CHRISTIAN ZUBER

SRI LANKA

ISLAND CIVILISATION

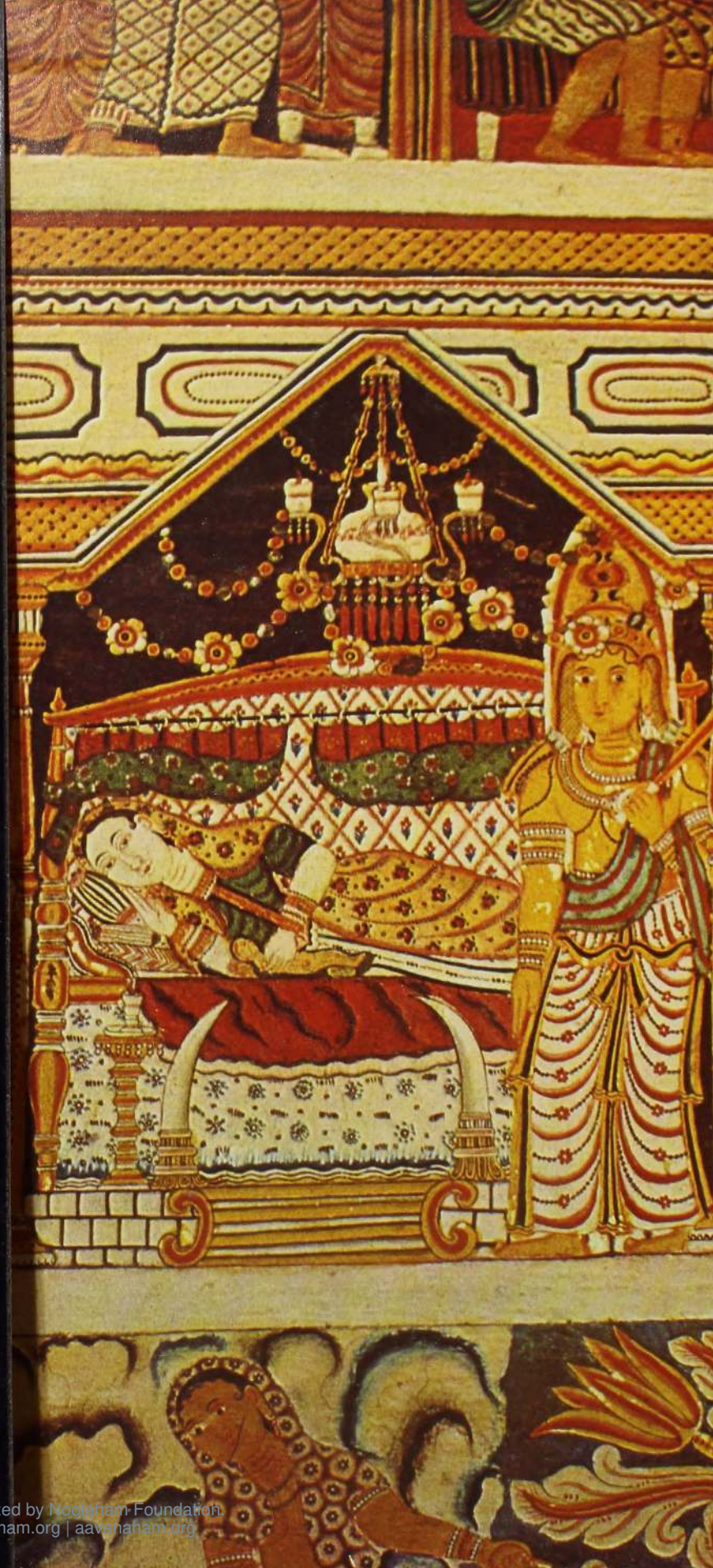
déjà parus

SENEGAL
HAUTE VOLTA
COTE D'IVOIRE
TOGO
DAHOMEY
MAURITANIE
RWANDA
BURUNDI
ETHIOPIE
GAMBIE
GUINÉE BISSAU
CAP VERT
TCHAD
MALI

ARABIE SAOUDITE
YEMEN
EMIRATS
QATAR
BAHRAIN
SHARJAH
OMAN
KOWEIT
IRAK
LIBAN
SYRIE

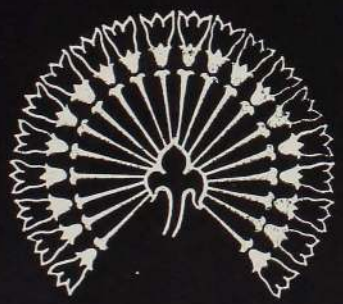
LA CÔTE
ALGERIENNE
SAOURA
LES AURÈS
M'ZAB
MAROC
TUNISIE

ICELAND
ILES GRECQUES
MALTE



SRI LANKA

ISLAND CIVILISATION



PHOTOS: CHRISTIAN AND NADINE ZUBER
TEXT: SENAKE BANDARANAYAKE

SRI LANKA

ISLAND CIVILISATION

"The Heauens with their dewes, the Ayre with a pleasent holesomenesse and fragrant freshnesse, the Waters in their many Riuers and Fountaines, the Earth diuersified in aspiring Hills, lowly Vales, equall and indifferent Plaines, filled in her inward Chambers with Mettalls and Iewells, in her outward Court and vpper face stored with whole Woods of the best Cinnamon that the Sunne seeth, besides Fruits, Oranges, Leimons, &c. surmounting those of Spaine ; Fowles and Beasts, both tame and wilde (among which is their Elephant, honoured by a naturall acknowledgement of excellence, of all other Elephants in the world). These all have conspired and ioined in common League, to present vnto Zeilan *the chiefe of worldly treasures and pleasures, with a long and healthfull life in the inhabitants, to enjoye them.*

(Samuel Purchas, Purchas His Pilgrimage, *1613).*

Sri Lanka lies in the middle of the Indian Ocean. A narrow stretch of sea separates it from cntinental Asia, from the southern tip of the Indian peninsula.

To the east of our island republic are the countries of Southeast Asia, and China, Japan and Oceania ; to the west lie Arabia, Persia, Africa, the Mediterranean world and Europe. There is little more to the south than the vast extent of the ocean, the equator and the icy wastes of Antarctica.

Sri Lanka is a land so striking in its natural beauty, so green and fertile, its tropical climate mellowed by sea and mountains and water and trees, that writers through the ages have invested it with a number of poetic names : 'the resplendent isle', 'the jewel island', 'the land of the hyacinth and the ruby', 'the land without sorrow'. Shaped like a pear, or some would say a mango, or a pearl, the country though small is one of the world's larger islands -- somewhat smaller than Ireland or Australia, larger than the two southern islands of Japan. It is rich in water, vegetation and sunlight, with high, central mountains, broad, riverine plains and an unending coastline of beaches. Man has lived here for hundreds and thousands of years, since prehistoric times ; in an environment that has many natural advantages, he has wrought a rich and brilliant culture, *an island civilisation.*

Recorded history begins nearly 2500 years ago, with the first unification of the island into a single centralised kingdom and the adoption of the Buddhist religion. The country has remained closely identified with this religion since, while relatively unbroken traditions link that ancient kingdom with the emerging modern nation. Altough intimately connected with the peoples and cultures of the Indian subcontinent, its strategic maritime location on the ancient sea routes of the Indian Ocean also brought Sri Lanka into regular contact with the lands to the east and the west. In its vegetation and climate it closely resembles the countries of Southeast Asia. In its trading relations, its associations have often been as strong or stronger with lands across the seas as with the neighbouring subcontinent. Most important of all, powerful internal traditions have shaped its politics, economy and culture throughout its long history. Thus, we find here distinctive environments and patterns of history and culture which are often quite different from those of the Indian subcontinent.

It has been said that 'there is no island in the world that has attracted the attention of authors in so many distant ages and so many different country as Ceylon' and also that 'there is probably no place that occurs so frequently or is so correctly situated on ancient maps'. Its central location on the seafaring highways of Asia and its historical and economic signifiance in the ancient world are reflected in these early records. Perhaps nothing conveys this so graphically as the map of the world by Ptolemy, the Egyptian geographer of the second century A.D. There, Sri Lanka (referred to by one of its many ancient names, 'Taprobane') appears about twenty times its actual size, dominating the twin arcs of the Indian Ocean formed by the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea.

One of the earliest foreign records is that of Onesicritos, a pilot in one of Alexander's fleets, who seems to have come here in the fourth century B.C. He described the country as '7000 furlongs in length and 5000 in breadth... divided into two parts with a river... (one) replenished with beasts and elephants, greater than Inde beareth, the rest possessed by men'. In the first century A.D., Pliny gives a description of the country and its people which he seems to have compiled from the accounts of Sri Lankan ambassadors to the court of the Emperor Claudius. Perhaps the most accurate of the earliest reports is that of Fa-Hsien, the Chinese pilgrim and scholar, who was here in the early years of the fifth century to visit Sri Lanka's Buddhist monasteries, which by that time had become great centres of learning. A number of Arab writers, among them the geographer, Al-Idrisi, and the well-known traveller, Ibn Battuta, have left descriptions of the land which they called 'Serendib'. The beauty and wealth of the country seem to have caught their imagination, for they incorporated it into the stories of Sinbad the Sailor and believed that Adam lived here when he was exiled from Paradise. Marco Polo passed through in the thirteenth century and about fifty years later his countryman, Giovanni de Marignolli, records some of the extravagant tributes that myth and legend have paid to Sri Lanka : 'from Seyllan to Paradise is a distance of forty Italian miles ; so that, 'tis said, the sound of waters falling from the fountain of Paradise is heard there'.

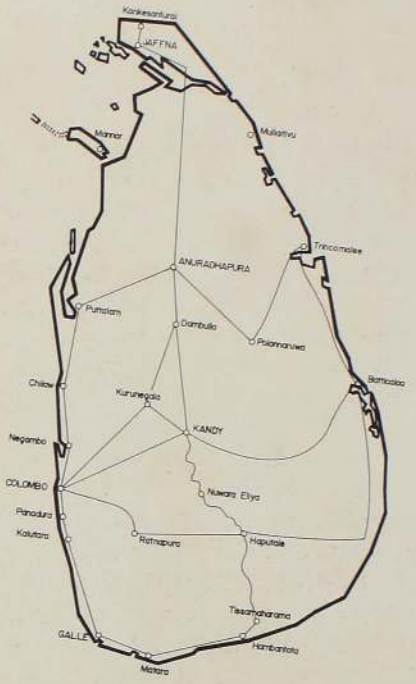
Such records indicate that Sri Lanka was not only a rich and beautiful island but that it was also the seat of one of the small but important historical civilizations of Asia. This is amply confirmed by the extensive archaeological remains that can be seen in many parts of the island. The ruins of great monasteries and capital cities, colossal man-made lakes, numerous inscriptions and a large body of ancient literature still survive as testimony to the achievements of the Sri Lankan people over a period of two thousand years and more. They show that from about the third century B.C. to about the sixteenth century, Sri Lanka took its place with other countries of Asia, amongst the most advanced and developed nations of the pre-modern world. Throughout this period it had evolved its own distinctive and independent culture and economy, while keeping in close contact and being open to ideas and exchanges with the countries of the Indian Ocean region and beyond.

With the beginnings of the modern era, when the world itself began to change and to enter upon a new historical stage, Sri Lanka too came into a new relationship with powers from overseas, with the Europe of the Renaissance. As in many other parts of the world, the colonial expansion of the European maritime nations had a direct political, economic and cultural impact on the island. From the beginning of the sixteenth century onwards, the three or four kingdoms into which the country was then divided, had to contend with the military power and the aggresive economic and diplomatic strategies of a rising modern Europe. It encountered peoples whom its chroniclers described as 'men who eat hunks of stone (bread) and drink blood (wine), and the sound of whose cannon is louder than thunder when it bursts on the Yugandhara rock'. It experienced three hundred years of warfare, negotiations, treaties and trade agreements and the loss of territory. Unable or very slow to change traditional modes of dealing with the world around it, Sri Lanka found itself incapable of meeting the challenge of modern consciousness and modern life that Europe was developing at such an incredible pace. Outstripped and outmanoeuvred by successive waves of Portuguese, Dutch and British colonialists, the last of the Sri Lankan kingdoms was invaded and annexed by the British in the early decades of the nineteenth century. For one hundred and fifty years the country remained a British colony, until -- in the aftermath of the Second World War -- political independence was won in 1947-48.

Like many Asian nations, with a few exceptions such as Japan, it was under the conditions of colonialism that Sri Lanka began the process of transforming itself into a modern nation. This historical transition is still far from complete. Sri Lanka enjoys and suffers, we could say, both the advantages and disadvantages of still being a largely rural and agrarian country, with a relatively low level of industrialisation and without that intense urbanisation that we somtimes see elsewhere in Asia ; of being a contemporary, twentieth century society, in which many modes and institutions of traditional life still prevail. Potentially, it is still open to the people of Sri Lanka to determine the path and character of their society's modernisation. The sheet is still relatively clean.

