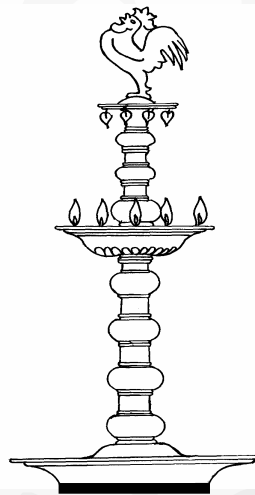


THE CEYLANKAN



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CONTENTS	
Editorial <i>Sumane Iyer</i>	2
Hagenbeck in Ceylon <i>Joe Simpson</i>	3
Growing up in a village in the 50s & 60s <i>Siri Gamage</i>	6
New Year Games had Religious meaning <i>S Pathiravitana</i>	9
A Biographical note Sir Marcus Fernando <i>Srini Peries</i>	12
Boxing Day tsunami survivor <i>Vama Vamadevan</i>	17
Book Review - Collections & Recollections <i>Tony Peries</i>	18
The Cruise of the “Halpha” <i>Somasiri Devendra</i>	19
‘Ruvingama’ Progress Report <i>Joe Simpson</i>	21
Letters to Editor <i>Tony Peries</i> <i>Somasiri Devendra</i> <i>Roger Thiedeman</i>	22
Bookshop and Web resources Cordial welcome to new members	25
Tributes: Late Vernon Abeysekera <i>Shelagh Goonewardene - Melbourne</i> <i>Neville Jayaweera - Kent, England</i>	26
Synopses of meetings <i>Melbourne - Shelagh Goonewardene</i> <i>Sydney - Gerard Velayuthen</i>	28
EDITORIAL	

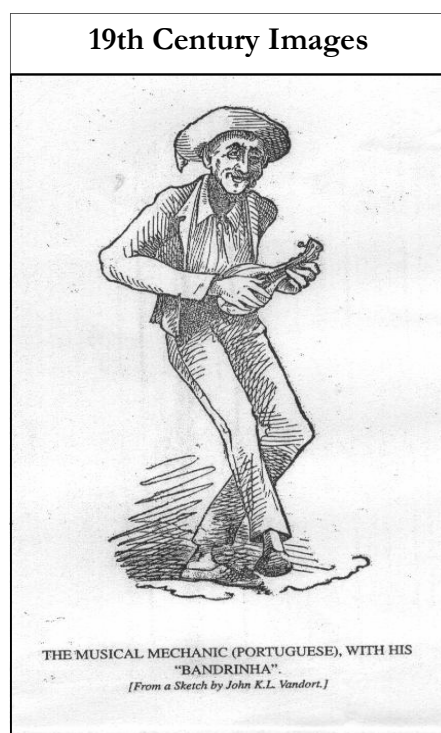


Lest we forget.

The tsunami and its devastating effects still dominate the mother country. On a recent visit to Sri Lanka my wife has witnessed ant like scurrying around of various NGO s in their 4WD vehicles mostly in and around Colombo and some in the far south delivering whatever services they do. Members of CSA

and readers of this Journal will recall the appeal we mounted in Journal 29 and one of the organisations mentioned was BECT Tsunami Rehabilitation & Reconstruction Trust. We hope many gave generously and others will follow soon after they read the Progress Report sent to us by Joe Simpson, the Canadian (Honorary Sri Lankan Burgher as he is affectionately known to his friends) Co-ordinator of DWC an organisation gathering funds for BECT. Turn to page 21 and if it does not make you reach into your wallet , nothing will. Results are what people want to see and that is what DWC has produced.

Douglas Ranmuthugala’s article on HMS “Rajaliya” has spawned a few more ‘insides’. We have contributions from Roger Thiedeman and Somasiri Devendra to add colour to the original piece. Now that is real participation and the Editorial Team hopes that readers will fertilise the seeds we plant by sharing and airing information they have relative to original articles we publish. To take this a step further we have Tony Peries (see his Letter to Editor p 22) who invites readers to share information on the lesser publicised participants in commerce - an invitation to expand on the material of his two talks on the subject of 19th and 20th century commerce, with reference to the Borah, Gujarati and Moor communities who first broke the monopoly of the British and established lasting commercial houses . Admittedly very little appears on record as Tony says “they remained aloof from local political and national stirrings.” We are talking about the Hebtulabhoys, Moosajees, Jafferjees etc. Familiar names? Know them or of them? Then please.....



“Uncle John” Hagenbeck in Ceylon

by Joe Simpson

John Hagenbeck (1866-1940) settled in Ceylon in 1891, when he was in his mid-twenties. He was a younger half-brother of the great German animal entrepreneur Carl Hagenbeck (1844-1913), “King of the Menagerie Owners” and founder in 1907 of the world’s first open-plan zoo at Stellingen, near Hamburg, which flourishes to this day despite several near-disasters in the past century.

Besides owning several tea plantations in Ceylon, John Hagenbeck collected and exported exotic animals to the family zoo, as well as arranging for groups of Ceylonese to travel abroad with the wildly-popular Hagenbeck “ethnographic” exhibitions in the USA and elsewhere. John appears in Leonard Woolf’s *Growing*, the memoir of the author’s years in early twentieth century Ceylon as a civil servant: in 1909, while Woolf was stationed in Hambantota, Hagenbeck brought down the timid Swedish Baron Axel Blixen, to join a foreign hunting party in the district. Baron Blixen was the father of the better-known Bror Blixen, fearless Kenya hunter of the 1920s and one-time husband of Karen Blixen (a.k.a. Isak Dinesen), author of *Out of Africa*. (In her book, Karen Blixen recalled once seeing giraffes on board a German steamer in Mombasa harbour, bound for Hamburg – the Hagenbecks had an animal catching station at one time near Kilimanjaro). In later years, during the 1920s, John Hagenbeck established the Ceylon Zoological Gardens at Dehiwela, an eleven-acre site which he used as a collecting depot for wild animals destined for European zoos; when this enterprise became bankrupt in the mid-1930s, the Government took it over and nowadays continues to run it as Colombo’s National Zoological Gardens.

During his heyday in the 1920s, John Hagenbeck wrote a number of books about his many adventures with wild animals in Ceylon, North India and modern-day Indonesia, but regrettably (for non-German speakers) none of these has yet been translated into any other language. Actually John had been forced to start all over again after the First World War, during which the British confiscated his assets and he narrowly escaped detention by fleeing from Ceylon to Germany. At one time before the Great War he kept a semi-permanent base in Sumatra, somewhere near Padang on the west coast; a fifteen-year-old Sumatran rhinoc-



John Hagenbeck (left) in his coconut plantation

eros living at the Madras Zoo in 1913, may well have been supplied by Hagenbeck in 1899. In the early 1900s when he lived at “Ixora Villa” near (then) Green Path in Colombo, he kept a curious menagerie in the grounds, to the vast amusement of local children who knew him as “Uncle John” and who used to ride the tame elephants around the gardens. On one occasion in about 1903, a kangaroo disappeared and was later found on the roof of a neighbour’s

house!

Lorenz Hagenbeck, a son of John's world-famous half-brother Carl, mentions his Uncle John several times in his own memoirs, *Animals Are My Life*, published in English translation in 1956, the year of his death. Carl's own memoirs, which appeared in a 1909 English edition as *Of Beasts and Men*, mention that by then the Hagenbecks had exported sixty-seven elephants from Ceylon, and also describe how they brought over to Europe and North America large contingents of Ceylonese to take part in sensational exhibitions, including one great caravan of almost seventy persons with twenty-five elephants and a multitude of



Entrance to the Dehiwala Zoo, as it is today
Photo by Somasiri Devendra

cattle of various breeds; foreign audiences went wild over such novel and exotic displays.

Lorenz Hagenbeck tells us that the Hagenbeck "International Circus and Singhalese Caravan" took place in a large field in Hamburg in April 1887 (in fact, the year after John Hagenbeck first visited Ceylon). Despite near-disaster when the American-style "Big Top" blew down in a sudden gale and had to be quickly re-erected, the awe-struck Hamburg crowds saw displays of Asian elephants, lions, tigers and other exotic creatures, and – the high-point – an elaborate pantomime led by the "Singhalese" called

"An Excursion to Wategama in Ceylon"! In 1903, young Lorenz sailed for India to bring back some elephants for his father Carl, and stopped off in Ceylon to visit his Uncle John. By then John Hagenbeck had a successful ship's factor business among his various other local enterprises. Half a century later, Lorenz remembered affectionately his evenings sitting with Uncle John at "The Lawn", his spacious Colombo bungalow, watching fireflies flitting about in the warm night air and chatting about Hamburg: "The sounds of the tropical night and the moon shining from behind the exotic outline of the palm trees combined in a loveliness I had never known." John took his nephew by train upcountry to Kandy, where they saw flashes of lightning light up an "astonishing landscape". In Kandy, the pair was greeted by several dozen "Singhalese", many of whom had performed for the Hagenbeck exhibitions years before. All badly wanted to return to Germany!

When the Hagenbeck's revolutionary new "Tierpark" (Animal Park) opened near Hamburg in 1907, a conjurer from the

"Singhalese Company" attracted great attention, so much so that the visiting Kaiser Wilhelm II hosted a command performance on board the Imperial yacht. Lorenz accompanied the conjurer to the dock in an elegant coach, and the pair was received on board with great ceremony; Lorenz remembered of the show, "I never saw the Kaiser more happy than he was at that moment". That same year, ten Asian elephants ridden by Ceylonese mahouts threw their riders and took off through the Hamburg suburbs at the sound of the railway engine that was to take them to the Munich *Oktoberfest*; one bemused homeowner telephoned to say, "Mr. Hagenbeck, if you've lost an elephant,

it's in my front garden!" One female named "Ceylon" was not found until the next day, feeding quietly in some woods.

In 1909, while in Buenos Aires for a big zoological exhibition, Carl Hagenbeck decided to cable his half-brother John in Ceylon, to request twenty devil-dancers to be shipped over right away! His wife and his son Lorenz felt however that the Argentineans, far more exposed than Europeans and North Americans to multi-ethnicity, would not be responsive to such exotica, so they secretly held up the telegram. When a furious Carl found this out, he turned the tables on his family by quietly ordering John to send him ten Ceylonese devil-dancers, exactly half the original number!

During the First World War, after what Lorenz calls John Hagenbeck's "adventurous escape from British internment [in Ceylon]" *via* Java and Italy, John helped his nephew run the Stellingen (Hamburg) Animal Park in very difficult wartime circumstances. One conscripted Stellingen employee actually took his Ceylon Asian elephant "Jenny" along with him to the Western Front to drag timber for trench props, and entertain the delighted German troops with circus tricks in the evenings; Jenny became the only elephant to be listed in the Wehrmacht books as a "war elephant"!

In 1932, by which time John Hagenbeck was long since re-established in his beloved Ceylon, the entire Hagenbeck Circus went aboard the S.S. *Terukini Maru* to Japan, *via* Colombo; there Lorenz and his own nephew were royally entertained once again by Uncle John, who (remarks Lorenz) "after the war had gone back to his business as a ships' chandler and plantation owner". One of his many roles was as the Ceylon general agent of the Alliance and Stuttgarter Life Insurance Bank Ltd. It was while he was with John in Colombo that Lorenz first heard that Adolf Hitler had been elected Reich Chancellor; John questioned Lorenz about what Hitler looked like, and then asked, "What now?" After a successful run in Japan and multi-cultural Shang-

HAGENBECK, John ; A dealer in wild animals and founder of the Dehiwala Zoo. Died in Colombo, 16th December, 1940. Aged 74 years. He was resident in Ceylon for more than 40 years and before the war he was a ship chandler and general agent of the Alliance and Stuttgarter Life Insurance Bank Ltd. On the outbreak of war he was interned at Diyatalawa being a German National.

