- Gina CHITTY Carlingford NSW
- Chanaka LIYANAGE Turramurra NSW

## WANTED...YOUR LITERARY CONTRIBUTIONS

*The Ceylankan* is published quarterly and the Editor is on the look-out for your literary contributions. Be assured that your work will be given careful consideration with a view to publication at all times.

Original, previously unpublished, articles relating to the history, culture and heritage of Sri Lanka are sought, while any material of an anecdotal nature will also be considered provided they conform to the CSA's ideals of being non-racial, non-political, non-religious and non-controversial.

While every effort is made to print material that is relevant and correct, we do not take the responsibility for errors. The Editor would appreciate any inaccuracies being brought to his notice without delay.

To facilitate the design/layout of the publication, we request that your word processing / typing be unformatted. Where applicable, contributors are also requested to annotate bibliographical references for copyright reasons and to help further research and study by interested members.

\*\*\*\*\*

### Notice to Members - Contact Details

Could we please request all members to advise Treasurer Deepak Pritamdas - deepakpsl1@gmail.com - and Secretary Presenji Jayawickrema - presenji@tpg.com.au - of any changes to contact details for phone, email address and home address. We need to make certain our records are correct for mailing *The Ceylankan* as well as for getting in touch with members, and would appreciate your assistance. Thank you.

## WE NEED SPEAKERS

The CSA welcomes professionals and others interested in speaking at our General Meetings. Meetings are held in Sydney, Melbourne and Colombo, quarterly in February, May and August.

If you know of anyone, please contact as relevant:

- CSA President Pauline Gunewardene

Mobile: +61 419 447 665

Email: paulineg@ozemail.com.au

- Melbourne Chapter Convenor Logan Thurairatnam

Mobile: +61 468 348 153

Email: a.logendran@gmail.com

- Colombo Chapter Local Secretary Insiyah Davoodbhoy

Mobile: +94 77 8705575

Email: insiyah.davoodbhoy@gmail.com

## ADVERTISING IN

### *The Ceylankan*

For some time, CSA members and others have indicated an interest in advertising to promote their goods and services in the Journal. However, we have been maintaining the ideal of the founders of the CSA, that the Journal must not be made a means for commercial profit, but only as a vehicle for research, study and promotion of the rich heritage and culture of Ceylon/Sri Lanka.

However, due to the rising costs of delivery of the Journal to members worldwide, there has been a need to look for additional sources of revenue. The decision was therefore taken by the Committee to accommodate advertising and promotional material in the form of separate loose-leaf flyers to be inserted in copies of the Journal being sent out.

Suitable material, in keeping with the non-political, non-partisan aims and ideals of the CSA, will be considered. All such copy is to be submitted to the Editor for consideration.

Once accepted, the advertiser will need to supply the printed flyers in sufficient numbers for inclusion in that particular issue of the Journal.

The cost of inserting such flyers is \$500 per issue of the Journal, paid in advance.

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