Today, the Republic of Sri Lanka has a population of over fourteen million people. It ranks as one of the smaller countries of Asia. Its economy is still largely agricultural and consists of irrigated rice cultivation, rice being the staple food, and three major commercial crops : tea - for which the island is famous - rubber and coconut. Some of its ancient exports such as gems, cinnamon and spices still retain an important place in the economy. It has rich mineral resources, especially in radioactive minerals. The main local energy source that has been effectively harnessed is hydro-electricity, in which the island has a high potential. Industry, which in the agro-industrial sector goes back to the nineteenth century, has seen considerable development in the last two decades. Modern industrial production constitutes only a small percentage of the country's economic output and employs a relatively small section of the work force. While a large part of the land, almost thirty-five per cent, is under permanent cultivation or human occupation, an even greater section, fifty per cent, still retains its natural vegetation or is covered by marsh or water.

Language (Sinhala, Tamil and English), religion (Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Christianity) and culture reveal the complex fabric of the country's history. Three major nationalities and four major religious groups form the bulk of the population of the modern unitary state, reflecting patterns of unification and plurality which go back to historical times.



The principal nationality, comprising about three-quarters of the population, is the Sinhalese, with whom the history and culture of the island are most closely identified. They are mostly adherents of Buddhism, Sri Lanka being one of the great historic centres of that religion from the most ancient times. Their language, Sinhala, together with the closely-linked language of the Maldives, is the southernmost extension of the Indo-European family of languages in the pre-modern era. While having its own distinctive features, Sinhala belongs to the larger sub-group of languages of northern and central India, to which areas the Sinhalese also trace their early historical associations.

The other major nationality is the Tamils, speakers of the Tamil language and mostly followers of Hinduism. They fall into two distinct groups : the indigenous Tamils, who have been one of the peoples of Sri Lanka from ancient times, and an equally large group of recent settlers, brought from India in the nineteenth century to work on the British tea plantations.

The third of the large nationalities is the Muslims, who are also an indigenous people, tracing the historical origins of their community to early trading settlements of Arab and other West Asian peoples. Besides these major nationalities, there are a number of other smaller communities, comprising less than one per cent of the total population. These are of both indigenous and foreign descent - including European, Indian, Southeast Asian, Chinese and African origins - and often form small but distinctive cultural groups.

Despite differences and inequalities that exist between the various nationalities - and which, even in recent times, have led to manifestations of chauvinism and racism and acute internal tensions and conflicts - historical and geographical factors have resulted in a considerable degree of cultural and ethnic interchange and integration. The development of a modern economy and especially of modern towns and cities and communications, has greatly accelerated this process.

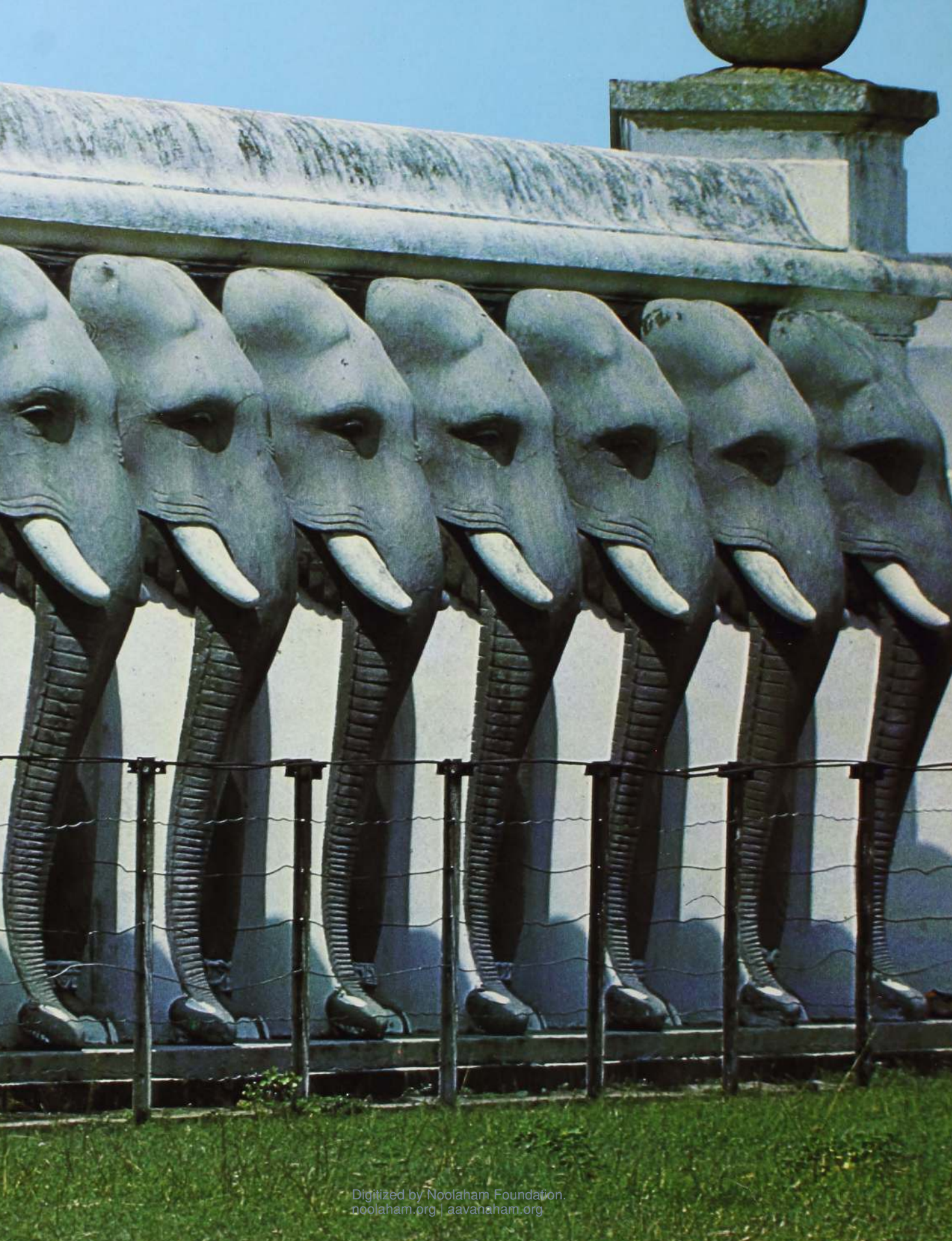
The people of Sri Lanka are poor, but relatively well-nourished, healthy and educated. A recent international index of 'the physical quality of life' amongst the countries of the world gives Sri Lanka the fifth place among the developing countries and not far behind the industrialised nations. Strong democratic traditions and popular participation in the political process have ensured that economic and cultural differences between social classes are less glaring than in many other parts of Asia. Land reforms, while not solving the problems of landlessness, and concentrating land ownership in the hands of the state, have ensured that no great private landowners have remained. An extensive landowning peasantry and a large class of small landowners is a social phenomenon coming down from historical times. Subsidised food, free education from primary school to university, and free health and hospital services are amongst the major institutions of social welfare which the people of Sri Lanka have achieved in modern times. Voting rights for men and women since the early 1930's, a parliamentary assembly and regular democratic elections, trade unions and a press reflecting different political and social viewpoints have been a part of Sri Lanka's modern political culture for more than fifty years.

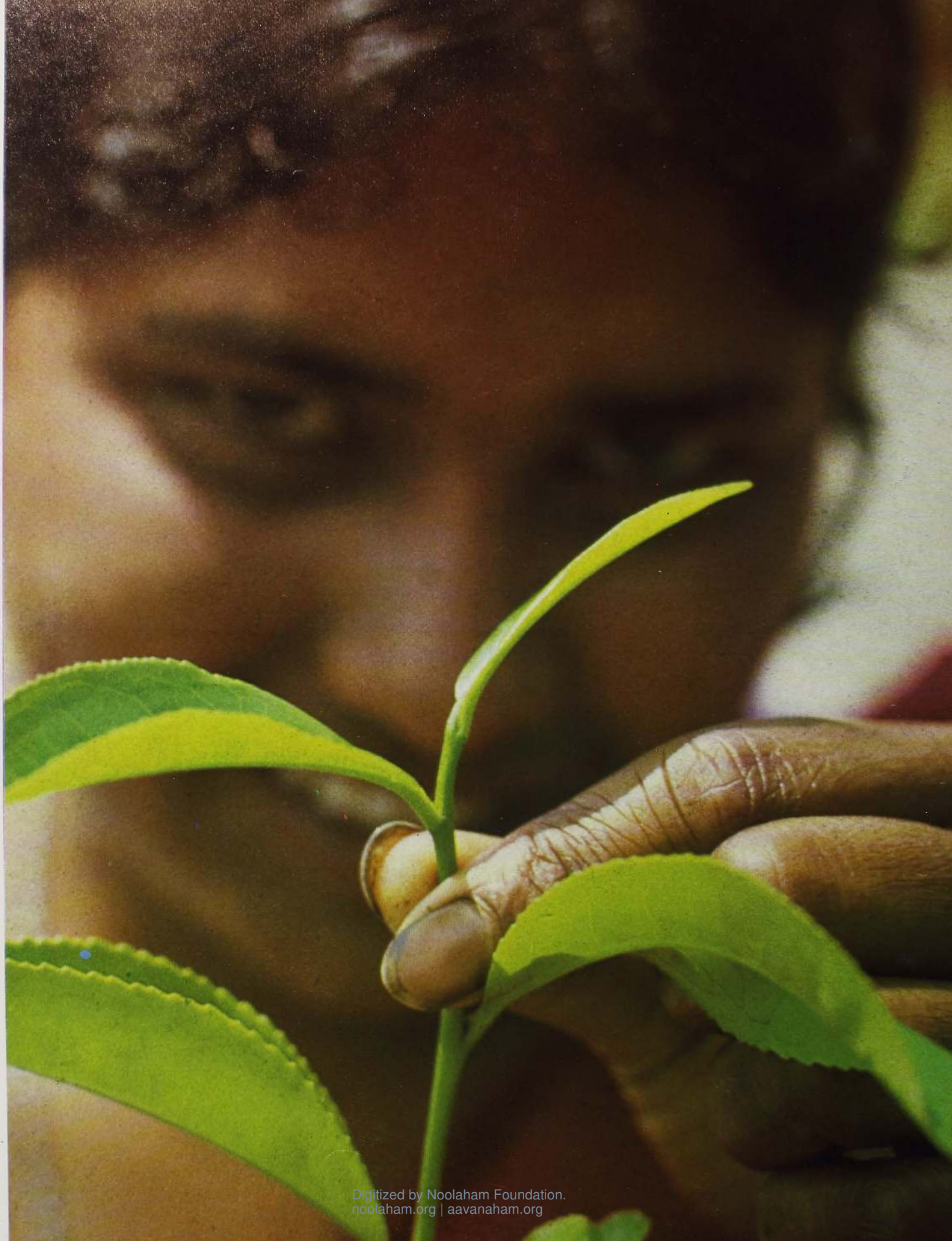
Undoubtedly, Sri Lanka's greatest resource and a significant index of its development is the high level of literacy and education that prevails throughout the country. Almost universal literacy exists among the younger segment of the population (under 30), who form more than sixty per cent of the people. Ancient intellectual and literary traditions have combined with a network of modern primary and secondary schools which extend to every village, as do the radio, the newspaper, the bicycle and, never very far off, the bus.

In an epoch in which in another twenty years, more than three-quarters of the world's people will be living in cities, Sri Lanka still remains a country of villages, a peopled, rural landscape. Some of these villages are spread out along modern arterial roads, like a long chain of endless village high streets or rural townships. Many lie along tree-lined paths and roads of bright pink, yellow or brown earth ; others amidst groves of coconut palms or across valleys terraced into rice fields. In appearance and often even in living conditions, very little has changed for centuries - but the consciousness and knowledge and aspirations of the people in these villages is intensely contemporary, of the twentieth century. The culture of the modern Sri Lankan city, like that of its traditional courts and townships, is derived from a variety of sources, including the village itself and foreign lands. Similarly, the culture of the comtemporary village is today profoundly affected by that of the city. Altough the social and cultural landscape of Sri Lanka still retain many aspects of traditional life - of both positive and negative value - what we see today is in fact a society in transition, possessing at its best a distinctive and creative mixture of tradition and innovation.

This book is an evocation of that experience, presenting in both pictures and words, some of the varied dimensions of Sri Lankan life. Its vegetation, its waterways, its sunsets ; the sea never more than sixty miles away ; deep valleys terraced into fields and mountains covered with tea or with tropical forests ; its animals, the elephant, the water buffalo and the leopard ; its ancient monasteries and the great white domes of the *dagabas,* those characteristic monuments of Southern Buddhism ; its tree-lined cities and semi-urban townships ; its modern harbours, airports, roads and railways ; its cinemas, its universities, its markets, its hospitals, libraries and newspapers ; and above all its people, poor but educated and articulate, gentle but combative, proud of their traditions, their culture and their history, but eager also to release and harness the energies they have, both physical and mental, to transform their land and their lives.

"Despite the great wealth which location, topography, soil and climate have bestowed and the startling richness of the natural environment, there is little doubt that the most decisive factor of all is man. Through thousands of years of activity, human beings on this island - as elsewhere - have mastered and transformed their environment. Almost every inch of landscape that we see and every species of plant and animal that we find has been touched or changed by human action".