1

hai, the Circus returned to Europe, again stopping off in Colombo for a few days. This time Uncle John again took Lorenz to Kandy, where they encountered some performing mahouts who (it turned out) had first learned their elephant tricks at Stellingen! While the Circus performed briefly in India, carpenters in Colombo busily prepared seaworthy stables to house the animals for the next stage of their long voyage, to Egypt.

Sadly, since he died in 1940 while he and his wife were interned at Diyatalawa as German Nationals, "Uncle John" Hagenbeck did not live to see the amazing resurrection of the family's Stellingen Zoo after the almost-total devastation of Hamburg caused by World War Two enemy bombing. (A Canadian airman narrowly escaped death when he parachuted into the bear pit). In his book Lorenz mentions the sadness caused to the family by the news of his uncle's death in Ceylon. At one stage just after the war's end, Hamburg schoolchildren collected tons of acorns to feed the starving animals at Stellingen. In the post-war era, Stellingen became a regular venue for shooting movies and TV shows, including Cecil B. de Mille's "The Greatest Show on Earth". Surely "Uncle John" would have heartily enjoyed that one!

In the coming issues, we will be serialising excerpts from his book "John Hagenbeck unter der sonne Indiene". (JH under the Indian sun) A First Person account of his adventure in the tropics. This is the only known English translation and is exclusive to The Ceylankan ...Ed.

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

by Siri Gamage

Growing up in a locality near Walasmulla in the far South of Sri Lanka during the 50s and 60s was an experience of a life-

time considering what the place and time had to offer an aspiring young person.

Interactions the villagers had with townsfolk, the farming activities, the ritualistic aspects displayed in Thovil and Bali as well as black magic, the growing emphasis by parents on science education and the expanding Swabhasa (vernacular) medium of instruction, commerce, the disaffection with the system of government all played a part in the social and cultural fabric at the time. Being the son of a village shop owner, I had the opportunity to not only be the part time sales person but also service delivery man at the shop. The shop itself – a venue for social interaction and gossip, provided a window through which I could gain a sense of the current issues and concerns that the village folk had. After reading newspapers, which arrived at the shop daily, I was the disseminator of information to the young and the old gathered.

The communal nature of village life was very much evident at the time. Among the farmers this was more visible as each depended on the other for ploughing, harvesting etc. During the ploughing and harvesting season, herds of buffaloes would plod their way along the *devata* (unsealed road) toward the paddy fields behind our land across the Kirama Oya. During the harvest times, often on full moon nights, the chatter

among passing folk, after finishing the threshing of paddy could be heard. It was customary to go on doing this until late at night. Once the threshing of paddy on one makeshift ground is over in the fields, the owners of the nearby plots used the same compound for threshing their harvest of paddy. In other words, they shared the compound.

My father used to sell Ayurvedic herbal medicine in one section of the shop. Pa-



The village shop - a typical scene, friends share a betel chew

tients would consult *Veda mahattaya* – village physician (on the way they bought several cigarettes, sugar and tea, or a loaf of bread for him) and come back with a *vattoruma* (a prescription for decoctions) and present it to my father. He would then gather the available items indicating to the customer those that

he had to buy from the shops in town or collect from the bush themselves. Often, he would deliver these on credit if the patient was short of money. Weighing of the ingredients was with copper coins and red seeds collected from the bush called *manchadi ata*. A coin measured *kalandas*. *Kalan* and *manchadi* were standard measures used in herbal medicine. If the *Veda mahattaya* had made an omission in the *vattoruma*, father – because of his long experience of selling herbal medicine- would quickly identify and rectify the error. Prescriptions included dried roots, barks, seeds, leaves, veins with medicinal value. Most of these items were imported from India. Dried fruits such as sultanas were also sold, as was *galkandu* – a variety of consolidated white sugar. They probably served as the “sugar coating” for the bitter decoctions.

There was a popular belief that if you were bitten by a *garandiya* (rat snake) – you are

not supposed to step on cow dung on the way to *Veda mahattaya's* house. If you did so, the treatment would become difficult. For snake and other insect bites there was a specialist *Veda mahattaya* who will generally



"Kirama Oya ", a river shared by all

visit the house of the victim. Upon sighting the patient, he will quickly diagnose the nature of the bite by reading gestures and features of the patient. *Veda mahattaya* was well regarded in the village and surrounding areas, as they did not charge fees for their services. As mentioned earlier it was customary for a patient to carry gifts of food or household materials in lieu of monetary reward.

In the fifties, travelling Indian traders perhaps Muslims or other south Indians, (people used to call them *mattayo*), would peddle their wares comprising textiles, fancy jewellery etc, a kind of mobile shop which they carried in bundles on their head. They also used to carry a polished wooden stick, probably to fend off dogs that abound in villages, but also used as a yard measure. They would lay the bundle down and open it layer by layer in front of the gathered family. My grandma was an avid 'window shopper' of items brought by the *mattayos* - just like the children. But she would end up buying a couple of items, partly to help the itinerant trader.

A cart drawn by white bullocks, with clanging bells around their necks brought lime,

clay pots, various merchandise and hay for the livestock. The sound of bells could be heard whilst the cart was about a mile away. At night, the owner and the young assistant would unhitch the bullocks and camp out near a shop or under cover of a tree. A lit kerosene oil lamp and a cooking fire was a common sight on these visits. The visitors would gather from the surroundings, dried coconut flower cases, coconut shells and husks as fuel for the cooking fire.

The *vidane mama* and *nanda* (dhobi or the launderer and wife) who lived opposite our house is another institution in village life. (*note the respectful reference to **mama** – uncle and **nanda** – aunt even if they performed a low level service in the community – Ed*) They used to wash my school uniform on a weekly basis. On rainy days, they found it difficult to dry them in time, and reluctantly I had to wear used shirts and shorts until the clean ones were delivered. Sometimes this delay was interpreted as resulting from their jealousy – not the bad weather. *Vidane mama* and *nanda* would take bundles of soiled clothes on their head to the Kirama Oya cutting across Walasmulla – Middeniya road under Weliamuna Bridge – it was an old wooden one. The traditional village laundry was a rock partly immersed in the river. Clothes would be dashed against the rock in flowing water – very effective for removing the dirt but shortened the life of the item. They would transport the washed clothes – hand squeezed – back to their home and sun dry them on clothes lines strung out in the backyard. White clothes were made whiter by soaking in *nil* - Robin Blue - before drying them out. To starch some items of clothes like shirts and shorts, they used *kanda* – liquid starch - usually derived from boiling rice. Hot embers from burnt coconut shells provided heat for the irons. *Vidane mama* and *nanda* had access to the most wealthy and privileged families in the area. As a result, they assumed an air of self importance when dealing with the rest of the village folk. Often this attitude created conflict between themselves and with others in the village who were farmers, workers, shop owners, carpen-

ters or masons, who were considered the lower level inhabitants. The socio-economic status of the couple did not make them significant in the minds of the villagers. They faced some kind of retributive justice, when one day the elder daughter eloped with a labourer. Initially the couple experienced a lot of mental anguish as they cut off contact with the daughter who had “disgraced” them, but as time wore on and grandchildren arrived all was forgiven and the families were reunited.

Education and schooling were highly regarded by parents in the area, especially as they provided an avenue for upward social mobility. Prior to the establishment of *madya maha vidyalayas* - central schools - and *maha vidyalayas* - high schools, only those who could afford to send their children to boarding schools in Galle etc. were the ones who saw their children succeed. Others obtained an average education just enough for living but not to qualify for a profession. Expansion of these schools and the introduction of a district quota system for university entrance along with the introduction of mother tongue as the medium of instruction in schools and universities opened up avenues of learning to hundreds and thousands of underprivileged young people from rural backgrounds. The high school in Walasmulla town which I attended was the place where modern influences were brought to bear on young people from surrounding rural locations. Modern life style crept into the minds and habits of youngsters by way of new dress styles, hair styles, novels and short stories about life in Colombo, teachers who had been to centres of learning and sporting, and peers from the town itself. The classes in the school were a mixture with the rich, poor, middle class kids. Some still wore a sarong and shirt; others wore shirt and pair of shorts. In the early years, some of us wore a pith helmet to school, similar to that worn by colonial policemen. Only in the advanced level classes were we allowed to wear white trousers. Applying refined coconut oil to

the hair was common but resented by some especially when it starts to dribble on the sides of the face. When combined with sweat it created an unwelcome odour. My “morning shower” prior to school was a luxurious dip in the *Kirama Oya* adjacent to our land on dry days or at the well opposite the house on rainy days

As far as my early education was concerned, a dedicated teacher or two who sacrificed their afternoons to give extra tuition free of charge made a significant difference. I acquired reading habits by reading the newspapers brought by my father to the shop. The shop floor was a mini parliament where villagers gathered and reflected on the happenings in the village, province, the country and internationally. Some were very hard headed in their opinions, and were vocal. Many were listeners.

To be continued...

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Siri gained his BA (Hons) in Sociology U of Ceylon 1972, MA Sociology U of Hawaii 1980, PhD in Anthropology & Sociology - Monash University 1990: his Topic being Rural Social Stratification (Class & Class Consciousness) in a Kandyan Village. Joined the faculty of University of New England in 1990 is now senior lecturer in Multicultural Studies but teaches units on immigrants, globalisation and work, social context of education, and intercultural studies. Siri was born in Walasmulla in the south of Sri Lanka and his article is based on its environs.

**Much of what is greatest in
human achievement involves
some element of intoxication,
some sweeping away of
prudence by passion!**

Bertrand Russel

New Year Games had Religious meaning

by S Pathiravitana

“Inhabiting a climate which renders exertion of any kind distasteful, the Sinhalese in common with all inter-tropical races indulge in exercise for exercise’s sake, but to a very small extent. Hence it is hardly a matter for surprise that their games and sports would be cast after the tamest and soberest patterns.”

That was an observation made a long time ago, actually in the 19th century, by one of the early students of Sinhala culture. Watching the thousands that gather to watch a rugger or volleyball match and the many more who are prepared to get scorched in the sun to see a draw in a tame cricket match, climate can hardly be regarded today as a restraining factor in the growth of sport. It would be truer to say that the Sinhalese, in common with the people of all simple agricultural societies had little time for sport as we understand it today and none to spare for plain and simple exercise.

Those who had the time to indulge in sport were the leisured classes, kings and princes to whom gamesmanship was not an idle pursuit but a compulsory subject of study in the 64 arts that they qualified in. But society was not composed of all kings and princes and besides the Sinhalese kings lacked the splendour and the glory of Moguls or the Mauryas and was in fact nothing but a slightly glorified principedom. It is no wonder then that the poor agricultural society of

the Sinhalese, busy keeping away famine and epidemics did “cast its sport after the soberest and tamest patterns”.

But this is not to say that the Sinhalese frowned on sport. Like all other activities in traditional societies sport too had its legitimate place and in the lives of the Sinhalese it made its appearance around the time of the Sinhalese New Year and contributed to zestful and meaningful living as no other sport can do today.

But the traditional sports and pastimes that were indulged in and around New Year are all but gone today. Efforts made to revive them year in and year out by the Rural Development Department have borne little fruit mainly because traditional sport thrives only in a traditional society and Sinhalese society so rapidly in transition today has

very little traditions left.

INDOOR GAMES

Among the games that survive are mostly indoor games like *pancha keliya*, a game very much like Ludo, but instead of the dice, six cowries are tossed into the



Traditional heralding of New Year
RABAN (large drum) playing by women

air. Incidentally there are very few games which are fully indigenous and terms like *onduma* used in *pancha keliya* show their Tamil origin. *Olinda Keliya* is another traditional indoor game which, perhaps has vanished never to return. The boards used in this game are now rarely brought out during New Year and the best evidence of their passing away is the fact that a number of them can be seen in the Colombo Museum. This was one game according to those who have watched it, which was delightful to see especially when the Sinhalese women

moved their nimble fingers over the different holes on the boards. *Olinda Keliya* is another game which is not purely Sinhalese. There is evidence that it was played in the time of the Pharaohs.

A simple game played by women and children even today is the “otte-iratte” game or as the Greeks called it ‘par-impar’. Though simple it is quite an exciting game and in the absence of a pack of cards could be used as a substitute for ‘asking-hitting’. The game is played with seeds. A player takes a fistful of them and asks “otte-iratte”? (odd or even) Then when it is answered, the seeds are counted not singly but in pairs, incidentally showing that counting was as the mathematicians say, on a binary basis.

To come to games played by men and boys there are quite a number which seem to have a similarity to modern games like cricket. “*Mabsok*”, which is popular even today, is a kind of super hop scotch game played by two teams one of which tries to prevent the other from crossing the bases marked on the ground as in the hop scotch game. The leader of the ‘stopping’ side is called the *Thaachchi* (another Tamil influence) who is not in charge of any particular base but can move along the base lines as he wishes striking at his victims within his reach. These games like *amba ata paninawa* (hop scotch) and *Mabsok* are incidentally symbolic of the journey of the soul across *Samsara*. The bases correspond to different stages in the progress of the soul. Hop scotch is one game children of different countries, creed or colour understand and play alike.

A game which has been described by one writer but seen by a very few is the *bubu keliya*. This game is interesting for the fact that some of its features resemble cricket. In *bubu keliya*, attempts are made by two teams to dislodge a stick placed across two heaps of coconut shells, by throwing a ball at it. The winners are jubilant but the “victim of

defeat has to sit on the bridge of coconut shells, his head bowed on his knees and submit with patience and resignation to the sneers and jibes of the victors”.

Chuk gudu which is also played in England under the name of “Tip-Cat” is another game but unlike in the *bubu keliya* the losers get a chance of abusing the winner. The game ends when two of the losers bring back to the starting point the shorter stick which has been driven away by the winning captain in three stages. Part of the penalty is for the losers to repeat a verse several times over while bringing back the stick to the starting point. If they fail, the process is repeated. But the happiest part in this for the losers is the abuse they are permitted to use in the verse which begins “Gudu gudu theyyang konda parreyyang” and ends “maha gudu dunnata thota hen gahapiya, gahapiya, gahapiya... (may lightning strike you down..).

The jeering and abuse which form part of these games are essential to another more important game that used to be played in the past but is no longer performed today. This is the game known as *An keliya* or the pulling of horns. It is not so much a game played during New Year though misguided efforts are made by enthusiasts of Sinhala culture to revive it during this time as a religious play performed in times of distress like epidemics. But it is the most interesting of all games because we can’t trace it to the origin and significance of games which seems sometimes meaningless.

This is how Knox reported the ‘an keliya’

“There is another sport, which generally all people used with much delight, being as they called it, a sacrifice to one of their gods, to wit Potting Dio (Pattini Deviyo). And the benefits of it is, that it frees the country from grief and diseases. The manner of the game is thus. They have two crooked sticks like elbows one hooked into

the other and so with contrivances they pull with ropes, until the one break the other: some siding with one stick and some with the other; but never is money laid on either side. Upon the breaking of the stick, that party that hath won doth not a little rejoyce. Which rejoycing is expressed by dancing and singing” and uttering such sordid beastly expressions, together with postures of their bodies, as I omit to write them, as being their shame in acting, and would be mine in rehearsing. For he is at that time most renowned that behaves himself most shamelessly and beast-like. This filthy solemnity was formerly much in use among them, and even the King hath spent time in it, but now lately, he hath absolutely forbidden it under penalty of a forfeiture of money. So that now the practice hereof is quite left off."

To recognise evil is better than to ignore it; although the modern man discovered the truth of this the other day ancients always made sufficient allowance for the play of baser instincts in man. The struggle in *an keliya* is not merely a trial of strength but the struggle of the forces of good and evil in which not always good triumphed. The game



'an keliya' in progress

is said to have originated when goddess Pattini an aspect of Kali engaged in a friendly tussle with her husband over a Sapu flower. Their sticks with which they tried to break the flower got entangled and in the struggle

that followed Pattini and her followers on one side and her husband and followers on the other kept tugging from either end until her husband's stick gave way at last. She was so pleased by this that she ordered this to be performed regularly. Thus it is that her people seek to propitiate her in times of calamity by enacting this performance and invariably they see to it that her side – the *Yatipila*, (contender, so to say .. Ed) as against the – *Udupila* (challenger.. Ed) emerges triumphant in the struggle.

Pora Pol is another of the games with religious basis, not the religion of Buddhism but of a primordial pre – Buddhistic epoch. Here again the game is played by two teams and the aim is to propitiate the goddess.

After the *An keliya* and *Pora Pol* games are over there is a wonderful torchlight *perehera* (procession) which goes round the village scaring away any remnants of evil. From the *an keliya* to the Royal-Thomian *keliya* seems a far cry. But the flags, the shouting, the old crocks, though they do not bear comparison to the drumming and the chant of the *kattadiyas* (exorcists) which accompanied the pulling of the horns, attempt to perform albeit unknowingly a comparable function. Cricket may not be the right game to revive for a day or two in the spirit of *an keliya* but as Ceylonese play it, especially in their Big Matches we seem to see the attenuated spirit of Potting Dio hovering over the Colombo Oval.

This article appeared in The Ceylon Daily News - New Year Supplement 13th April 1959

Signage...

"Ladies, don't forget the rummage sale. It's a chance to get rid of those things not worth keeping around the house. Don't forget your husbands.

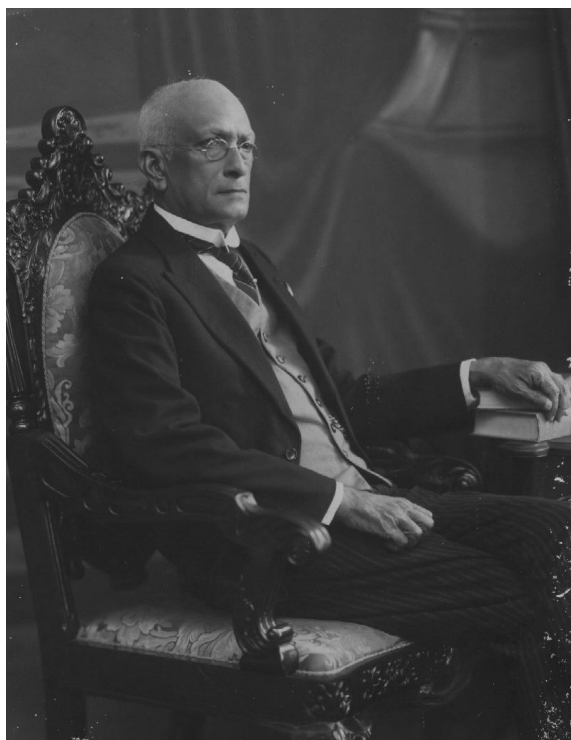
The peacemaking meeting scheduled for today has been cancelled due to a conflict.

Potluck supper Sunday at 5:00 PM - prayer and **medication** to follow.

A Biographical Note Sir Marcus Fernando

by Srini Peries

The author admits to self-interest in compiling these notes as Sir Marcus Fernando was her paternal grandfather. He died shortly before she was born. The family intended to sponsor the private printing of a biography but Tony, her eldest brother, died prematurely in 1986, while gathering reminiscences from those who knew her grandfather personally and although those notes have been lost, press cuttings etc, have provided the basis for what follows. However, certain matters hitherto known only to the immediate family are revealed here so that they are on the public record rather than being lost forever.



Sir Marcus Fernando 1864-1935

Hilarion Marcus Fernando was born in October 1864, the first child of Andrew Fernando Jnr. Andrew married three times so H.M. (as he was known) had several broth-

ers and sisters but only he and his immediate younger brother Charles Matthew (C.M.) attained a level of eminence achieved by few Ceylonese in the 19th or 20th centuries.

Both brothers had their primary education at St Benedicts College, Kotahena, the suburb where their father lived, and went on to the Colombo Academy as Royal College was then known, for their secondary education. H.M. obtained the prestigious Gildchrist Government Scholarship for the East in 1882 and gained the Ceylon Government Scholarship in 1883 which was also acquired by Charles Matthew in the following year.

At nineteen, in 1883, Marcus arrived in London and was the first student from Sri Lanka to study medicine at University College. Marcus did his clinical work at the North London Hospital which was opened in 1834 and renamed two years later as University College Hospital. In four years Marcus qualified as a Bachelor of Medicine and proceeded to the doctorate without delay. The remarkable achievement was preceded by his acquiring a second Medical Entrance Scholarship the year following his arrival in London.

Each year, he added to his impressive collection of medals and awards.

1884-85 College Silver Medal for junior class in Physiology

1885-86 College Gold Medal in the senior practical medical examination. College Silver Medal in Materia Medica.

First Class Honours and the University Gold Medal in Physiology. First Class Honours in Organic Chemistry.

1886-87 College Silver Medal in junior midwifery.

The Tuke Medal in Pathological Anatomy.

College medals for senior midwifery and medical jurisprudence topped that impressive list. He won the coveted Atchison Scholarship which is awarded to this day for the outstanding student of the year.

Acquiring his B.Sc. he qualified in 1888 with the M.B. securing the University Gold Med-

als in Medicine and Forensic Medicine. In the same year he became a Licentiate of the Worshipful Society of Apothecaries. In 1889 while working as Ophthalmic Assistant in the hospital he obtained his M.D., the first Sri Lankan to do so at the University of London. His intellectual prowess was recognised by his election as a Fellow of University College in 1890, the first ever Ceylonese graduate to be so honoured.

University College, London in the early eighties produced four great men. One remained at University College Hospital: Sir John Rose Bradford, became President of the Royal College of Physicians and made himself a permanent niche in the history of medicine: another, Sir Ernest Starling wrote a textbook of anatomy, became Godrell Professor of Physiology at University College and built himself a world-wide reputation; a third Lord Dawson of Penn, became Senior Physician of the London Hospital, President of the Royal College of Physicians and Physician-in-ordinary to King George V; the fourth went to Ceylon: Sir Marcus Fernando.

Given the eminence attained by his University College medical contemporaries there seems little doubt H.M. could have as family history says, set up a practice in Harley Street, London, to this day inhabited by many top specialists. However, he returned to Ceylon in 1890 and in 1891 married Margaret Frances Mary, the second daughter of Charles Henry de Soysa, philanthropist of Moratuwa. C.H. de Soysa was arguably the wealthiest Ceylonese of his time and practised an unrivalled degree of philanthropy. H.M. certainly influenced de Soysa endowments to the de Soysa Maternity Hospital (the “Lying-In home”, as it was known to many generations of Ceylonese), the Pasteur Institute, Victoria Memorial Eye Hospital and several provincial hospitals.

H.M.’s younger brother C.M. married another daughter of C.H. de Soysa and it is said (see Appendix 6 of Kumari Jayawar-

dene’s book “Nobodies to Somebodies” subtitled “The Rise of the Colonial Bourgeoisie in Sri Lanka”) that C.H. de Soysa tried to get another rising young scholar, James Peiris, as a son-in-law, to the extent of sending his, de Soysa’s, carriage, to meet Peiris on his return from Cambridge. However, Peiris drove away in the carriage of Jacob de Mel, another enormously wealthy citizen of the period. This story is almost certainly apocryphal because Kumari Jayawardene also points out that Jacob de Mel funded Peiris’s education in Cambridge, as his father had died after severe business losses. That being the case, it is almost certain that an arrangement regarding the marriage had long been in existence.