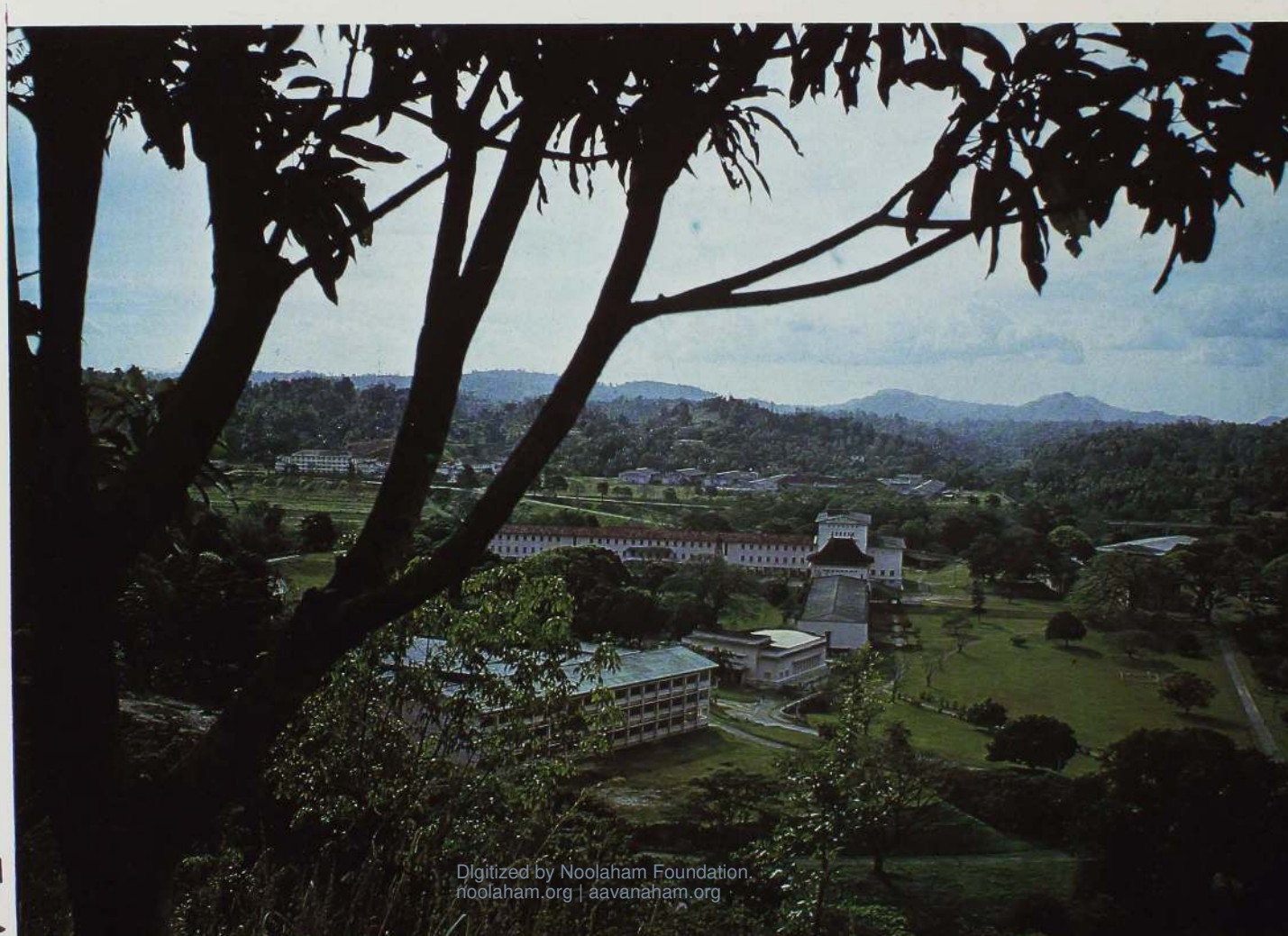


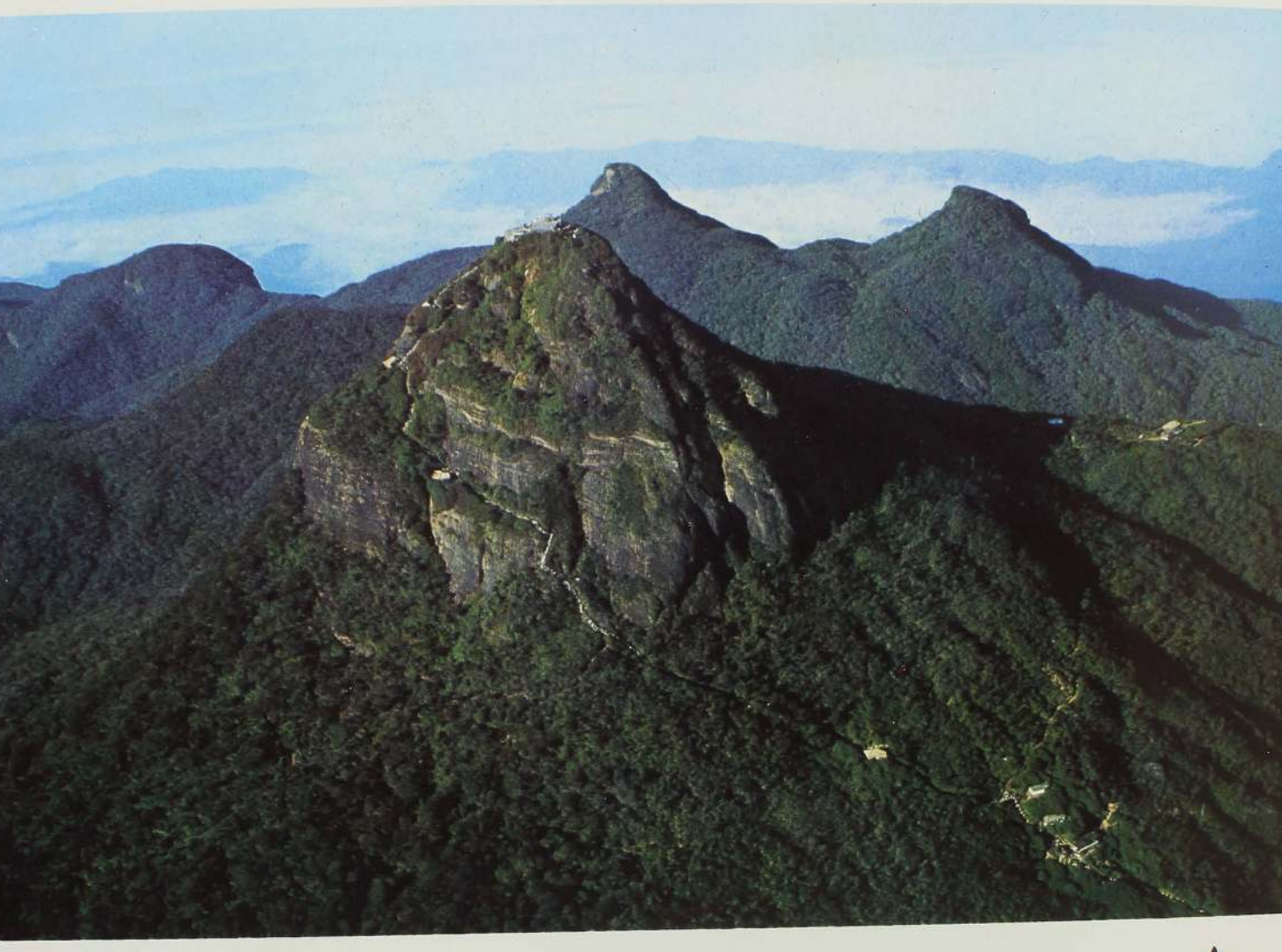


"Listen to the note of the royal swan, intoxicated with the honey of flowers. Hear the murmur of bees within the sāla trees. Listen to the words of the kokilas in the mango grove. Watch the peacocks dancing with their plumage spread before the smiling pea-hens. Watch the youthful deer, maddened with the air of spring, draw his mate out from the fold with the edge of his horns, and retire into the forest glade. Watch the bowers of creepers, how they stand in readiness. Watch the stretches of milk-white sand. Watch the great waterfalls, roaring down the rocks. How sweet are the gentle breezes wafting the fragrance of flowers".

(from the Butsarana of Vidyācakravarti, a 13th century Sinhalese prose work: translated by Martin Wickremasinghe).

10





THE ENVIRONMENT

On a map, the shape and structure of Sri Lanka are easy enough to grasp. The coastal belt, the plains, the rivers and inland waters and the central mountains - these form the main topographical features of the island. The reality, as always, is immeasurably complex. What we find in fact is an immense variety of land formations, vegetation, climate, animal life and patterns of human settlement. We may travel ninety miles inland from the east or the west coast, climbing from sea level to over eight thousand feet. Yet it is possible to drive six hundred miles around the island, almost without losing sight of the sea.

Deep in geological time, Sri Lanka was part of the ancient southern continent of Gondwanaland. About one hundred and fifty million years ago, this continent began to distintegrate, parts of it gradually joining up with other landmasses to form the countries around the Indian Ocean as we know them today. Sri Lanka at that time was part of the great landmass of the Deccan plateau, finally separating from it about twenty-five million years ago. Since then changing sea levels may have from time to time opened up the land bridge between the island and the subcontinent, but that has not happened for the last ten thousand years or so. Despite these various land connections in remote geological epochs, the Sri Lankan landmass itself, like that of southern India, is a very ancient formation whose basic structure has remained stable for many millions of years. In its geologically evolved form, the island consists today of a broad plain surrounding a mountainous region located in the south-centre of the country. The plain is at its broadest to the north and the east of the mountains and narrowest in the southwest. The structure of the land has been described as one that consists of three 'peneplains' or plateaus, rising in successive stages from a hundred feet above sea level to six thousand feet and beyond. From the relatively compact mountain mass, most of the country's twenty-two rivers radiate outwards to the sea.

Sri Lanka's vegetation and micro-climates extend from sand deserts and groves of coconut palms to grassy highland plateaus and the tropical rain forest, stretching over the steep slopes of the mountains. Rainfall patterns vary from more than two hundred inches a year to less than twenty-five. Temperatures are 'oceanic', the all-present sea ensuring that there is little variation from a mean of eighty degrees (27%C) throughout the year except, of course, in the cooler mountains.

A basic climatic variation is recognised by the division of the country into two or three distinct zones : the so-called *wet zone,* which covers the entire southwest quadrant of the island, and which receives rain throughout the year ; the *dry zone,* which covers almost the remaining three-quaters and, while relatively wet, receives only periodic rainfall ; and the *arid zones,* which are two specific areas of the dry zone receiving, as the name indicates, the least amount of rain.

It is possible, however, to divide the country more meaningfully, as both man and nature have shaped it, into six distinct environmental regions :

(1) The wet zone plains of the southwest
(2) The dry zone plains of the north, the east and the south
(3) The central highlands
(4) The coastal belt
(5) The Jaffna peninsula and the islands
(6) The arid zones of the southeast and the northwest.

(1) *The wet zone plains of the southwest.* This region is, overall, the wettest, greenest and most densely populated part of the country. Hundreds of villages, often merging into each other, are to be found here, amongst the home gardens, rice-fields, coconut groves and tea rubber plantations that cover this area. Four-fifths of the region is under cultivation or human settlement. It contains many cities, townships and villages, linked by a mesh of roads, but its vegetation is so profuse that it retains much of its rural ecology.

Although often referred to as 'the Low Country' (as against the 'High Country' of the central mountains), it is in fact a somewhat hilly and undulating land. On the one hand, the ranges of hills approach very close to the coast ; on the other, they merge imperceptibly with the outlying heights of the central highlands. Perennial rivers cut right across it to the sea.

This area as a whole was perhaps the latest part of the island to come under human occupation, although early settlements of pre-Christian date were known in the Colombo region. It was from about the thirteenth century onwards that it became an area of great historical importance, producing the cinnamon, spices and other natural products that formed the mainstay of the island's increasing export trade. The last of Sri Lanka's rich and powerful kingdoms, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the Kingdom of Kotte, was centred here. The area came under colonial control and influence from the seventeenth century onwards. Today it is the most urbanised region in the country, both ecologically and culturally, with Colombo exercising a strong metropolitan influence over it.

(2) *The dry zone plains of the north, the east and the south.* These broad and slightly hilly plains cover almost three-quarters of the island's territory. They are traversed by sixteen rivers, including the two hundred mile long Mahaveli Ganga, which begins in the west and curves around the central highlands. Characteristic of this region is an annual rainy season from about December to Febuary. The formation of the land, the river systems and the periodic rainfall were all utilised by the ancient Sri Lankans to build an intricate network of great man-made lakes and canals, bringing these plains under cultivation and forming the basis of the rich, irrigation civilisation that existed in this area from the first millenium B.C. to the thirteenth century.

After the thirteenth century a slow decline set in here when the major centres of Sri Lankan civilisation began to shift to the plains of the wet zone and the central highlands. Much of it was greatly depopulated and heavily forested by the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, during which time it formed the outlying provinces of the Kandyan kingdom. Extensive archeological remains from the pre-thirteenth century period are found throughout this region, and the famous ruined cities of Anuradhapura, Sigiriya and Polonnaruva are located in the centre of the northern plain.