In 1893, H.M. was appointed Second Physician to the Colombo General Hospital and Registrar to the Ceylon Medical College, the first Ceylonese to hold these positions. He went on to be Senior Physician and lecturer in Medicine, and by age thirty-four was one of the leading physicians and teachers of Medicine. He was particularly interested in tropical diseases, his views on malaria control being much in advance of general thinking at that time and his visit to Bombay in 1897 to report on a Plague epidemic is held to have forestalled a similar crisis in Ceylon. His interest in and reports on public health matters were largely responsible for the Colombo water supply, drainage and sewerage schemes. Having held a wide variety of government appointments, H.M. resigned from the medical service in 1909 and was appointed Consultant Physician to the Colombo General hospital. He gradually gave up his private practice to devote his energies to agriculture, economics and politics.

H.M.’s wife was richly endowed at her marriage but he increased their large holdings of agricultural land by purchasing and bringing under cultivation extensive acreages of rubber and coconut, experimenting with both tobacco and oranges as commercial crops. Notting Hill Group in Mawathagama, 13 miles from Kurunegala, was purchased by

H.M. Fernando as mostly bare land and planted with rubber and coconut. He named it for the London suburb where he had spent some happy student years, and two of its divisions, Ladbroke Grove and Bayswater, after adjoining suburbs. H.M. established a dairy herd of Friesian cattle, a breed he introduced into Ceylon, on Aspokuna estate also in the Kurunegala district and milk was supplied from there to Kurunegala town until the nationalisation of plantations in 1974/75 when the entirety of the inherited land holdings was lost to the family.

Like other men who have a sufficiency of wealth, H.M. was determined to walk the stage of politics and when a seat (The Reforms of 1910) was created for an “Educated Ceylonese Member” in the Legislative Coun-



Sir Marcus Fernando with his eldest grandson Tony outside “Villa Venezia”

cil, he contested Mr.(later Sir) Ponnambalam Ramanathan. The Governor of the time (McCallum) did not favour the reforms which created the seat and in 1911 attempted to thwart Ramanathan’s nomination on flimsy grounds, the real reason being that he boldly and resolutely espoused popular causes with

brilliant argumentative skills in the Legislative Council. He had held the office of Solicitor General at a time when such a position was barely open to locals and all these factors gave him an edge in the election campaign which was vituperative, bitterly fought and remembered for generations because so many of the wealthy Sinhalese elite voted for Ramanathan. The brothers Hector and E.W. Jayawardene campaigned vigorously for Ramanathan, who won the contest easily. The widely disseminated view was that caste was the real deciding factor but Kumari Jayawardene, whose book is referred to earlier, believes that H.M. was looked on by some of the Sinhalese elites as a new rich upstart and that it was CLASS not caste conflict, that mattered. To comment 93 years later is inappropriate!

H.M. served on many commissions and produced a variety of reports for the government and some of these will be briefly mentioned below as detailed categorisation is unnecessary and uninteresting. Six years after his defeat at the polls H.M. was nominated by the government as the first Sinhalese member of the Legislative Council and in 1921, when unofficial members were admitted, appointed a member of the Legislative Council. His services were rewarded with a knighthood in 1923, the first medical man so honoured in Ceylon. H.M. was the Chairman of two banks, a director and later owner of a newspaper, and in the year before his death served on the Banking Commission which recommended the establishment of the Bank of Ceylon. He was twice Chairman of the Low Country Products Association and an address by him in that capacity in 1932 is prescient in the extreme. The subject was coconut cultivation and the growing of by products, touching on the use of “green manure” in conjunction with inorganic fertiliser as experimented with on a large scale by him. He also dwelt on animal husbandry and the economics of land development in the context of opening up the Wannai (the malarial dry zone) and strongly criticised the impact of high sea freight rates imposed on exports by the Shipping Conference (the cartel which sets the rates, and one which persisted even into the

early 70's).

H.M. had one son, Reginald Marcus (known as R.M.) and two daughters, Constance (Consy) and Noel. R.M. read agriculture at Cambridge graduating in 1913 and later married Rene Gunewardene, the sister of a well known paediatrician "Tiddy" Gunewardene and an equally renowned radiologist H.O.(Hugh). R.M.'s first two children were both boys, Tony and Mark. Their grandfather doted on them, Mark particularly and Rene blamed H.M. for Mark's death at the age of 2 ½ years, which she held was the consequence of a chill he caught leading to pneumonia, following a drive round Nuwara Eliya lake at the child's insistence in the evening of a wet misty day. Noel married Lionel de Fonseka, a reclusive philosopher: they had no children. Both daughters were very attractive young women and extremely sophisticated as their father travelled to Europe with them regularly and lived there for quite long periods so they both spoke fluent French and Italian. H.M. lived for many years at "Deveronside", No: 36 Edinburgh Crescent now known as Sir Marcus Fernando Mawatha. The house had been the Russian Embassy up to the outbreak of the Revolution, when the Ambassador, it is said, hanged himself in an upstairs bathroom – and haunted the house ever after. I cannot claim to have met him!

Next door to No: 36 was an extremely large white mansion, "Sravasti", belonging to and occupied by the very rich W.A. de Silva, which was in later years the hostel for Members of Parliament for many decades. W.A. had no children but virtually adopted a nephew Lionel de Silva. Lionel wanted for nothing and had his medical education in Liverpool paid for by his uncle. He did not live in "digs" but had a suite at the Adelphi Hotel, then the best in that city, where he ate, drank, and dressed VERY expensively indeed! He and Consy had an over the wall romance, opposed by both families but the marriage went ahead and was a disaster: Lionel gambled heavily and stayed out late every night. He is once said to have arrived home in the early

hours and being extremely annoyed at the lack of comestibles for a snack, thereafter insisted on keeping 50 pounds of sausages on hand in the 'fridge'! His uncle seemingly cut him adrift, money wise, post marriage and Lionel proceeded to gamble away his wife's fortune. In the case of one property of which she had only the life interest, he sold that to a Chettiar (money lender/small trader of Indian origin).

H.M. had an enormous income but he gave his two daughters generous dowries and being very enamoured of the Italianate style of



Sir Marcus amongst the grandeur in his Villa

decoration, built a mansion, "Villa Venezia" in Queens Road, off Thurstan Road. He had a Nuwara Eliya residence, "Astley House" and there installed an enormous Venetian glass roof over the large central reception area, as well as numerous Italian decorative ceramics. Another extravagance was the ordering of a complete fourteen place dinner service from a French porcelain maker- all in blue with a little red and the initials "H M F" on each piece in a central motif. Most of this was at "Astley House" in the early 1970's. Doubtless still in pursuit of his political am-

bitions H.M. purchased a newspaper “The Ceylon Independent”, on the board of which he had served earlier. The newspaper did not enjoy a large circulation and “went broke” in the 1929-1931 depression, when H.M. was suffering a much reduced income. His son-in-law Lionel de Silva, in debt up to his eyeballs, then died suddenly (suicide was rumoured but unproved) and H.M. found Consy penniless, necessitating repurchase of her dowry properties.

The British banks which totally dominated commerce would not extend credit to Ceylonese and many endured the depression by selling property or handing agricultural land to agency houses like Carsons in return for a small regular income from crop sales. H.M. managed his own finances with the aid of his son and they sold little but it took them years to pay off all debt. When R.M. died in 1958 the family received a letter of condolence from F.X.A. Pereira, son of I.X. Pereira, who owned F.X. Pereira & Sons as well as the lighterage and shipping firm Narottam & Pereira. I.X. also imported newsprint and F.X.A. said that after H.M. died in December, 1935, his son paid off for years, all of the debt, (though it was not then legally recoverable) incurred on newsprint supplied to “The Independent”.

H.M.’s wife died in 1934 and in 1935 he went to London with Consy, on what was to be his last visit: he died there, aged seventy-one, on 18th December. The “London Times” of December 20th, 1935 carried a four paragraph obituary, more than rare for a “colonial non white” at the time and the “Ceylon Daily News” of the same day devoted its entire editorial to him. In a full column and a half of praise the latter pointed out that H.M. did much unpopular work useful to officialdom of the day but the cool detachment he brought to politics did not endear him to the public so that his political career was a poor postscript to the versatility he had displayed in many other fields of endeavour. The Governor in 1935 was R.E.Stubbs and he most unusually, given the aloofness of the Colonial

Administration from the locals then, penned a handwritten letter of condolence to R.M. This and other letters, press cuttings, printed copies of lectures given by H.M. and connected material is being gifted to the Victor Melder Ceylon Library.

Hilarion Marcus Fernando is commemorated by the name of a street - Sir Marcus Fernando Mawatha formerly known as Edinburgh Crescent, and a Hall of Residence named for him at the campus of the University of Ceylon, Peradeniya. Also, an annual Sir Marcus Fernando Oration, inaugurated in December, 1969 by Professor. M.L. Rosenheim, President of the Royal College of Physicians and co-sponsored by The Ceylon Medical Council and the Commonwealth Foundation.

Srini has just published a semi autobiographical book “A Gaggle of Aunts” see Bookshop panel on p25 for details...Ed

From: Once upon a Tender Time
by Carl Muller

...Trouble was, what the Portuguese did, the Dutch undid; what the Dutch set up, the British thumbed down. In Bambalapitiya, the Portuguese built a church to *Senhora nostra dos Los Milhagros*-Our Lady of Miracles. The Dutch tore it down and raised a “Reformed” church on the same site. The British took it over and made it a Presbyter of sorts. Eventually it became St. Paul’s and a large girls’ school was built behind it and the chapel stayed in business while the entire complex and the area around it was called Milhargiriya – a bastardization of the Portuguese ‘Milhagros.’ And Milhargiriya it is to this day and the miracles are, of course, the girls in the school who are the magnet of every school-boy in Bambalapitiya {You’re telling me} The Sinhalese were quite happy with the name. It had a nice Sinhala ring to it. After all, there are lots of Sinhalese place names with the ‘giriya’ ending.

Boxing Day Tsunami Survivor

by Vama Vamadevan

I knew Godfrey Gunasekera as a good Police Officer and gentleman from the time he started as a young Sub Inspector in the early 1960s. I saw him rise from that position in a steep vertical trajectory in Police ranks. What amazed me now is the same vertical mobility he displayed in pulling himself up from the treacherous waves of the tsunami.

At the time of the tsunami, Godfrey was the General Manager of the Suriya Lanka Beach Resort in Talalla, Gandara in the Deep South. When I heard of the tsunami disaster from far away Sydney, my thoughts went out to Godfrey. I knew he would have taken the full blast of the tsunami in view of the location of the resort fast by the beach, and made every endeavour to get in touch with him. At last I managed to reach him through the help of the David family and I now piece together what I learnt from Godfrey and others of what happened on that fateful day.

On the morning of Boxing Day, 2004 Godfrey was out as usual, early in the morning, walking round the resort attending to routine matters. It was like any other day. Around 9.30 a.m whilst checking the garden abutting the sea he was alerted by the shouts of his staff to the unusual sight of the seawater swirling and advancing towards the resort.

Fortunately, this being an Auyrvedic resort, the tourists were up early and after breakfast getting ready in their rooms to commence the various massages, herbal baths and other treatment formalities. The alarm was raised and all the tourists advised to rush to the top floors of the Resort. This later turned out to be the saving grace, where all the tourists' lives were saved and they live to tell the tale.

I must mention here that the only life lost was that of one of the staff members. The credit goes to a smart retired Policeman being at the helm of affairs at this resort.

This resort also had a hillock opposite the hotel, and some staff and tourists were directed to run up the hillock for safety. Whilst Godfrey was supervising the evacuation, he was caught head on by a tall wave from the tsunami. I recall Godfrey was a good swimmer earning awards at St Peters College ending with swimming colours. Backstroke was his *forte*. Sea bathing on Sundays was part of



Godfrey Gunasekera
SSP (Retd)

his routine. He was one of the early schoolboy members of the Otter's Aquatic Club. Later, in the Police service, he was in the forefront of many a competition and won laurels. His swimming prowess was to come in handy, but it was no match to the might of the tsunami.

When the tall wave first hit him, his instinct was to leap up and try to ride the wave. But the ferocity of the wave was so intense and devastating that he was tossed about like a leaf in a whirlwind.

He used both his hands as best as he could, to keep afloat for a while and wade between drifting debris. The word 'debris' is a misnomer; it was really chunks of broken walls and rocks the size of big tables hurled at supersonic speed with deadly consequences. Impact with any of these at that velocity was sure death.

Soon a second wave hit Godfrey and he was sucked to the bottom. Keeping his wits and using desperation as his spur he used every ounce of energy left in him. He used the good old 'DIP' as called in swimming parlance to surface.

Godfrey was still in coat, tie and in his shoes and this was another impediment he had to contend with to fight the snarling waves. Water, mud, sand and debris were in his shirt and trousers making the fight against the ris-

ing water even more difficult. Whilst in this pathetic state another wave even more ferocious hit him more violently and engulfed him. By now Godfrey had taken in much water and was loosing control. His eyes were blurred and he was short of breath. He thought the end was near.

In this pitiful state, being a good Christian, his thoughts went to the LORD Almighty. He asked for forgiveness for any of his sins by omission or commission, and begged the Good Lord to make the end swift and without pain. He thought death was inevitable. At this stage a terrible pain on his right knee, which is normally a killer, revived him. The LORD answered and what looked like the top of a tree was near him and he grabbed it with both hands for dear life and was afloat. He managed to get a firm grip and hung on desperately. In the melee he lost his right shoe and this helped him to use this foot too to tighten his grip on the branch.

When the water slightly subsided he saw the vision of devastation. There were chunks of walls, trees, furniture, cars, metal etc. swirling around and still moving and lethal if one came into contact with it. Now, he could see screaming men, women and children and some floating dead bodies. Water was still about 10 feet high around. It took some time before the water receded.

When he got a chance to step on *terra firma* he saw he had a bad right knee and right arm with a stabbing pain. Notwithstanding this, he quickly got on to the task of evacuating the tourists who, as mentioned earlier, he got to high ground and had them transported to Colombo, before he sought to get some medical attention himself. The only fatality was an Auyrvedic supervisor named Miss. Peter, whose body was later recovered. The resort was a total wreck. The ground floor and the kitchen were a write off. The well-laid out garden was a total mess with broken furniture, boats etc strewn all over. The resort office was a shamble and all paper work, cash and banking documents lost. The memory of this fateful day will linger in Godfrey's

mind for a very very long time indeed.

Godfrey had a stint earlier as Security manager at Confifi Hotel in Beruwala and in the Police service held many senior and sensitive postings. He was Director (Logistics) at Police Headquarters and prior to that Detective Senior Superintendent of Police in Colombo. In spite of these arduous duties he sat and passed the L.LB Part1 of the University of Colombo.



BOOK REVIEW

"COLLECTIONS & RECOLLECTIONS"
by Mrs Decima Perera, Published by Commodore Press, Vic --310 pp.

This book is really a sort of one person anthology, including as it does, a quite extensive collection of the author's poems as also her personal reminiscences of a long life: she was aged 83 at date of publication!!

The general reader is likely to find most interest in Mrs Perera's narration of her family background, schooling at St Bridget's Convent (where she had the late Mrs Sirimavo Bandaranaike as a classmate) & on through her early years there as a teacher, to a late teen marriage to a government medical practitioner, just before the outbreak of World War 2. Life as it was lived by the educated professional classes in the years prior to Sri Lankan independence and before the political turmoil of the mid 50's, is described in detail in a manner which will one day be a valuable historical record, particularly for the Diaspora of more recent decades whose foreign born children cannot but be fascinated by the recounting of another age, time & place. The late Dr Perera was in his early years stationed at little towns like Lunugala in the days when these places were not merely difficult of access but with even government quarters poorly equipped by late 20th century standards so Mrs Perera's detailed accounts of life there is as fascinating as it is a testament to her fortitude!!!!

Personal reminiscence is quite a new genre for migrant Sri Lankans and this little volume earns a worthy place therein.

Tony Peries

The Cruise of the “Halpha”

(Explanatory note:

In 1974-75 I began compiling a history of the Service, for the Sri Lanka Navy. I started with the war years and the result was the publication, “A History of the Navy in Sri Lanka & The Ceylon Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve (CRNVR) 1937-1950”. Scrabbling amongst old files I discovered ‘nuggets of gold’. What is reproduced below is one of them: a handwritten document, carrying no name, but plenty of interest. The voyage took place in a world where the Portuguese ruled Timor, the Dutch ruled the Dutch East Indies, Singapore was yet British, Malaya was fighting Communist guerrillas and Burma was open to the world. It recalls a forgotten link between Australia and Ceylon, and – most importantly – demonstrates the reality of “the brotherhood of the white uniform”.

Who wrote it? Only a member of the crew could have. Which one? The crew comprised Lt.Cdr. Carl Ohlmus (in command), Lt. Rajah Proctor, Lt. Alanson Caldera, P/O A.J.Fernando, P/O(SM) A.H.Poulier, L/S Aubrey Wise, L/Tel. Hugh Paulusz, A/B, V.A.C.Fernando, S/M R.M.P.A.Ratnayake and Ck. Jinoris. The list of “possibles” narrows down to two – Rajah Proctor, who became a well-known writer of short stories and Alanson Caldera, the son of a Vice Principal of Zahira College who had been a respected amateur historian. Old hands have told me that the latter “must have been” the writer, and they also told me that Carl Ohlmus, the only other “possible” had died, four months after the end of the voyage, of an illness aggravated by its rigours. By now, all the others, too, are no more, but Caldera lives on in Victoria, and this – perhaps HIS own story, is dedicated to him. Somasiri Devendra)

A CRNVR crew of three officers and seven men under the command of Lieutenant Commander Carl Ohlmus was flown out on 30th.May, 1948, by Ceylon Government Air Ceylon to Sydney to take over and sail back, a 75ft. 55-ton wooden purse seine vessel purchased by the Department of Fisheries.

The vessel was purchased from Messrs. Halvorsen & Sons and twelve days were spent in Sydney taking over and storing her

for the voyage back. Due to limited fuel capacity, it was decided to coast all the way back.

‘Halpha’ was delayed a further three days in Sydney due to a cyclone blowing down the East coast of Australia. Finally, as the cyclone was blowing over, ‘Halpha’ sailed to Brisbane on 22nd. June, arriving two and a half days later in somewhat heavy weather for a small craft like her.

Leaving Brisbane, she sailed for Townsville and thence to Thursday Island, passing through the Inner Great Barrier Reef, one of the beauty spots of Australia which, unfortunately, could not be explored thoroughly for the lack of time.

From Thursday Island, course was set for Port Darwin, one of the out ports of Australia, an oasis in the barren and forbidding Northern Territory. This was one of the longest laps taking four and a half days to accomplish. Here, as in all other Australian ports, the RAN was of immense assistance to the ‘Halpha’ which, though flying the Red Duster was treated with due naval courtesy as a Naval Craft.

Leaving Port Darwin and Australia, ‘Halpha’ sailed for Dili in Portuguese Timor across the dreaded sea of Aranjuru which, at that time, was calm as a lake. In Dili, too, Australia turned up trumps, with the Australian Consul helping in every way – help which was very much needed because of the language problem.

From Dili to Soerabia along the northern coasts of Flores, Bate and Lombok; and here, almost halfway across, bad luck dogged ‘Halpha’, with her starboard engine breaking down when 450 miles from Soerabia, which was reached three days later on one engine at reduced speed.

Repairs being sanctioned by Colombo, they were undertaken by the Dri Docking Co., Soerabia and estimated at three weeks’ duration and were to be only to enable the ‘Halpha’ to run five out of six cylinders, starboard engine. Due to the lack of proper equipment, unfortunately these repairs took over seven weeks.

During this period, Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands celebrated her Golden Jubilee and a week later, on her abdication, Princess Juliana ascended the Dutch Throne. An impressive parade of the three services was held, supported by mechanized Forces, and the Ceylon RNVR was represented at the saluting dais by the First Lieutenant of the *'Halpha'*, Lt. R. Proctor. Many official functions were held in connection with these celebrations and the Ceylon RNVR officers and men were invited to attend as representatives of a very new navy, as the Dutch Naval officer-in-charge expressed it.

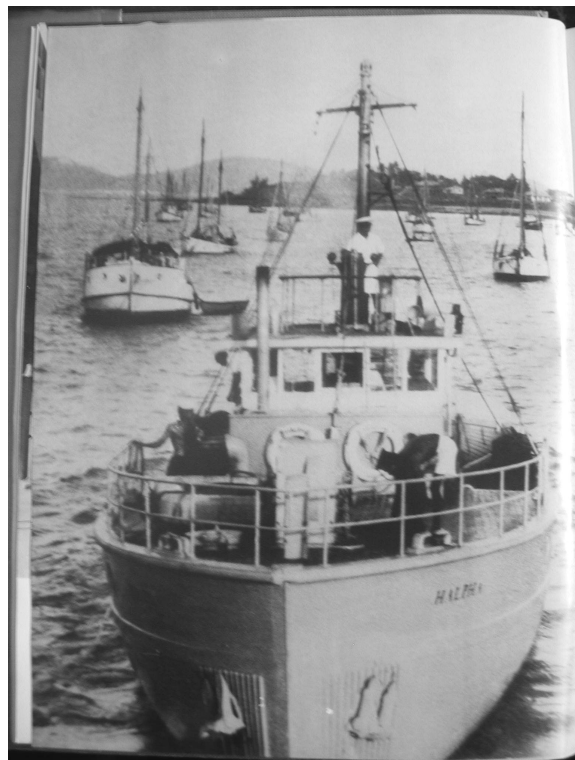
Here, too, the RNN were very helpful and rendered every assistance they could to the Ceylon men and organized trips were arranged to places of interest in the interior. From Soerabia to Batavia where, too, the Dutch, forewarned of *'Halpha's'* arrival, were of every assistance. *Halpha* kept in close W/T communication with the RNN and thence, right up to Singapore where they were made welcome by the RN stationed there.

Batavia to Singapore was one of the calmest hops of the whole trip, being almost wholly through the sheltered straits of Banka, Durian, Philip Channel and Main Strait. Malaya was in a state of turbulence over her communist troubles, but both Singapore and the next port of call, Penang, were comparatively quiet.

The next stop, Penang to Rangoon, was a long one but the best feature was the skill of the Rangoon River pilots as they piloted the *'Halpha'* up the forty two miles of river to Rangoon – a river at that time experiencing spring tides of five to six knots. At Rangoon, the Burma Navy could not do enough for the *'Halpha'* and helped to make her stay there a very pleasant one. *'Halpha'* set out for Akyab but three and a half hours after leaving the pilot vessel, a cyclone warning forced her to leave back, and the pilot vessel was reached with difficulty due to the heavy seas piling up.

After a week's delay in Rangoon, *'Halpha'* set out again for Akyab. This time the seas were proverbially calm after the storm. Akyab, reached two and a half days later, was still the same as it was during the latter part of the last war, according to the First Lieutenant who had served there at that time. Akyab to Madras, the longest hop, was again made in calm seas and took just under five days. Here the RIN looked after the CRNVR crew and made things very easy with their assistance. The final trip from Madras to Colombo was accomplished in two and a half days, *'Halpha'* arriving at 1200 hours on 25th. October, after taking the North-about route through the Pamban Pass.

Thus, in a little over two month's actual sailing time, counting in the routine stops, the CRNVR crew sailed the *'Halpha'* from Australia home, a distance of about 8,000 miles. The trip, though uncomfortable at times due to the size of the vessel, was the longest the CRNVR has undertaken and proved both educative and interesting a brought a lot of experience to the officers and men manning the *'Halpha'*. FINIS



'Halpha' - probably in Sydney Harbour

See footnote on p 24 ...Ed

TSUNAMI AFTERMATH

Dear Sumane:

I am writing this report in my role as the volunteer Fundraising Coordinator in Canada for BECT's "Tsunami Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Trust", which is building a 50-home rural village near Tangalle, southern Sri Lanka, to be called "Ruvingama". "Ceylankan" readers will recall that this project was mentioned in the last issue of the magazine. The project's ever-evolving website is at: www.bectbuildingavillage.org.