In recent times, and especially in the last two or three decades, this area has been resettled and is being redeveloped. Many ancient irrigation works have been restored and new ones constructed or planned. Today, these plains have become the expanding frontier country of Sri Lanka. Nearly three-quarters of this area, however, still remain unused and under forest.

(3) *The central highlands.* The central mass of hills and mountains rises from the surrounding plains, in a series of steps or stages. Bordered sometimes by steep escarpments and precipitous slopes, the greater part of the highlands consists of smoothly rounded hills and ridges - testimony to their ancient geological formation - belonging to a number of large plateaus or basins, about one thousand five hundred to two thousand five hundred feet in height. A few higher and narrower ranges, rise to over five and six thousand feet, with high peaks such as Pidurutalagala (8282 feet) and Adam's Peak (7341 feet).

A major portion of the central highlands has a high rainfall and was once covered with the dense vegetation of the tropical rain forest. Some tracts of this primaeval forest still survive but most areas of the central highlands have been occupied by man. The valleys and plateaus are old village settlements, while the hills and higher ranges are occupied by tea and other plantations established in the last one hundred years. A smaller and drier section of the highlands is in the form of ancient grasslands or thinly forested tracts where it is believed that prehistoric man lived, burning the forests for hunting and shifting agriculture.

The highland climate and land-use patterns are a distinct variation of the rural environment that we find in the plains. It is, of course, the major tea-growing area and one can often see here the smooth and rounded contours of the tea plantation landscape. A more ancient and beautiful man-made environment is that of the terraced rice-fields, where every inch of land has been shaped by hand to form an ingenious patchwork of earth bunds and waterlogged beds.

Historically, the hill country was the central region of the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries, the Kingdom of Kandy. The city of Kandy, the major modern city of the area, still retains much of its historical character and many of its old monuments. Until the nineteenth century the culture of this area remained very little affected by contact with the modern world. Then, almost abruptly, great changes took place with the British conquest of the Kingdom of Kandy and the opening up of the highland plantations. Today it still remains one of the major cultural regions of the country.

The climate is temperate and attractive, without any difference of summer or winter. The vegetation is always luxuriant, cultivation proceeds whenever men think fit ; there are no fixed seasons for it.

Fa-Hsien, A Record of the Buddhistic Kingdoms, *5th century.*

Where the mountain streams pour cool water from every peak,
Where the rice fields are ploughed at both seasons
And all around are houses with gardens of coconut and palmyra,
While in every pool are full-lotuses...
Where on every side the sweet rice ripens in the fields
And from far away are heard the cries of calves and children

Hamsa Sandesaya *(The Swan's Message)*
Sinhalese poem of the 15th century
(adapted from the translation of H. Pieris and L.C. Van Geyzel).

---

(4) *The coastal belt.* The narrow strip of coast which forms the seaward border of the wet and the dry zone plains has, everywhere, its own distinctive and varying maritime environment. In the southwest, where it forms part of the southwest plains, the coastal belt is an area of intensive human settlement, containing such modern port cities as Colombo and Galle. Elsewhere in the country it varies between areas of settlement and large stretches of completely unoccupied coast.

The greatest number of Sri Lanka's major minor towns and ancient and modern ports are located in this belt. Broad river estuaries, extensive lagoons and great natural bays and harbours where high cliffs come right down to the edge of the sea - such as Trincomalee, Weligama and Galle - are some of the familiar natural features of this region. Wide and shady beaches, of course, stretch almost the entire length of the coast, with sand dunes and sand deserts in the driest areas. A continental shelf and shallow waters teeming with marine life surround the island. More than half this coastline is girdled by reefs, forming a submarine forest of corals, sea fans and millions of brightly coloured fish.

Hundreds of small fishing villages are the most regular manifestations of human settlement and activity in this maritime zone. Its most distinctive man-made feature is the arterial road which more or less circles the island. This road runs in an almost continuous seaside stretch of over two hundred miles, from Puttalam, on the west coast, to Hambantota, in the southeast. It is, for the most part, an ancient highway that estended even further north to Mannar and beyond. A similar road, sometimes interrupted by ferries, runs along the east coast. Another section encircles most of the Jaffna peninsula and the nearest islands, and stretches southwards to Mannar. Only the two great national parks and wildlife sanctuaries of Wilpattu and Yala and the narrow sandy neck of land which joins the Jaffna peninsula to the mainland interrupt these ancient coastal routes, transformed in modern times into major arteries of communication.

(5) *The Jaffna peninsula and the islands.* The extreme north of Sri Lanka is an area with a distinctive environment and history. Dry, flat, surrounded by sea and lagoon, with a harsh natural vegetation growing over sand and limestone soils, the Jaffna peninsula also contains some of the most fertile and intensively cultivated farmlands in the country. In the very heart of the peninsula is a famous belt of red soil, where the underground water, often trapped in limestone beds and caverns, is lifted out to provide irrigation for rich fields of onion, tobacco, potato and chilli. Also characteristic of this area is the palmyra palm, which like the coconut elsewhere in the country, satisfies a host of domestic needs.

An area of ancient settlement, at least from the beginnings of recorded history, Jaffna was the seat of the Tamil kingdom of the thirteenth to seventeenth centuries. Tamilian culture and the Hindu religion are found in many parts of the country, particularly in the northern and eastern provinces, but their greatest concentration and highest development is centred on the Jaffna peninsula, which is considered the homeland of the indigenous Tamils.

To the west of the peninsula are a number of small but inhabited sea islands, amongst them Karaitivu and Kayts, with its historic harbour ; Nainativu or Nagadipa with its ancient Buddhist temple, and Neduntivu (Delft) with its wild horses. The furthest island, Kachchativu, is almost equidistant from Sri Lanka and India.

(6) *The arid zone of the southeast and the northwest.* Two specialised extensions of the dry zone lie at either end of the island, characterised by low rainfall, flat land, a vegetation of low trees and scrub, a coastline of sandbars and sand dunes, and a sparse population. These areas, however, were some of the earliest zones of historical and even prehistoric occupation, and the remains of ancient irrigation works, capital cities and ports can still be seen here. The port of Mantota, which was one of the great centres of Sri Lanka's trade with India, China, Persia and Rome, lies in the northwest, near the more recent town of Mannar. The Mannar island is part of a submerged landbrige between Sri Lanka and the Indian subcontinent. This northwestern area was also the centre of Sri Lanka's historic pearl fisheries. The southeast, on the other hand, which had a much more extensive irrigation system, was the heartland of the ancient southern kingdom of Ruhuna.

In these six major regions of the country, we find an extensive and often highly differentiated range of plant and animal life. A part of this is the island's natural heritage belonging to a time before the appearance of man, or at least before significant human activity ; much of it has been profoundly affected by human intervention and human settlement.

One of the special characteristics of Sri Lanka's plant life is the immense diversity that is concentrated in a relatively small area. The richness of this flora has been significant enough to play a part in the early development of modern botanical sciences : in 1747, the Swedish naturalist, Carl Linnaeus, the founder of modern Botany, wrote his famous treatise, the *Flora Zeylanica.* Since then, the island's plants have been a subject of great interest to many 'classical' botanists and biologists of the eighteenth and mineteenth centuries. One reason for this, in the words of a recent researcher, Dr. Cramer, is that 'Sri Lanka has not suffered any major climatic or geological catastrophe since the Cretaceous or early Tertiary periods (i.e. around one hundred million years ago) ; such environmental equilibrium prevented the extinction of any appreciable part of our flora since, probably, the Pleistocene (around three million years ago) ; on the other hand, following the Pleistocene, the climate underwent marked changes, but these only accelerated the process of the evolution of our species'.

It has been estimated that the island has over three thousand indigenous species, which is three times as many as in the British Isles, an area about three times as large. Moreover, almost a third of these Sri Lankan species are not found anywhere else in the world. The affinities, as well as the differentiation, which this flora shows with that of India, on the one hand, and Southeast Asia and Madagascar, on the other, reveal much of the island's natural history, especially its past, geological connections and its evolved and distinctive ecological personality.

The wind blew. Thousands and hundreds of thousands of trees, which had put forth buds, fell down. The curlew uttered shrieks. Torrents came forth on the Malalya mountain. The night was made (to be) of the glow of tender copper - (coloured) leaves by fire-flies beyond count.

Translation by Senarat Paranavitana
from the Sigiri Graffiti, 7th-9th
century.

Ceylon's jungles are among the world's gaudiest ; there is scarcely a season when they are not in flower, either with the waxy blossoms of the iron tree, with gold-veined dark velvet "Wanna Raja" orchids, the crimson and tangerine petals of the Asoka and coral trees, or with lilac, yellow and mauve blooms of creepers that intertwine in sixteen or twenty varieties. The framework of the woodlands is provided by the majestic teak, spreading Kumbuk trees, slender talipot palms, and by snake trees, whose roots twist as if in serpentine agony.

Ceorge Davison Winius, THE FATAL
HISTORY OF PORTUGUESE CEYLON,
Cambridge, Mass. 1971.

The most luxuriant plant life in Sri Lanka, unfamiliar even to those who live not far away from it, is to be found in the primaeval rain forest. This once covered the entire wet zone from the plains up to a height of about five thousant feet, but is today mostly restricted to mountain tracts and hilly, lowland areas such as the Peak Wilderness around Adam's Peak and the Sinharaja Adaviya, the 'Great Forest of the Lion King'.

The Sinharaja forest is unique in that a greater part of it has never been affected by human activity, nor, for millions of years, by any great natural calamity. Scientists believe that it represents a botanical and zoological environment whose evolution has been undisturbed for at least the last one hundred million years. Moreover, it has a distinctive combination of local environment and Sri Lankan plant species. As Savitri Gunatilleke observes : 'The bulk of the forest is comprised of endemics, which makes our rain forests quite exclusive to the island - nowhere else in the world is there this particular combination of species, this gene pool not only of plants - whose medicinal and agricultural potential has yet to be studied - but also of animals and micro-organisms'.

One of the most evocative descriptions of the fauna and flora of the rain forest is found in the opening passages of John Still's *Jungle Tide :*

'High forest such as this has three levels of life, distinct and separate in almost every way, though the mighty trees live through all three levels. On and under the soil itself live the people of the ground floor, those who cannot or care not to climb, such as the deer and pigs, the porcupines, several kinds of birds, and far more kinds of insects, as well as most of the snakes and their chief prey the frogs, though there are tree snakes and tree frogs too. Here, too, are to be found many lovely flowering plants, and a dozen or so of ground orchids flourish. Above this, midway between the dense undergrowth of the ground floor and the spreading tree-tops that roof it all, there is a more open space, where birds may fly freely, and where the branches are clothed in grey beards of lichen and hung with many sorts of parasite and epiphyte whose beauty excuses their indolence.

'The upper surfaces of the domes are roof-gardens, carpeted thick with flowers whose nectar draws to the feast thousands of bees of many kinds, moths in battalions, and whole hordes of ants. In the roof-gardens, where all rain is first-hand and there is no drip, where sunlight is pure and unfiltered by shade, there grows an abundance of vegetable life more varied even than on the shady floor of the forest. All living beings in the roof-gardens hold tenure of the royal tree. Orchids and ferns, loranthus and lichens, they cling to their host and sub-let their leaves and snug corners to lesser tenants, lizards and birds, bugs and spiders, scores of tribes of ants, and a thousand forms of fungi, until the royal dome becomes a kingdom, a thing a man might study all his life and yet not know to the full'.

As rich in its own way as the rain forest is the man-made environment of food-bearing and other economically useful trees and plants : jak and breadfruit ; commercial crops such as tea and rubber ; a vast array of spices and aromatics, the best-known of which are cloves, cardamons, nutmeg and cinnamon ; numerous trees valued for their timbers, including rare and beautiful tropical woods such as ebony, calamander and tamarind ; and a myriad fruits, mango, pineapple, papaya and bananas being the commonest and most favoured. Besides these are a host of trees, plants and creepers which are grown for their flowers or their colourful leaves : asoka, sal, na, sepalika, hibiscus, poinsettia, jacaranda, frangipani, gliricidia, rhododendron, bougainvillea.

Man did not have to venture far for food in this tropical world. The fertility and luxuriance of Sri Lanka's vegetation is never more apparant than in colossal fruit like the jak - the largest edible fruit in the world, some weighing as much as fifty pounds - breadfruit, papaya and banana. Together with root crops, like manioc, yams and sweet potatoes, these grow in almost every homestead and often form the staple diet of the village and the suburbs - especially as the food of the poor. The most conspicuous of these 'organic' sources of food is the coconut palm. Believed to have come in the distant past from the Pacific region, the earliest recorded plantations are from the sixth century, under royal patronage. Today it is planted wherever it will grow, in the smallest domestic garden, as well as in plantations many hundreds of acres in extent. Almost every part of the tree is utilised, coconut oil and the milk extracted from the white pulp of the fruit imparting a characteristic flavour to Sri Lankan cooking, giving it a close affinity with the coconut-based foods of Southeast Asia.