I am pleased to report that "Project Ruvingama" is making real headway, although much remains to be done. At the last count, just over US\$85,000 has been raised from private donors worldwide, out of a total budget of US\$200,000 (equiv). In reality, the total now needs to be revised upwards to closer to \$300,000, due to the rising cost of building materials and labour, and the add-on cost of planned-for communal facilities, like a community centre, pre-school, temple, library and so forth.

The vision of the BECT trustees is provide future village selectees, who led a socially marginalized and impoverished existence even before the tsunami devastated their already-precarious existence, with an organic community that will enable them and their families to lead economically productive and fulfilling lives in the future. Hopefully, Ruvingama will lead the way for other, similar reconstruction projects all along the southern and eastern coastline. The road ahead is long and arduous, but here are some of the highlights to date:

Developing World Connections (DWC), a British Columbia, Canada non-profit organization offering the chance to combine adventure travel with work on community projects in less affluent countries, has already sent out about 20 self-funded volunteers from various backgrounds (including a retired judge!) to assist with building homes at Ruvingama. Some volunteers stayed on project for up to 6 weeks, and each of them also contributed \$500 directly to the project, apart from injecting much-needed spending money into the local economy. More details at DWC's well-illustrated Ruvingama webpage journal: http://www.developingworldconnections.org/Projects/Sri_Lanka/Ruvingama/ruvingama.html

Panadura Rotary Club has raised significant fund-

ing from various Rotary Clubs around the world, including US\$25,000 from a Rotary Club in California, AU\$6,400 from another Rotary Club in Melbourne, and US\$7,500 from yet another Rotary Club and Festival Choir in Beijing, PRC. Shanthi Perera, a former President of the Panadura club, is one of the Ruvingama trustees. Rotary Panadura is now building 12 homes at Ruvingama, using locally contracted labour. Shanthi can be contacted at mandev@sltnet.lk. A further 10 homes are being built by a separate local contractor hired by BECT's trustees, so that almost half the total homes in Ruvingama are now well under construction.

A group of local government employees in Nanaimo, Vancouver Island, British Columbia recently voted to raise funds to build at least one house at Ruvingama. The group hopes to generate enough community interest to expand its efforts to fund further construction. The group includes representatives from all city departments and both their union bargaining units.

The land on which Ruvingama is being built lacks a perennial source of water. This part of the Hambantota district lies in an intermediate climate zone and does not receive abundant rain. Water can be collected during the rainy seasons at the bottom of the land in a man made lake or "tank". This supply will, however, not be adequate for the everyday needs of 250 or more people and the cultivation of their garden crops in the dry season. The supply of both potable (drinking) and non-potable water is therefore an important issue. A suitable water supply system has to be planned and implemented. In the future, municipal water may become available by pipeline, but in the meantime, securing a reliable water supply remains a challenge for the project trustees that they are actively working on. Dr. Stephen Allison, a retired Canadian hydro-engineer with decades of experience of irrigation projects all over the developing world, including Sri Lanka, plans to visit Ruvingama in May and will hopefully have some practical suggestions to offer.

At a time when so many reconstruction projects have yet to get off the ground, due to coastal setback regulations, land title issues and other complexities, it is something of a miracle that Ruvingama has come so far in such a short time. More funding is desperately needed, so I encourage "Ceylankan" readers to donate, no amount is too small, and to spread the word about Project Ru-

vingama. Let it be a light in the darkness that still surrounds so many of Sri Lanka's tsunami survivors.

Yours truly,

Joe Simpson (otesaga@shaw.ca)

Captured on camera, rapid progress on Ruvingama Project.



Sinking a Well for potable water



All volunteers - self funded

Far from their own homes, they build for those displaced in the tsunami



LETTERS TO EDITOR

Sir,

As members know, I gave a talk to both Sydney & Melbourne chapters on "Some aspects of Commerce in 19th & 20th centuries" during which I touched on the fact that cinnamon was a VERY early export from Ceylon as mentioned by the Roman historians Theophrastus & Herodotus in the 4th & 5th centuries respectively. They did not of course know where the commodity came from as it was a closely guarded secret of The Arab traders. The Chinese Buddhist monk, Fa Hsien, visiting Ceylon in about 5AD mentioned Arab traders settled there comfortably & "doing well"

Early British writers on trade such as James Steuart (circa 1830) are fairly well known as they are relatively recent & wrote in English which is widely used in Ceylon but some Dutch & Portuguese accounts of early trading are not that well recognised because of the language barrier & the fact that translations tend to retain archaic usages making them difficult to read. However there are indications that Arab traders from "The Gulf" had continued in business throughout many earlier centuries & Kumari Jayawardene in her thoroughly researched work "Nobodies to Somebodies" --Appendix 5 cites a Borah firm, Carimjee Jafferjee who had been in Ceylon since 1831 with branches all over India & even Mauritius. The Borahs, a group of Gujeratis (originally from Kutch, were (Jayawardene says) a schismatic group of Shia-Muslims of the Dawoodi sect with a trading/family network spanning India, E.Africa, S.E. Asia & islands of the Indian ocean. She adds that being traditionally a trading group they, wherever they resided, kept aloof from local political & national stirrings so the early British looked on the Borahs not as competitors but useful commercial allies. The Heptulabhoy family business in Ceylon goes back to 1864 & it was they (not Sinhalese or Tamil business people!!!) who first broke the British monopoly on tea exports. Unlike the British, who were given to a certain degree of self-aggrandisement in writing histories of their firms etc the Borahs & other Indian-Moslem traders were--& remain-- exceedingly private people. It may well be that such families have personal records or oral histories of their business over nearly two millennia & it will be interesting to hear from any members who have any such knowledge or can access it from personal contacts.

A Google search of NABATAEA-NET will re-

veal much fascinating history of these very early Gulf traders, the Nabatyans among them, with origins going back to the time of the Ptolemaic & Selucid empires. The Nabatyans were using quadriremes (seagoing vessels powered by oars AND sail) around 200BC to trade in spices & incense.

PS On a totally different note, Douglas Ranmuthugala, in "Tales of WW2" (Journal 29) mentions being unable to trace the old Puttalam airstrip in 1971 but I recall trainee pilots using a strip there in the 50's & 60's when completing the 300 mile cross country flight with 2 intermediate landings required for a licence. One landing was at Minneriya & the other at Puttalam which had a resident watcher but no "windsock" in the absence of which he ran out & lighted a "smoke pot" when a pilot "Buzzed" the strip, to show which way the wind was blowing. One then landed & signed a book brought out to the aircraft, to "prove" the landing.

Tony Peries

Sir,

More on HMS *Rajaliya* etc.

Maybe the following bits and pieces about Douglas Ranmuthugala's piece in the February 2005 Journal will interest WW2 buffs.

Names and locations of FAA stations in Ceylon.

BAMBARA – RN Air Station, Trincomalee

BHERUNDA – RN Air Station, Colombo Race Course

VAIRI – RN Air Station in Sulus and Ceylon

OXFORD – RN Air Squadron (Instrument Training), Colombo Race Course

EXPEDITER – RN Air Squadron (Communications), Colombo Race Course

DEFIANT – RN Air Squadron (Fleet Reqs.), Colombo Race Course.

(There was also a MAYINA which was, however, a RN transit camp)

Source: "The British Pacific and East Indies Fleets: 'The Forgotten Fleets' 50th. Anniversary." David Brown (ed). Brodie Publishing House, Liverpool. ISBN 1-874447-28-4, June 1995

2. Japanese aircraft damaged/shot down in the 1942 raids.

After a major battle, the event was studied in detail by the Training and Staff Duties Division of the Admiralty and published as a "Battle Summary", a Confidential Book (CB). In 1943, CB 3081 (9), Battle Summary No. 15, NAVAL OPERATION OFF CEYLON 29TH MARCH TO 10TH. APRIL. 1942 was published.

It was later, after the war, re-classified to the lower class of BR 1736 (9)(BR = Books of Reference). Appendix C, "Summary of Japanese aircraft casualties

claimed in Ceylon operations, 5th. April to 9th. April 1942" gives the following figures.

Date & Claimant	Destroyed	Probably destroyed	Damaged
5 th . April, Colombo raid by fighters			
30 Squadron	14	6	5
258 Squadron	14	1	4
800 & 803 Squadron	1	0	0
By A/A guns At Colombo	5	0	several
Cornwall	0	1	1
Total	34	8	10 +
9 th . April, Trincomalee by fighters			
261 Squadron	14	14	3
273 Squadron	1	3	2
806 Squadron	3	0	0
By Bombers – 11 Squadron	3	0	0
By A/A guns At Trinco	8	0	3
Hermes & Vampire	1	1	several
TOTAL	30	18	8+
GRAND TOTAL	64	26	18+

Footnote to the Table: The Japanese claimed to have shot down 120 British aircraft in these operations and only to have lost 17. The C-in-C, Ceylon, suggests that the former figure exaggerated our losses by 300 per cent, perhaps the latter should be multiplied by three to give their own real losses)

A description of *Rajaliya*

"Alex recalls that there had been a very large elephant on the edge of the airfield at Puttalam, grazing on native vegetation. It had the number 43629 painted on its side and was obviously a member of the staff. But Alex could not imagine what its job was.

"The day after their arrival in Puttalam, Alex was told to take a particular aircraft to the servicing area. Normally a tractor was used to tow the aeroplane from one place to another over short distances. 'I had not seen a tractor on the airstrip and I mentioned this fact to the Lieutenant but it did not seem to concern him,' Alex writes, adding that he followed orders by getting into the cockpit.

"At this point elephant no. 43629 with its mahout sitting on its back appeared round the corner and took up a position immediately in front of the Seafire,' Alex records, with amazement. 'Two members of the ground staff hooked two towing ropes from a harness around the elephant's body to the undercarriage legs of the aeroplane and off we went on the slowest trip I ever had in a Seafire. Now I know what they kept the elephant for'".

Source: *The Sunday Island* of 13th March, 2005, "Lifestyle" supplement, pp 1 & 2

Somasiri Devendra

...even more on “Rajaliya”

from Roger Thiedeman

As someone with an interest in aviation history—especially in relation to Sri Lanka—I wish to expand on some of the points mentioned by Douglas Ranmuthugala in his article ‘Tales of WWII HMS *Rajaliya*: British Naval Air Base at Puttalam’ in *The Ceylankan* Journal No. 29 (Vol VIII No 1) February 2005.

But first, I must correct a factual error on page 20, where the author states that the American F4U Corsair fighters of the Royal Navy Fleet Air Arm were fitted with “British Merlin engines” (presumably referring to the Rolls-Royce Merlin engine). This is not correct. All variants of the Chance Vought F4U aircraft were each powered by an American-built Pratt & Whitney R-2800 18-cylinder air-cooled radial engine. As the word ‘radial’ suggests, the cylinders were arranged in circular fashion, in two banks of nine cylinders, with one bank behind the other. This radial cylinder configuration, and the rounded engine cowl and nose section of the airplane, are clearly visible in the photo of a Corsair on page 19 of Mr. Ranmuthugala’s article. The Rolls-Royce Merlin, on the other hand, was a 12-cylinder liquid-cooled engine, with its cylinders forming two banks of six joined to form an elongated vee-shape—just like the V-6 or V-8 engines in the cars that some of us drive. It would have been impossible to ‘shoe-horn’ such a power plant into the circular engine bay of a Corsair, as the photo on page 19 would confirm.