As important as its primaeval and endemic vegetation are the large number of plants and trees which have come from neighbouring or distant lands, but are now completely naturalised and both economically and culturally important in the daily life of the country. This includes, above all, the chilli, so essential to Sri Lankan cooking today, but brought to Asia from the Americas by the Portuguese in the sixteenth century. South and Central America were also the original home of rubber, cacao and manioc or cassava, while some of Sri Lanka's best-known flowering plants such as frangipani and bouganvillea are also historical importations.

Sri Lanka, of course, has an abundance of indigenous flowers, amongst them a large number of endemic orchids. The cultivation of flowering plants and trees is a deep-rooted tradition in the island, stretching from the royal parks of Anuradhapura to the poorest village gardens of modern times. As important, in ancient times, as flowers was the collection and culture of medicinal plants and herbs, which still form the basis of traditional medicine.

The worship and veneration of trees and plants is older than their cultivation. As an important source of food, shelter, building materials, weapons and fuel, the tree is an object of worship and a symbol or abode of a supernatural being in many early cultures. The tree-cult is an almost universal phenomenon, especially in tropical Asia, one of the most heavily-forested regions of the world. While many manifestations of the tree-cult can be found in Sri Lanka, particularly in its folk religion, the veneration of the bo-tree, the *ficus religiosa,* takes on a special historical dimension in the country's Buddhist traditions. The Bodhi-tree is a symbol of the Buddha and commemorates his Enlightenment. The ancient bo-tree at Anuradhapura goes back to the beginnings of Buddhism in the island and was a direct link between Sri Lankan Buddhists and their co-religionists in the valley of the Ganges, the homeland of Buddhism. As a reflection or replication of this sacred tree, every Buddhist temple in Sri Lanka has a bo-tree as one of its principal ritual centre. ...

Sri Lanka's rich tropical vegetation has supported, even more so in the past than today, a great wealth of animal and bird life. The study of fossil remains has given us an understanding of the country's geological formation and ancient changes in its climatis regimes. Amongst these fossils are the remains of lion, rhinoceros and hippopotamus, all now long extinct, and also the ancestors of the island's present fauna, including the elephant, the water buffalo, the leopard and the bear ; many kinds of deer, like the sambhur, the spotted deer and the diminutive barking deer ; and a variety of monkeys. Nineteenth century descriptions record the density and variety of the animal population in forest and mountain areas before the opening-up of the plantations and the resettlement of the dry zone plains ;

'I have travelled in many forests, and traversed many woods in various countries, but never have I seen one that could, in any degree, be compared to those of Ceylon. There, where the sun shoots his burning rays, only a trembling and coloured light can be perceived. Trees, almost as old as the world, spread a refreshing coolness, and proudly exalting themselves on high, extend their branches far and wide into the air. Others, loaded with wild fruit, protect aromatic plants that grow in their shade, and fill the atmosphere with a balmy and refreshing fragrance. An incalculable number of birds of every sort are mingled together, and each singing its own natural note, produces a confused but pleasant concert. Butterflies, of the most splendid and glowing colours, wander among the trembling leaves. Here and there are seen through the trees troops of deer, elk and antelopes of all sorts, and sometimes bears and wild swine. Game swarms on all sides ; hares, partridges, wild fowl ; while the cooing of pigeons and other birds of that species continually resounds through the forest. Apes of various sorts skip from branch to branch, and have often afforded us much amusement by a thousand ridiculous leaps and grimaces'.

This account, first published in 1810, was written by a Dutchman who had traversed the island on foot. Writing nearly one hundred years later, a Forest Department officer recalls his memories of that time :

'The higher ranges, above the elevation at which paddy will grow, were almost uninhabited but were not pathless, for they were intersected by well beaten tracks made by those master road-makers, the elephants, zigzagging up the slopes, running along the ridges and through the gaps of the hills. Elephants roamed in broad daylight over the patanas or upland grass-covered plains, and the valleys and swamps were full of sambhur feeding unmolested. In the low-country, the great unbroken forest, which stretched from Dondra Head to Palmyra Point, simply swarmed with game. Elephants were as numerous in this hot, dry country as in the cold, wet hills ; great droves of wild buffaloes wallowed in the tanks ; thousands of leopards and bears infested the rocky hills and stony tracks ; spotted deer grazed in the glades in herds of an hundred or more ; and wild pigs rooted about in countless numbers'.

Ruthless hunting during the nineteenth century decimated the animal population. 'Major Forbes mentions the killing of 106 elephants in 1837 by a party of four Europeans in three days, and the slaying of no less than nine in one morning by a gentleman who was at the time Government Agent at Kurunegala. Majors Rogers is credited with having slain upwards of 1400 ; Captain Gellway over 700 ; and Major Skinner, almost as many'. Such slaughter, together with the growth of plantations and the expansion of human settlements, have restricted the island's natural fauna almost entirely to the dry zone forests, a large extent of which is still preserved. There are, however, nearly fifty wildlife sanctuaries, the two largest at Wilpattu and Yala each covering over four hundred square miles, conserving both the birds and animals in their natural habitat. While most of these reserves are of recent origin, the preservation of royal and monastic forests and the creation of animal sanctuaries are an ancient Sri Lankan tradition. Inhibitions concerning the killing of animals in sacred areas like the Peak Wilderness must have been operative through the centuries. A twelfth century inscription records the proclamation of such a sanctuary around the city of Anuradhapura, by King Nissamkamalla :

'Ordering by beat of drum that no animals should be killed within a radius of seven gav (about 24 miles) from the city, he gave security to animals. He gave security also to the fish in the twelve great tanks and bestowing on (fowlers) gold and cloth and whatever kind of wealth they wished, he commanded them not to catch birds and so gave security to birds'.

Man's relationship with animals and birds, his fear, affection and respect, and their usefulness to him are all reflected in the place that they occupy in Sri Lankan rituals and in both religious and secular literature and art. Prehistoric survivals such as the Bear dance of the Vaddas - which was the prelude to a hunt - and the numerous animal masks which feature in masked dance dramas and masked rituals testify to the importance of animals in the life of early man in the island. One of the most feared and most powerful demons of the folk religion is the bear-headed Maha-Sohon-Yaka, 'the Great Demon of the Graveyards', who is impersonated by a masked dancer. The 'Kohomba Kankariya' dance rituals and the 'Vannam' court songs and dances of the highlands are deeply immersed in aimal imagery and symbolism. A well-known sequence in the Kohomba Kankariya is the *Uru Yakkama,* a ritual and largely humorous hunt of the wild bear, enacted in song, dance and mime. The most famous of the Vannams is the *gajaga* or 'elephant' vannama, which describes the movement of the celestial elephant of the King of the Gods.

There is no animal which has meant so much to the people of this country than that king of our forests, the elephant. Our association with it is as old as our history and a study of elephants has been a part of our culture. Thes versatile animals served us in war, helped in the construction of the great temples and reservoirs and graced every religious ceremony.

Lys de Alwis in CEYLON
OBSERVER PICTORIAL, *1969*

The largest and best-known of the island's animals and one which occupies a special place in its life and history is the elephant, a variety of the Asian species which still survives in India, Bangladesh and some Southeast Asian countries. In fact, more than one sub-species has been found in the island, one of which is considered the *forma typica* of the Asian elephant, Sri Lanka being one of its original homelands. The Sri Lankan elephant was well known in ancient times and greatly prized in foreign lands, as many Greek, Roman and Portuguese records show.

The domestication of the elephant, which seems to have taken place before the beginnings of recorded history, played a vital role in the island's development. As a heavy work animal - in which capacity it still functions - the elephant serves the combined role of bulldozer, tractor and crane, while its role in traditional warfare was analagous to that of the modern tank. In the clearing of the ancient forests and the building of dams and canal bunds, the elephant's

contribution to the country's early agriculture and irrigation must have been considerable. Its role in heavy construction work, especially in the lifting and positioning of huge boulders, and as a heavily-armoured and fighting animal in warfare, is immeasurable. The Sri Lankan chronicles record names of famous war-elephants and the descriptions of elephant armies. The capture of wild elephants was a royal monopoly and the care of the court elephants the function of an important state official. As much as the horse in other societies, the elephant in traditional Sri Lanka was the symbol of feudal wealth and power. Today, elephants are still used as work animals and in religious festivals and processions. The famous procession of the Tooth Relic in Kandy has over one hundred elephants in its retinue.

Elephants, of course, still exist in their wild state in Sri Lanka, but their conservation and protection have been a major problem. With the decimation of the elephant herds in the nineteenth century, 'the lordly elephant', as one recent writer says, 'was reduced to the ignominy of being a mere variety of big-game and with the generous assistance of such ruthless hunters as Major Rogers and Sir Samuel Baker, they were banished from their natural habitat, the wet zone'. In more recent times, the opening up of the dry zone forests for cultivation has progressively limited the elephant's feeding grounds and turned many of these animals living outside the national parks into dangerous and destructive pests, whose own survival is thereby threatened.

Thick mud drying on their bodies
Horns sharpened the great roots of trees...
Look, wild buffaloes, on the edges of pools !

Hamsa Sandesaya *(The Swan's Message). Sinhalese poem of the 15th century*

Trudging up from the coast I came to the elephant baths... Out of the watery calm, a motionless grey mushroom appeared : it changed into a serpent : then an immense head : then a mountain with tusks...

Pablo Neruda (in Colombo in 1929)

Perhaps more important economically thant the elephant, though scarcely revered in the same fashion, is the water buffalo, which exists both in a domesticated and in a wild state. If the elephant was the traditional bulldozer, the buffalo was the tractor, the principal draught animal used in ploughing the rice fields and threshing the rice. Muddy waters being almost its natural habitat, it is an animal indispensable in wet rice cultivation - only replaceable, and that somewhat unsatisfactorily, by the tractor. The buffalo has also been, traditionally, a major source of milk and milk products in the village areas. Curds made from buffalo milk, mixed with honey (palm treacle) is one of the great desserts and ceremonial foods of Sri Lanka.

In the last decade or so, the domestic buffalo was in fact being replaced by tractors, but the effect of the fuel crisis and other socio-economic factors at village level, as well as new agronomic research, has led to an effective reassessment of the buffaloo's importance. The wild buffalo, on the other hand, being far more resilient than the elephant and more agressive, seems to have increased in recent years, thereby posing a problem of limitation rather than of conservation.

On an entirely different scale and in a very different context from the elephant and the buffalo are some of Sri Lanka's strangest animals, such as the scaly ant-eater and the loris. The ant-eater is a long-nosed burrowing animal, about the size of a dog. Its body and tail are protected by heavy scales, and when attacked it rolls itself up so thightly into a ball that it becomes completely unassailable. Together with the monkey, however, the ant-eater was a delicacy in the diet of the Vaddas. Even stranger is the loris ; no larger than a rat, with long hands and feet and enormous eyes, it belongs to a species found nowhere else in the world. One of the smallest surviving primate mammals, it is related to the lemurs of Madagascar and the tarsiers of Borneo, and has evolutionary links with man. It has been described as 'a strange creature of lineage so ancient that it was fully developed when, millions of years ago, the horse was four-toed and no bigger than a hare and the elephant a trunkless animal the size of a pig'.

The only carnivora of any significance are the leopard and the bear, the lion being extinct even before historical times, and the tiger unknown having only entered peninsula India after the land bridge between the island and the continent had been submerged. With keen sight and hearing, and great strength and agility, the leopard, however, is a shy and rarely-seen animal, seldom known to attack human beings. The sloth bear, on the other hand, is the inhabitant of the forest which is most feared by man. Agressive and temperamental, it attacks with its powerful teeth and long-nailed claws. In days when Sri Lankan man lived entirely by hunting, or in more recent times when forests were still an important source of food and fuel, the bear must have been the most fearful adversary than man could encounter. Its ferociousness and the fear which it instils probably account for the important place which the bear occupies in local folklore and ritual.

Even richer than its animal life and present almost everywhere throughout the country are the more than five hundred varieties of birds that are seen in the island ; from the smallest Weaver Birds, no longer than a finger, to the Black-Necked Stork, almost as tall as a man ; from brightest blue kingfishers and green parrots and the elaborate plumage of the jungle fowl to the Grey Partridge and the long-necked Black Cormorant ; from the curious Hornbill and the elaborately-tailed Bird of Paradise to the ubiquitous domestic crow. Nearly four hundred of these birds are indigenous to the island and a hundred of them exclusive to Sri Lanka.

There are few better evocations of this birdlife in its natural habitat than this description of a forest 'tank', written nearly thirty years ago but just as applicable today :

'Across the water drift white pelicans with no ripple to betray the activity of their swiftly paddling feet - their immense bills nearly as long as their bodies. Near the middle of the tank a rock rises out of the water to form a barren islet, painted white by the droppings of many thousands of birds. Teal cormorant ceaselessly come and go from this island ; while on its summit sits a darter, motionless, with wings outstretched and head held high, like some black creature of ill omen, as he dries his wings in the sun. Over the mat of floating lotus-leaves run water pleasants with delicately arched tails, and blue coot on their spidery toes. Whistling teal, quacky duck, white-shafted ternlets, cormorants, pelocans and darters swim about, bobbing under water and coming up again all day in search of food.