Elsewhere (page 17), Mr. Ranmuthugala speculates that, apart from HMS *Rajaliya* at Puttalam, “there were two other “Naval Air Arm Bases in Ceylon at the time, one at Trincomalee...and the other in Colombo.” In fact, there was another airbase of the Fleet Air Arm (FAA) at Katukurunda, named HMS *Ukussa* (hawk in Sinhala). The Colombo base, at the Racecourse airstrip, was named HMS *Bherunda*, after a mythical bird. Yet another base at Maharagama, HMS *Monara* (peacock), while not an airfield as such, existed specifically for training Ceylonese FAA recruits in a variety of technical skills. At the Ratmalana, Vavuniya and Sigiriya airfields, the FAA shared facilities with the Royal Air Force; only after the war was the Ratmalana FAA station named HMS *Serunwa*.

Finally, on page 20 the author refers to the use of elephants at HMS *Rajaliya* for towing aircraft around the base. In 1997 I contributed articles to the Sri Lanka ‘Sunday Times’ (February 2 and July

6) is describing this practice. My stories were based on a painting titled ‘Puttalam Elephants’, which now hangs in the FAA Museum at Yeovilton, UK. The work of British aviation artist Robert Taylor, and featured in the book *The Air Combat Paintings of Robert Taylor* (published by David & Charles; 4th edition, 1989), the painting depicts a female elephant towing a Corsair, with her name ‘FIF’ emblazoned on her ample flanks.

Photo courtesy: ‘Ghosts of the Skies: Aviation in the Second World War’ by Philip Makanna.

A jungle elephant hauling a Corsair of the Fleet Air Arm at an airfield near the Indian Ocean 1944.
Roger confirms this is at HMS ‘*Rajaliya*’



Footnote to *The Halpha Cruise*

With reference to para 1, appearing on page 19, this was the Air Ceylon DC-3 (registered VP-CAT) whose pilots became disoriented over Singapore, en route to Australia with the CRNVR crew who were going to sail the ‘Halpha’ back to Ceylon. The aircraft was floundering around in dense cloud, with fuel fast running out, when it was finally located by a RAF aircraft and escorted to a safe landing at Changi Airport - with only minimal fuel left in its tanks. The following year, the same aircraft - named ‘Sunethra Devi’ - was written off in a landing accident at Trichinopoly, fortunately with no loss of life. I described both incidents in a two-part story published by the Sri Lanka ‘Sunday Times’ in December 1999.

At the time ‘Sunethra Devi’ crashed at Trichy (December 21, 1949), it had three other Air Ceylon ‘stablemates’:

1. VP-CAR ‘Sita Devi’
2. VP-CAS ‘Viharamaha Devi’
3. VP-CBA ‘Sri Lanka Devi’.

‘Viharamaha Devi’ remains with the Sri Lanka Air Force (SLAF) at its museum in Ratmalana, but no longer in airworthy condition. The same applies to another former Air Ceylon DC-3 (4R-ACI), that was purchased by the airline in 1959 and - along with the former ‘Viharamaha Devi’ - was taken over by the SLAF in the mid-to-late 1970s.

Roger Thiedeman

A CORDIAL WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS



Dr Niranjala & Lakshman Weerakkody

Grovedale VIC

Mr T Ponniah

Wilston QLD

Robert & Vimala Anandarajah

Croydon Park NSW

Rodney & Mignon Ingleton

Kingsford NSW

Upali & Chandini Dharmakirti

Issacs ACT

Darrel & Lorraine McCarthy

Lesmurdie WA

Cubby & Nuala Wijetunga

Traralgon VIC

Dr I Kulatunga

Colombo 5 Sri Lanka

Dr M & Dolly Devakumar

Denbighshire UK

Daman & Shalini Panditaratne

Lindfield NSW

Everard & Marcella Andrado

Sinnamon Park QLD

Laksiri Fonseka

Inglewood New Zealand

Chris & Gill Drieberg

Ronville VIC

Hamid & Nazli Farauque

Coburg VIC

Ranjith & Priyani Abeyratne

Castle Hill NSW

Titus Gunesequera

Sydney NSW

Rosani & Amal Wahab

Pymble NSW

Nina van Dort

Vienna, Austria

...who have joined since publication of
Journal 29

Bumper Stickers

Heart Attacks...God's revenge for
eating His animal friends.

Hang up and drive!!

BOOKSHOP AND WEB RESOURCES

BOOKS/MAPS/COLLECTIBLES

This column is a regular feature for the benefit of members who publish works, and others who wish the Society to sell material on their behalf. No charges apply to members but donations will be gratefully received. Others pay a handling charge. Please e-mail the editor if you wish to take up this offer.

Collections & Recollections by Decima Perera :
Commodore Press VIC, 310pp . Price \$ 20 + \$ 6
p& h. Call Decima on 03 9807 0079

A Gagggle of Aunts by Srin Peries: Wasala Publications Nugegoda Sri Lanka, 92pp, paperback. Price \$ 15 inc p& h call Srin on 02 9674 7515 or,
email:srini.p@bigpond.com

Navigating Boundaries: The Asian Diaspora in Torres Strait , Editors A Shnukal, G Ramsay & Y Nagata. Contains chapter entitled *The Sri Lankan Settlers of Thursday Island* co-authored by Stanley Sparkes & Dr Anna Shnukal. Pandanus Books, available from Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University Canberra. Paperback 330 pp. Price A\$ 55 inclusive of p&h.

'Now in reprint! **'Tea, Tytlers and Tribes - An Australian woman's memories of tea planting in Ceylon'** - By Beryl T. Mitchell. 166 pp and 60 photographs. An autobiography you will enjoy. \$30 plus \$5 P&H within Australia. Ph Beryl at (02)97453763 email:berylmitchell@bigpond.com

Sinhala Consciousness in the Kandyan Period, 1590 s to 1815 by Michael Roberts - Colombo: Vijitha Yapa Publications, 2004 ISBN 955-8095-53-2 and 955-8095-1-1—270 pages in A 4 size, with 31 Images, 7 Maps and 4 Charts: to order visit www.vijithayapa.com . Paperback Rs 1,499—Hard cover Rs 2,499.

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A tribute to the late Vernon Abeysekera from a former colleague and friend

It was with much sorrow that I heard of the passing away of Vernon Abeysekera in the fullness of time, at the age of 85. It was five years ago that I last met Vernon on my visit to Melbourne and as ever he was full of *bon homie*, expansive and in good spirits. We reminisced about times long gone and shared information about mutual friends and former colleagues and I was quite intrigued to find that he had developed an interest in mysticism and matters spiritual, which struck me as a dramatic turnaround in his view of the world. Since then we have been communicating via the phone and the Internet every now and again.

Vernon's passing away is an occasion for sorrow not only because the death of any friend or family member is always a cause for grief but also because it signals again the fact that a whole culture and a way of life is fast slipping away from us. He represents more than most people of his generation I know, a very particular way of life, a whole set of values and a coherent world view.

He was a brilliant product of Royal College Colombo and having obtained a First Class Honours in Western Classics at University, in 1945 he passed into the prestigious Ceylon Civil Service. In the Civil Service he served in many important positions among them, being the first Sri Lankan to serve as the Director of the National Service of Radio Ceylon and later, as the Government Agent of the District of Jaffna. In both roles he distinguished himself with great merit.

While in broadcasting he was trained in the BBC and upon his return helped to raise a whole generation of professional broadcasters in then Ceylon. As a broadcaster he had a fine sense of the medium and was able to indulge his penchant for producing plays and for reading poetry. Vernon was essentially an artist. He acted in several plays and produced plays himself, on the stage as well on radio. His little monograph, "Greasepaint and Microphones" recalling his days at Radio Ceylon makes very interesting reading.

Vernon was also a very pleasant personality, gentle, affable and cultured, qualities which enabled him to make a huge success of his job as the Government Agent of Jaffna. It was only a few days ago, at a largely attended meeting at which I was present, convened in London to pay tribute to a great Tamil journalist Mr S. Sivanayagam, one time Editor of the Saturday Review and the paper Hot Springs, that I was pleased to hear Mr Sivanayagam himself refer to Vernon Abeysekera as a fair minded and impartial administrator.

During his term as GA, Vernon endeared himself to the political leaders and to the people of the Jaffna

district as a whole, and having served as Government Agent of Jaffna myself, just prior to Vernon, during a time when administering Jaffna would have taxed the ingenuity of any administrator, I can vouch that that was no mean achievement. Another small monograph that Vernon wrote titled "Images of Jaffna", recounted among other things, how he produced Shaw's and Chekhov's plays with local actors for Jaffna audiences.

About his contribution to the life of the local community in Melbourne after settling down there in the mid 1970s, I am sure there are many in Melbourne itself who can bear better witness than I can from far away England. I have heard of the radio magazine programme he produced in Melbourne from the late 1970s to early 1990s, made up of 3 language streams, a model which I understand has been a forerunner in several other cities within Australia. And of his involvement with the charitable organisation Austcare (now called Care Australia) in which he became Regional Director. I have also heard of the initiative he took to start the Movement for National Harmony following the sad events of July 1983 in Sri Lanka. It was in recognition of all these varied and rich contributions he made to the life of the local community that, through the Serendib Newspaper, a grateful public conferred on him an award for "Lifetime service to the community".

Above all Vernon was a gentleman and a *bon vivant*. Like Omar Khayam, author of the famous Rubaiyat, Vernon liked the good life, a glass of Scotch, a book of poems, a Manila cigar and convivial company and was very much the typical English squire. He was unfailingly gracious, gentle, and given to a sly humour and ready laughter. That was the typical Vernon. I am told that even as he lay terminally ill and unable to communicate orally, when the doctors placed a piece of paper in his hands and asked him to write anything he wished to say, he simply wrote, "*Go to blazes*". That about summed up Vernon's philosophy of life.

Any evaluation of Vernon's career which ignores the role played by his wife Rosemary in making a success of his varied endeavours would be incomplete. I can personally vouch that during his tenure as Government Agent of Jaffna it was Rosemary's own charming ways and excellent public relations that enabled Vernon to win the hearts of the people, and although I did not know them closely after they relocated to Melbourne, I am sure that Rosemary's role in his life remained undiminished throughout their long marriage.

My wife and I want to express our great appreciation of Vernon as a valued friend and share with Rosemary and his sons Stefan and Michel their sorrow over his passing away.

Neville Jayaweera, Kent - England

...and a tribute from Melbourne

Vernon Abeysekera Guide, Philosopher and Friend

On hearing of his recent death, a friend remarked to me that Vernon Abeysekera was the best known Sri Lankan in Melbourne. That this may well be true is a measure of the great contribution he made to the community in a wide range of ways. He migrated to Australia with his wife Rosemary in 1972, on his retirement from the Ceylon Civil Service following a distinguished career. Two of his appointments, as Government Agent, Jaffna, and Director of National Service at the Broadcasting Corporation gave him the most enjoyment and personal satisfaction as borne out in the two books he wrote later, "Images of Jaffna" and "Greasepaint and Microphones."

From April 1979 he presented a weekly programme on the radio 3EA station in Melbourne which was designed for and aimed at Sri Lankans, and his performance there for well over ten years earned him the respectful and grateful attention of a whole community whose needs had been neglected by the facilities available to them on radio up to that time. Thereafter, any newly arrived migrant found reassurance as well as entertainment and useful information directed at his or her own concerns by listening regularly to Vernon's thoughtful and relevant choices which comprised his programme. Also there was Vernon's voice, attractive, well modulated and sympathetic, with its superb combination of self-deprecating humour and implicit authority. A pleasure to listen to and a match for any of the best broadcasters in the business.