'On the far side of the tank stands a row of pale dead trees on whose bare bough darters and teal rest awhile ; and on one sits a kingfisher, moving his head jerkily from side to side, - then, still for a moment, he falls like a blue stone, hitting the water with a splash, and flies back to his perch with a struggling scrap of silver in his beak. In the shallows and among the reeds, stand long-legged fishers ; tall flamingos hiding their blushes beneath their wings, egrets, pond herons, purple herons, and grey herons - all fishing and dozing through the long hours of the day. A herd of Buffalo, semi-wild, laze among the water weeds, some with only their snouts visible : white cattle egrets and mynahs perch on their backs and peck off the ticks'.

As interesting as the island's indigenous birds are the numerous migrants who come here from regions as distant as Siberia, Central Europe and China. Travelling mostly along coastal regions, this extraordinary natural phenomenon takes place every year, where large flocks of birds fly thousands of miles across continents, in front of the advancing winter, searching for warmer climes. For those species who move in the direction of South Asia, Sri Lanka represents the final destination - there being no further landmass before Antarctica - until they return once again in the warmer months to their more northerly homelands.

While birdlife is at its richest in the tanks and lagoons of the dry zone, birds are also found in towns and cities, where dense man-made vegetation and extensive green spaces offert them environments as conducive as those of the forest. Large numbers of wild birds are common even in Colombo, especially in the suburbs, but also in the parks, gardens and waterways in the very heart of the city. A recent publication of the Wild Life Society has an entire chapter on the birds of Colombo and records well over a hundred varieties which have been noticed in the city.

No other aspect of Sri Lanka's fauna, perhaps, has aroused as much interest among writers and naturalists as its bird life. Since the nineteenth century, more exhaustive studies have been made and lists prepared on the subjects of birds than on any other aspect of the local fauna. This interest has literary antecedents in the Sinhalese poetry of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries where a number of poems, conceived as messages from the poet to an eminent personage, are carried by bird messengers. Thus we have the Swan's Message, the Parrot's Message, the Starling's Message and so on. The following lines from the Parrot's Message, while full of literary conceits, convey a vivid impression of the forest and forest life as it was observed by man so many centuries ago :

Fly on through the lovely forest regions,
Where gleaming waterfalls break through
And tumble down,
Where sandy tracks are covered with scattered pollen
And companies of swans are maddened by desire.

Do not delay if monkeys go leaping
Close to your path on the forest-tops...
Watch the rapture of those cuckoos !
Mark well the flock of roosting parrots,
Who resting among leaves
And perched on ripe mangoes
Rip them with their beaks,
Guzzling the flowing juice which never palls.

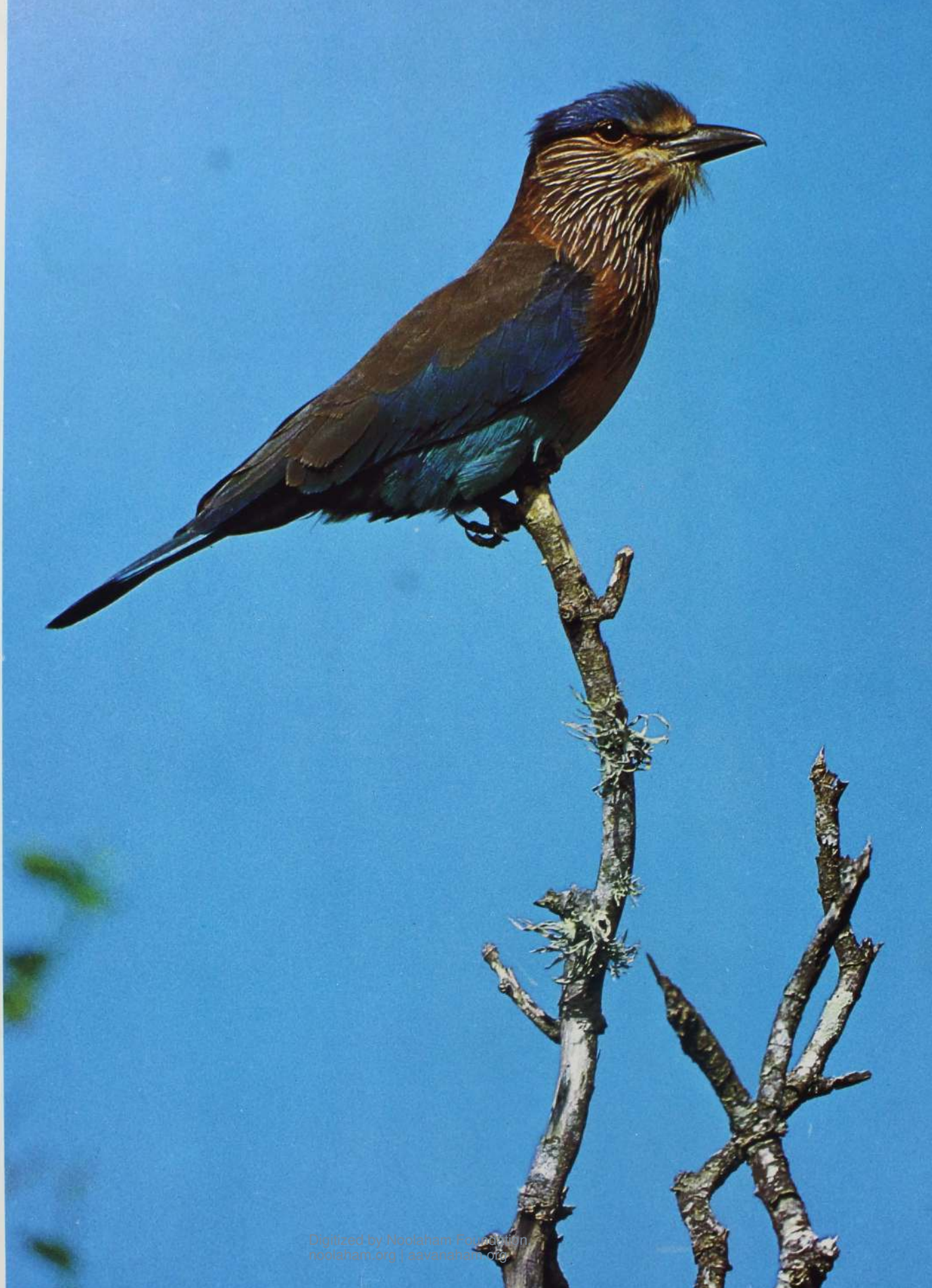
Watch the dancing peacocks,
Their tails bright blue flowers a-quiver,
Stretch their blue necks and utter cries.

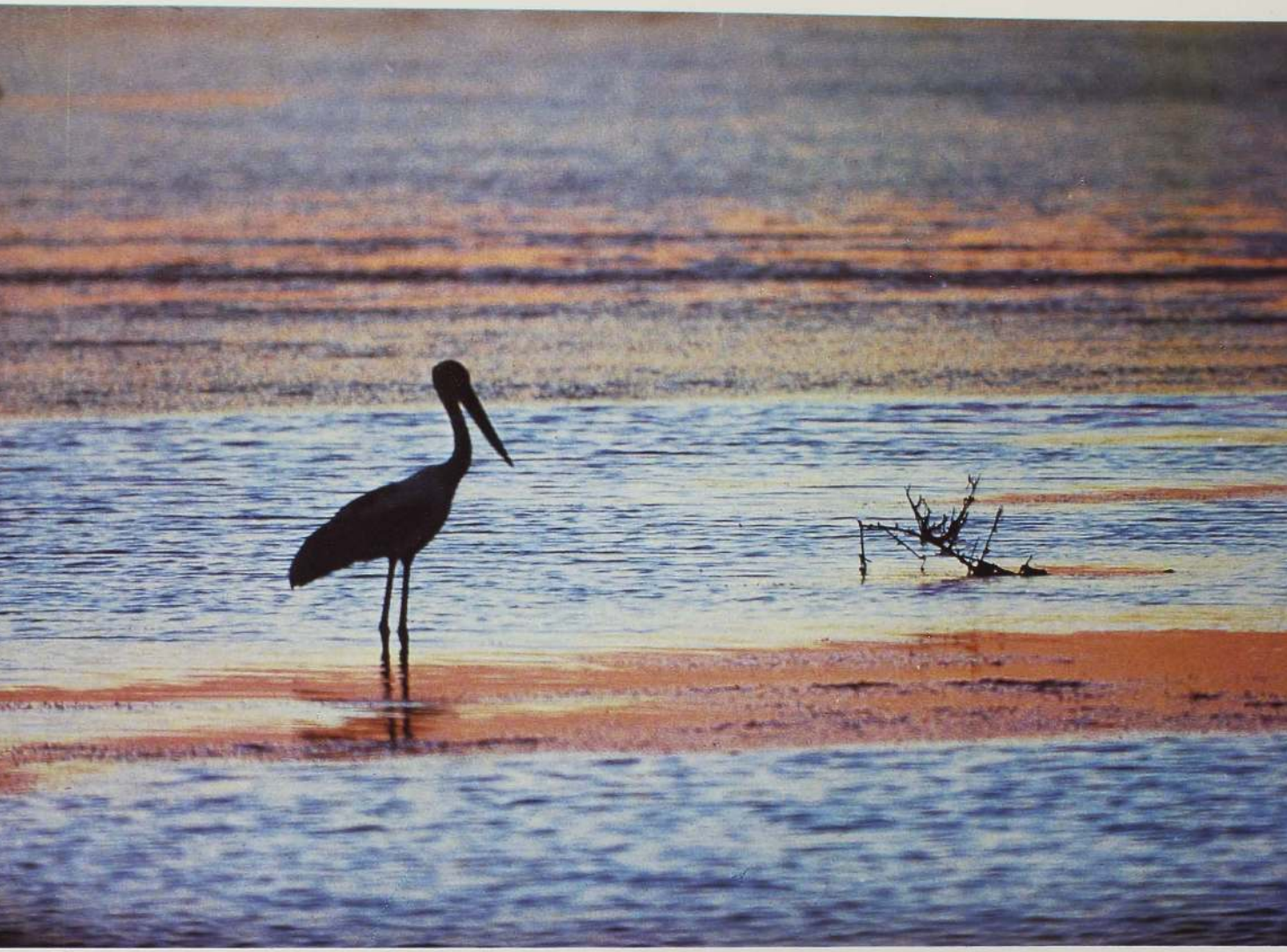
See in this place and that, herds of deer
In whose hearts fear rises at the sight of wild huntsmen,
So that they leap swiftly back and forth in the forest
Like lightning flashing
Within a dark rain-cloud.

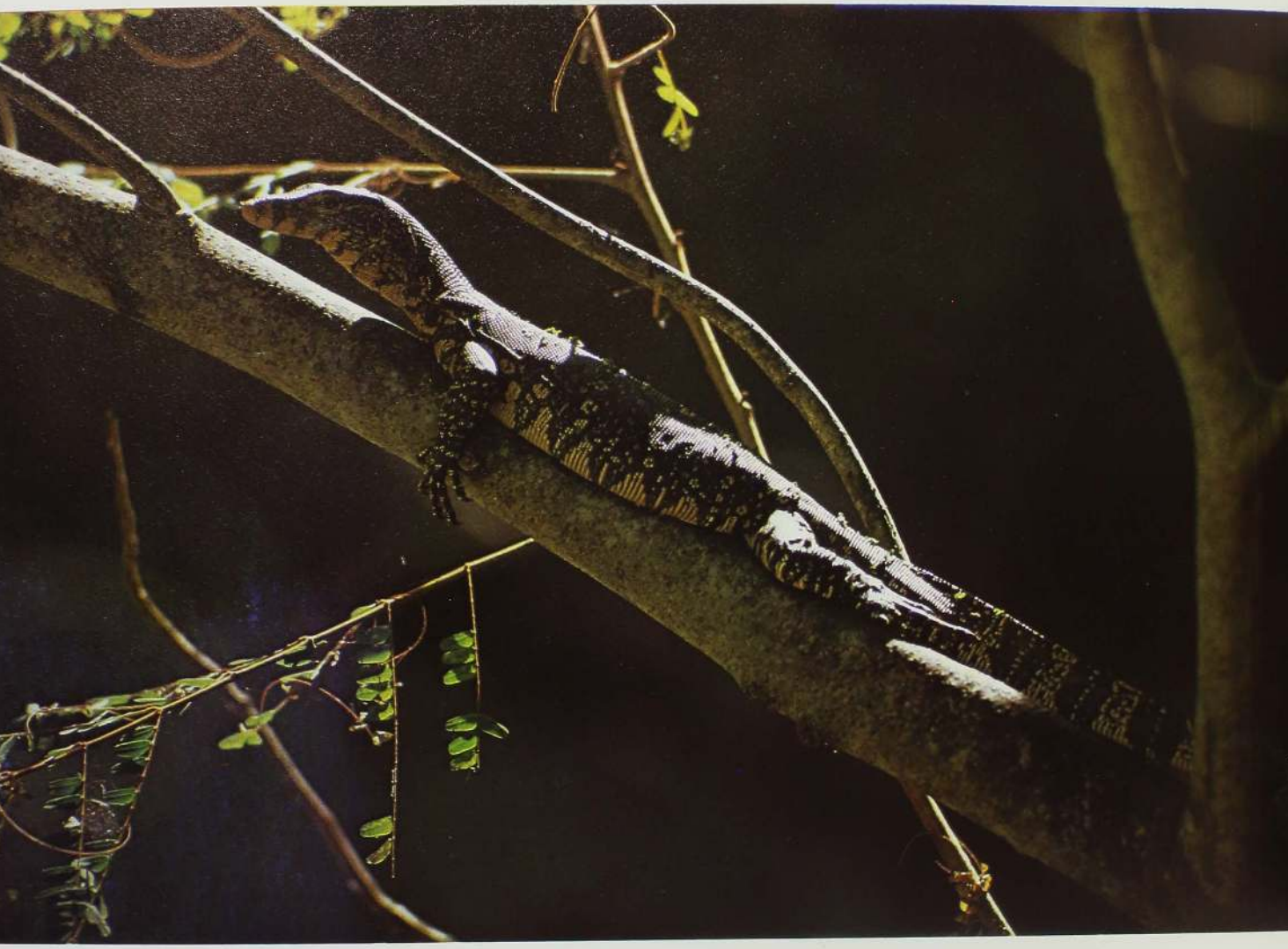
Watch at close range buffaloes who plunge in woodland pools
With water-weeds stuck to their bodies ;
Look straight at the wild boar who have dug wallows in the banks.
Gaze happily at the monkeys who hurry past.
See the flowering creepers who, like faithful wives,
Ever embrace the trees their husbands.

Before you will appear a multitude of bats
That dangle like swaying concentration of darkness.
Feast your eyes, my friend, to your full contentment
On flocks of jungle fowl...

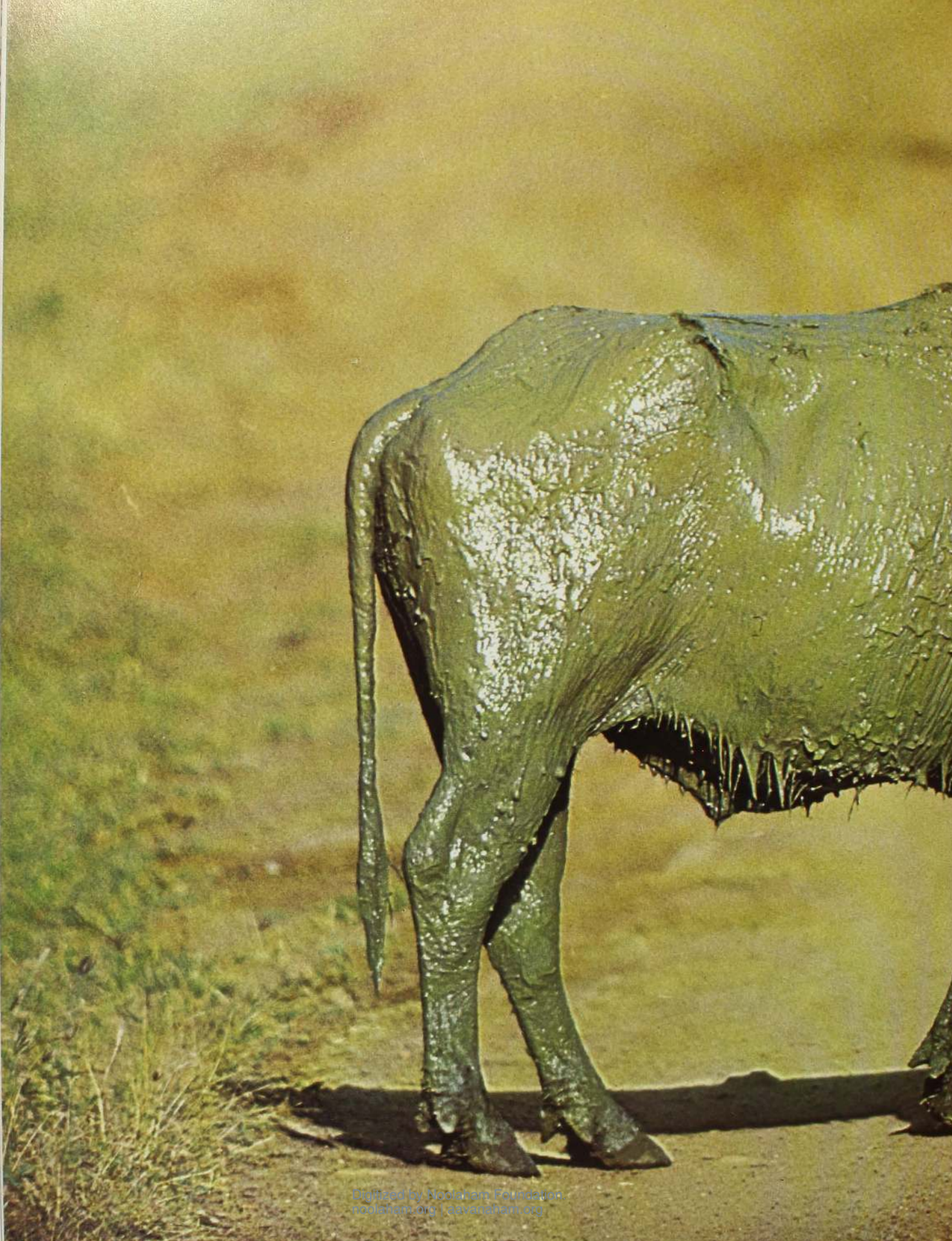
The richness of Sri Lankan fauna is a manifestation of the island's natural wealth and fertility. While man's economic activities have made considerable use of animals and, in recent times, have also resulted in the reduction of the animal population, no major species other than the rare Sri Lankan Gaur has become extinct in modern times. There is today a systematic policy of conservation to prevent that loss and extinction of birds and animals which has been the experience of other more developed countries. The cultural, psychological and scientific value of a country's fauna is keenly recognised in Sri Lanka, echoing the island's ancient conservationist traditions and reflecting its modern ecological interests. As one of our famous historians, who was also the head of the Department of Wild Life, observed two decades ago, 'Only the fringe of scientific faunal studies has yet been touched ; a great field of research remains open to the zoologist, the biologist and ecologist. Just as Sri Lankan art, literature and religion have encompassed and expressed a profound concern with the natural world, its modern naturalists and scientists have since begun in earnest the systematic conservation and study of the natural heritage.







38



'O Indigollava Kiri-Amma !
Eat. Drink. Give us livelihood.
Give us meat got by hunting.
Do not cause us to meet with the Elephant.
Do not cause us to meet with the Bear.
Do not cause us to meet with the Leopard.
You must make us a livelihood by (means of) the Pangolin.
You must make us a livelihood by the Iguana.
You must make us a livelihood by the Monkey.
We must meet with the Sambhur deer.
We must meet with the Pig.
To the end while going, to the end while coming back,
You must promote and give livelihood and protection,
O our esteemed Goddess'.

Vadda hunting prayer.

THE PEOPLE

Despite the great wealth which location, topography, soil and climate have endowed, and the startling richness of the natural environment, there is little doubt that the most decisive factor of all is man. Through thousands of years of activity, human beings on this island - as almost everywhere else in this world - have mastered and transformed their environment. Almost every inch of territory and landscape that we see and every species of plant or animal that we find, has been touched or changed by human action. It is man who has carved valley floors and hill slopes, and dammed rivers to form great artificial lakes ; who has cleared vast tracts of impenetrable forests, turning them into farmlands and settlements ; who has built a network of roads and bridges that allow us to pass freely across the face of the entire country.

The origins of man in Sri Lanka are still obscure. Although the only fossil remains of early man as yet found in South Asia are from Sri Lanka, and despite an extensive collection of prehistoric stone implements, very little is really known about the country's prehistoric populations. What research has been done shows clear links between an ancient type know as *'Balangoda Man'* and modern Sri Lankans. But when the actual peopling of the island took place and over what period of time, are as yet unanswered questions. All we know is that man has lived here for at least twenty-five thousand years - and perhaps for as much as fifty or a hundred thousand years.

What is clear, however, is that the peoples of almost all nationalities and groups in Sri Lanka are of the same basic ethnic type as those of the Indian subcontinent. The migration of peoples between the island and the great neighbouring landmass, both by land and by sea, must have taken place in the most remote ages - just as in recent times. It is for this same reason that the Sri Lankans are closest in physical appearance to the inhabitants of southern India, the most immediate neighbouring territory. At the same time, both local specialisation and the admixture of elements from other areas - such as seaborne peoples from northern India, Southeast and Southwest Asia and from as far afield, perhaps, as Oceania - have produced a racial mix distinctive to this island. While this racial mix - like that of the Indian subcontinent - is basically Caucasoid, elements of an ancient Asian and Oceanic *Negrito* race and of *Mongoloid* peoples from Southeast Asia seem to have played an important role in the ethnic formation of the modern Sri Lankans.

In the course of the island's history several major and minor nationalities have come into being, sharing many cultural traits peculier to the island, but also differentiated by others such as language, religion and communal identity. It is now commonly believed - even though these ideas are of comparatively recent origin - that there are racial differences and even differences of geographical origin between the major nationalities. However, as far as the great majority of Sri Lankan people are concerned, there is little scientific basis to this. We could, in fact, reverse these ideas and say with greater justification that the people of modern Sri Lanka are so intermixed and heterogeneous that *no* distinctive racial traits can be attributed to any nationality.

On the other hand, the emergence of various cultural groups and communities in the course of the island's historical development is fairly clear, even if the complete picture, especially in prehistoric and protohistoric times, has not been filled in as yet.

Clearly, the most ancient peoples of Sri Lanka were the *Vaddas,* a few, scattered, forest-dwelling communities who have all but dispappeared in the course of this century. Their way of life was basically of a stone age, hunting and gathering type and represented some of the earliest forms of human existence, before man's knowledge of agriculture. The Vaddas, who lived in caves and primitive shelters, knew the use of the bow and arrow and the making of fire. Never more than a few thousand individuals in all, they lived for centuries alongside the more advanced agricultural civilisation. There is also no doubt that some of these hunting groupes had settled down from time and become absorbed by the agrarian society around them. It is precisely this process which has taken place in the last few decades with the existing Vadda communities who live in villages or forest settlements and are scarcely distinguishable now from the poorest peasant farmers.

The Sinhalese form the great majority of the people of Sri Lanka. The history and culture of the country is inextricably linked with the history of the Sinhalese-speaking people and with a series of Sinhalese kingdoms which existed from the third or fourth century B.C. to the nineteenth century. Traditions recorded in the historical chronicles of Sri Lanka trace the origins of the Sinhalese to an exiled north Indian prince, Vijaya, and his retinue, who settled down in the island and established the Sinhalese kingdom, in the sixth century B.C. Modern historians treat the story itself as purely legendary, but tend to accept its basic premise that civilisation in Sri Lanka had its origins in waves of migrants from northern Indian settling down in the island somewhere in the first millenium B.C., an amalgam of their Indo-European dialects producing the Sinhala language.

'The people of Sri Lanka, like those of many other ancient lands, are engaged in the formation of a modern nation out of a country of many nationalities. With a historical and geo-political unity that is two thousand years old, and a complex of language and culture that has an indigenous existence of many centuries, they bring rich resources and experience to their task'.

This language, together with the closely related speech of the Maldive Islands, forms the southernmost of the Indo-European or Indo-Aryan languages of Asia. The Sinhala language is separated from the main block of such languages in India by the large Dravidian linguistic region that covers the southern half of the Indian peninsula. This linguistic connection remains, however, the only indication of direct migratory contact with north India. Language and 'race', of course, are never identical and, as our archaeological knowledge of the beginnings of civilisation in Sri Lanka is still so meagre, we have no definite evidence yet concerning the origins of the Sinhalese - whether they are a mixture of various ancient indigenes, with an admixture of more recent migrants, or whether they are the descendants of related migrant groups who already had an identity and a common language prior to their arrival in the island.

What is clear, however, is that by the end of the first millenium B.C. the Sinhalese emerge as the country's major historical community. They are settled over a greater part of the island, speaking a unified language, and are adherents of the Buddhist religion. Whatever their ethnic origins and whatever cultural traits they have taken from elsewhere, when history begins they are an indigenous people who have already produced on this island a distinctive culture and civilisation. They establish a series of major kingdoms, which unify the country through long periods of history and dominate the political, economic and cultural life of Sri Lanka through the greater part of over two thousand years of recorded history.

The other ancient people who form a distinct nationality are the indigenous *Tamils,* also inhabitants of this island from prehistoric times. The Tamils are mostly Hindus, living in many different parts of the country but with their highest concentration in the northern and eastern provinces, where they have developed their own distinctive regional cultures. Like the Sinhalese, the Tamils also believe themselves to be a migrant peopole who, in this instance, have come to Sri Lanka from the Tamil country of southern India. There is no doubt that their language, religion and culture are closely related to the great Tamil civilisation of India, and that this island's Tamil culture was deeply inflenced from time to time by Indian developments. At the same time, in certain fields, the Sri Lankan Tamil community showed a dynamism that was in advance of the Tamilian culture in India. As a local scholar observes, the 'notable contributions of Ceylon Tamil scholars during the period of British rule were in the fields of scientific literature, lexicography, prose literature and in the edition and publication of ancient works, in all of which they led the South Indian scholars'.