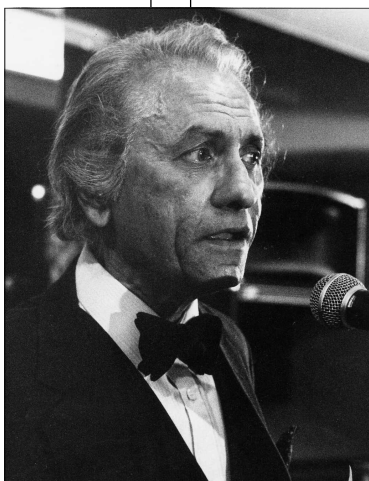
It soon became obvious that Vernon was widely read, as befits a First Class Honours in Classics, and highly informed about most things cultural, political and in many other areas of knowledge. His experiences of being a senior government official in various parts of Sri Lanka had given him a great deal of expertise and understanding of its people and the national events and trends that shaped their lives. The result was that if anyone in Melbourne wanted to check when or what had taken place in the modern, cultural, social, or political history of the country, they immediately contacted Vernon to give them the facts about what was unclear to them. They relied on him implicitly to provide them with the required information or direct them to a reliable reference source which could supply it.

A staunchly loyal Old Boy of Royal College all his life, Vernon edited the Newsletter in Melbourne for sev-

eral years. As always, he brought all his talents to bear on this project. Here again he was making a useful contribution to the community. Others will probably be able to vouch for his other activities that benefited people. He was always an articulate member of the Ceylon Society of Australia and made perceptive comments and raised interesting questions at the lecture meetings of the Society held in Melbourne.

With all his many interests, there is no doubt that he had a special love for books, plays, cinema and radio. What gave him the greatest pleasure, and he did this on radio right up to the end of his life, was to review books and films. He always made carefully considered and worth while assessments for he had good taste and sound values. He also had great politeness so that the less laudable features of whatever he was discussing were dismissed with ironic humour. That was a notable characteristic he possessed, his impeccable manners which graced his relationships with

people just as they governed the quality of his writing and radio programmes.



Vernon Abeysekera

Vernon was an actor of stature and that was how I first came to know him when we both took part in Dennis Bartholomeusz's production of "The Lark" by Jean Anouilh in 1962. We had formed an English theatre group called "The Little Theatre Group" and Vernon was one of its stalwarts. This was followed by "Tiger at the Gates" by Jean Giraudoux which Vernon directed and I acted in as Cassandra. There was no doubt that the stage had always fasci-

nated him and he gives a detailed account of his relationship with it, as also with radio, in his delightful and readable book "Greasepaint and Microphones" which recalls his memories of these vital areas of his experience. This is a small treasure of its kind because it brings to life the events, the chief personalities and the contexts in which the early days of English theatre and English broadcasting came into being and Ceylonese as distinct from Europeans, began to move into positions of influence and authority. Vernon was a leading figure in these developments being both participant and observer in the change from colonial Ceylon to modern Sri Lanka.

Vernon followed all the major political movements and philosophies that beset the world in the twentieth century and into contemporary times. I will always remember how insistent he was in attending protest meetings against Australia's entry into the war in Iraq. He was not deterred in this by the crowds, despite his physical frailty. And yet he was

also a romantic at heart. One sensed it in his charm and a certain gracefulness in his personality. I believe he loved French films and the songs La Mere and La Vie en Rose.

In today's cynical, undisciplined and pragmatic world, Vernon was the epitome of the cultured, civilized, liberal humanist and gentleman with time for others and an openness to the ironies as well as the struggles, including spiritual struggle, endemic to life. He was a well-rounded human being who was always responsive to what was good and beautiful in anything or anyone he came in contact with. He will be immensely missed by his loved ones and his large circle of friends. May he rest in peace.

Shelagh Goonewardene

SYNOPSIS OF MEETINGS

Sydney - February 2005

Talk by Dr Nihal Kuruppu

“Life and Times of Martin Wickremesinghe”

The Chairman introduced Dr Kuruppu to the meeting. A synopsis of Dr Kuruppu's interesting and informative talk on the same topic to the Melbourne Chapter in October 2003, is contained in the Ceylankan - Issue No. 25, dated 25 February 2004.



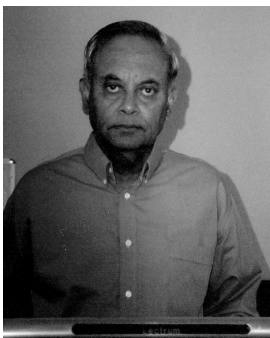
Dr Nihal Kuruppu

Talk by Srikantha Nadarajah

“Historical Antecedents of Problems in Post Independence Sri Lanka”

The Chairman introduced Mr Nadarajah to the meeting, and a synopsis of his presentation appears below:

Major sources of ancient history are the Pali chronicles. Modern



Mr Srikantha Nadarajah

historians have shown reservations on their authenticity of recorded events, some of which are shrouded in myths and legends. However a major part of recorded events could be considered accurate. Relevance to modern times in such writings is the tendency to inspire Sinhala nationalism. While it can be justified in the context of ancient times to unify the nation against foreign invasions, it was also taken as an incentive to invoke nationalism which in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, created friction with minorities and inhibited development of Ceylonese nationalism. Also there was inadequate coverage of Tamil society and culture during this period. In the colonial period under Portuguese & Dutch rule, several factors contributed to the decline of Sinhala society.

Formation of a new ruling class in Maritime Provinces.

Transformation of economy from agrarian to commercial basis which benefited traders and a new class of people.

Greater prominence given to Catholicism and Christianity over Buddhism.

Disruption of social life due to wars and persecution especially under the Portuguese.

Marginalization of the majority Sinhalese was further emphasised under British rule by.

The unification of entire island under a single administrative structure and the development of transport and communication network.

The introduction of English as the language of administration.

The neglect of English education in the southern provinces and the increase in missionary schools in the north, all of which favoured minorities.

The introduction of plantation agriculture and neglect the of the peasantry, especially in Kandyan areas.

The emergence of a new Bourgeoisie class of traders and the rise of British interests at expense of the locals.

The neglect of Buddhist temporalities.

These factors gave rise to movements for the revival of Buddhism and Sinhala nationalism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The formation of the Buddhist Theosophical Society, Anagarika Dharmapala's resistance against colonial rule were manifest but there was an absence of a sustained Ceylonese nationalist movement for independence.

Development of legislatures and the movement for constitutional reform gathered pace and gave rise to an early period of unity. Communal representation as a policy of divide and rule, universal franchise and changes in constitutions with limited scope for minority participation, were limitations of the Soulbury Constitution. The onset of nationalism in post independence period had a significant impact on society. The need for unity and greater participation by all sections in the affairs of state was recognised. Historical writings during the last fifty years show greater understanding of events in the post independence period.

Each speaker was followed by a lively question and answer session.

Melbourne 6th February 2005

The Chairman, Dr Srilal Fernando introduced the speaker, our President, Tony Peries as the author of the book, *George Steuart & Co Ltd - 1952-1973: A Personal Odyssey*. Mr. Peries, as a former Chairman and CEO of the famous commercial company, George Steuart & Co., a leading player in the tea industry of Sri Lanka had all the credentials to speak knowledgeably on the subject of "Some aspects of commerce in the 19th and 20th centuries in Sri Lanka".

He began with a general comment on how commerce developed in the country. Ceylon was well known from antiquity for its cinnamon. In the 5th century the historian Herodotus wrote about cinnamon, which was brought from the east by Arab traders. The Portuguese were motivated to come to Ceylon mainly by their interest in the trade in cinnamon as were the Dutch who were promised a monopoly over

the island's spice trade in return for help in driving out the Portuguese. Consequently cinnamon enjoyed an important role under both these foreign regimes and with the Dutch in particular, its importance was fundamental. It is interesting to know that up to the 19th century Ceylon provided almost the whole of the world's supply of cinnamon, and the cinnamon monopoly was one of the largest source of profit to the Dutch East India Company.

Mr. Peries referred to the book *Nobodies to Somebodies* by Kumari Jayawardena as an accurate and interesting account of the development of commerce and the emergence of the Ceylonese bourgeoisie.

After 1833 foreign investment capital flowed into the country, South Indian labour was recruited to work on plantations and roads were built to improve methods of transportation in bringing coffee and later and, more importantly, tea to the commercial capital, Colombo, for sale. Liquor was an important medium of capital accumulation. By early British times, individuals had the right to rent a tavern and with the development of the plantations the liquor industry flourished. Governors owned plantations and between 1833-1843, 250,00 acres sold at 5 shillings an acre. It was in this period that an enterprising Englishman, James Steuart who was a sea captain, founded George Steuart & Co. He had an acute business mind and began trading in commodities of various kinds.

The earliest plantations were of coffee, which were very successful until the coffee blight set in which led to the transition to tea. Cheap South Indian labour and the 'Kangany' system which recruited gangs of labour and looked after them were the bedrock of the tea plantations.

Mr. Peries then went on to describe the domination by the British of all aspects of commerce including banking. This domination continued well after Independence in 1948. The success of the tea trade, and all the institutions and structures as well as related lines of commerce that supported its importance were virtually all in British hands. Gradually, Sri Lankan companies began to make inroads into this commercial network, eventually gaining control of the economy. For further details see the account of the presentation Mr. Peries gave in Sydney on 6th

June 2004 on this subject which is summarised in *The Ceylankan Journal*, number 27 of August 2004.

In answering many questions which came from the audience at the conclusion of his interesting lecture, Mr. Peries was of the opinion that the future of tea is fairly limited. He said that a lot of tea is not profitable now due to the cost of production having gone up as the labour environment improved. In time only areas suitable for machine plucking may continue in existence. Tea was hard pressed to compete with the range of other non-alcoholic drinks that are now available.

At the conclusion of the meeting the Chairman called on Mrs Srin Peries to draw the winning raffle ticket and the prize was won by Mrs. Marjorie Jilla.

Shelagh Goonewardene

What law have I broken? Is it wrong to love my own? Is it wicked for me because my skin is red, because I am a Sioux, because I was born where my fathers lived, because I would die for my people and for my country?

Sitting Bull (Tatanka Iyotake) 1831-90
Sioux Leader—in *Sitting Bull* by Gary C Anderson 1996

Enclosed in this issue is a membership application form. Members who may wish to introduce a relative or friend to the Society are requested to have the form completed and mailed to the Treasurer whose address appears below.

REMINDER MEMBERSHIP DUES

2005 subscriptions are now due. Kindly draw your cheque/MO in favour of the Ceylon Society of Australia and mail to Rienzie Fonseka—25 Clanwilliam Street—Eastwood NSW 2122 Please note subscriptions are for a calendar year.

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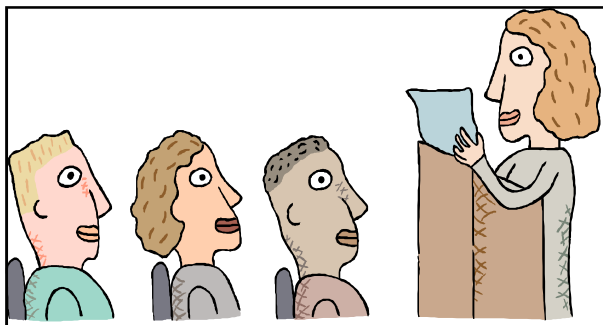
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NEXT SYDNEY MEETING

Sunday 5th June 2005 at 6.30 p.m

Merrill J Fernando

Founder & Chairman
will speak on

“The History of Dilmah”

Hornsby Bowling Club

22, Waitara Avenue access only from Alexandria Parade

Meeting will be followed by a light supper. Volunteers offering plates please contact Social Convenor Chandra

on 9872 6826

RSVP Tony on 9674 7515

How to become a member of the Ceylon Society of Australia

Contact Rienzie Fonseka

25 Clanwilliam Street Eastwood NSW 2122

Ph: Int +61 2 9874 0146

E-mail: winston@secura.com.au

and request an application form

In search of speakers

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

Our calendar for the year is - April/May, September/October and November/December. Dates can be arranged to suit availability of eminent speakers. Please contact President Tony Peries on 02 9674 7515

E-mail: srini.p@bigpond.com

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NEXT MELBOURNE MEETING

To be advised

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

For further information please contact

Shelagh –AH 9808 4962

Or Srilal –AH 9809 1004

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

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

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