Once again, very little is known about the early origins of the Tamil community in the island. What historical records do establish is that Tamil settlements did exist in Sri Lanka from the period B.C. onwards, and that both friendly migrations and hostile invasions - in historical times - saw some transfer of peoples from Southern India to Sri Lanka, though in what numbers and in which parts of the island they were dispersed is not at all clear. The most significant development is the rise of an indigenous Tamil kingdom in the northern part of the country from the thirteenth to the seventeenth centuries. The language and culture of the Sri Lankan Tamils are specific and have their own island characteristics that differentiate them from the parallel cultures of the subcontinent.

Political rivalry between Sinhalese and Tamil princely houses, the rise of political adventurers and several invasions of Sri Lanka by the rulers of the Tamil kingdom of South India have been recorded in the Sinhalese chronicles. In modern times these have been interpreted as representing enmity between peoples, rather than between rulers, although history clearly shows that the two communities have lived peacefully side-by-side for centuries, with a considerable degree of interchange and cooperation.

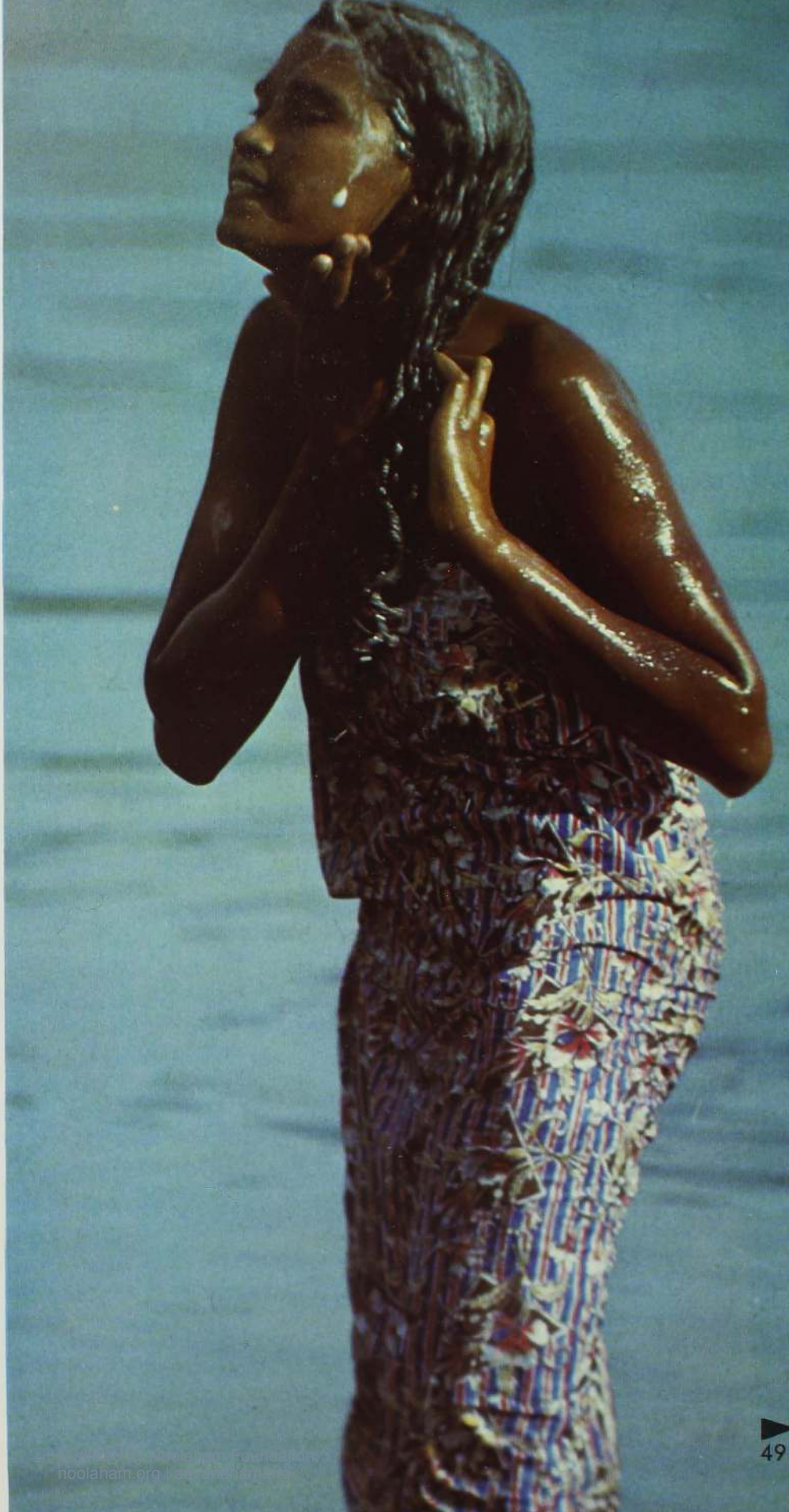
A slightly larger group of Tamils has settled in the island in recent times, brought over by the British in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, in conditions of great hardship and misery to work on the plantations. Problems of citizenship and the question of settlement in Sri Lanka or repatriation to India arose after political independence in 1948 and have now been settled by agreement between the governments of the two countries. A section of the estate Tamils are to remain as citizens of the island, while the rest are to go to India. While this remains a workable political compromise, it has created a number of human tragedies, most eloquently expressed perhaps by a yound Tamil poet who writes from his new home in India, yearning for Sri Lanka, the land of his birth. The estate Tamil community have, through their work, made a tremendous contribution to the development of a modern Sri Lanka, and in the highland areas where they have settled, they have created a distinct culture and way of life. The very same historical circumstances which brought them to this country, also created a situation in which they were isolated from the villages surrounding the estates and thus separated from the Sinhalese peasantry. The peasants were themselves impoverished and severely restricted in their search for new farmlands by the existence of the estates. The integration of the Tamil estate workers as an indigenous community is one of the major social tasks confronting Sri Lanka today.

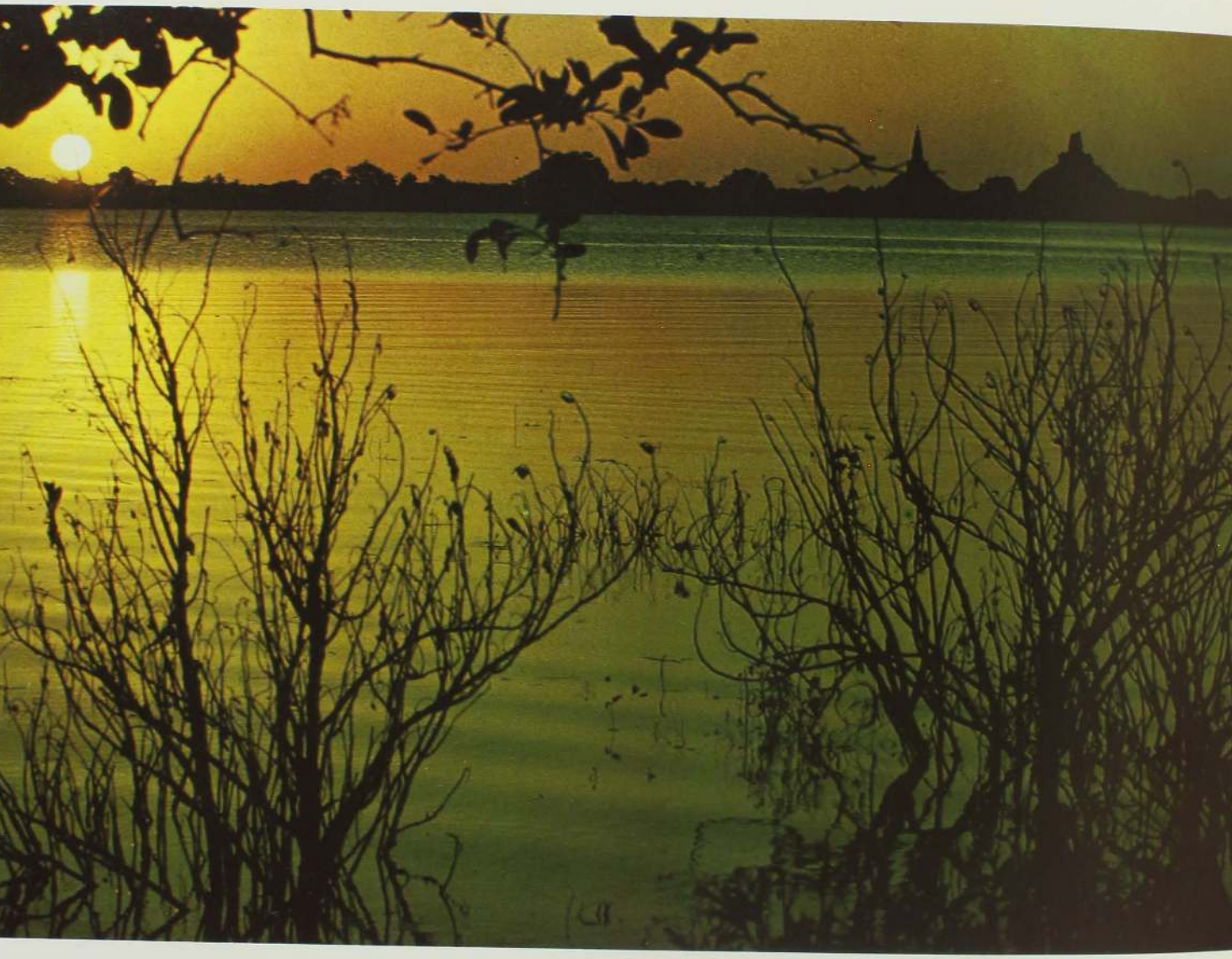
The third of the major communities in the island is the *Muslims,* who also have deep historical roots here. This community has its origins in Arab or Arabised traders who settled in the port cities of ancient Sri Lanka. This settlement seems to have begun sometime before the tenth century and to have continued until about the fifteenth or sixteenth century. The precursors of these Arab traders are to be found in earlier references to Persian and pre-Islamic Arabian trading communities in Sri Lanka. The Arab traders married and settled in the country and established their communities both on the sea coast and in the interior, and, in time, became an indigenous Sri Lankan nationality. They speak a dialect of Tamil, but are often bilingual or trilingual, and have their own distinctive culture and way of life. Being mostly a community of traders and of city workers - there is also a Muslim peasantry, especially in parts of the Eastern Province - their culture is a largely urbanised one and an interesting manifestation of an old and indigenous urban culture in a country which is so substantially rural. (A small minority among the Muslims are the Malays, of more recent Indonesian or Malaysian origin, who retain some part of their original language and customs).

These three major communities, the Sinhalese, the Tamils and the Muslims, constitute over ninety-nine per cent of the Sri Lankan people. Together they form the complex mosaic of language, religion, culture and economy of modern Sri Lanka. Besides these, there are a number of minority groups, who have come from foreign lands but have lived and worked and been born here and whose homeland is this island. The largest of these communities are those whose origins are European. The smaller but older constituent of the latter is the Sri Lankan Portuguese, or the 'Portuguese Burghers' as they are called. Many of these exist as small pockets of technicians and craftsmen, speaking a dialect of Portuguese and maintaining some of their ancient customs. Much larger and better known are the *Burghers,* or 'Dutch Burghers', who are European settlers of mostly Ducht, Geramn or Flemish descent, settled here during the period of Dutch occupation. They are a middle-class, professional group who have contributed greatly to the urban culture of modern times.

Besides the Burghers, there are a number of comparable or smaller groups such as the Malays, mentioned above, and a few villages settlements of Africans, who have now become almost completely 'Sinhalised'. Both the Malays and the Africans came to Sri Lanka as soldiers or exiles during the Portuguese or Dutch occupations, although historical contacts with Southeast Asia and Africa are known from earlier times. From India and Pakistan came Parsis, Borahs and Sindhis, communities of traders and businessmen. Among the South Indian groups are Chettis and Nadars from Tamilnad, Malayalis from Kerala, and a few Telegu speakers, including the Telegu-speaking gypsies. These minorities represent less than one per cent of the entire population. Many of them are city-dwellers, concentrated to a great extent in Colombo. One may recall here Robert Percival's description of the city in 1800, when it was even more cosmopolitan than it is now : 'Colombo taken altogether is, for its size, one of the most populous places in India. There is no part of the world where so many different languages are spoken, or which contains such a mixture of nations, manners and religions'.

The people of Sri Lanka, like those of many other ancient lands, are engaged in the formation of a modern nation out of a country of many nationalities. With a historical and geo-political unity that is two thousand years old, and a complex of language and culture that has an indigenous existence of many centuries, they bring rich resources and experience to their task. No doubt, divisions fostered in feudal and colonial times and the social and economic stresses of a poor nation - as much as the political and cultural expression of these - have more often led in recent times to the projections of differences and conflicts between communities than of the longstanding patterns of unity. Contradictions between nationalities, like those between classes, are a historical phenomenon that historical processes alone can resolve. In the meantime, there is a majority of modern Sri Lankans who whould agree with the popular novelist and writer, Martin Wickremasinghe, when he says that the inhabitants of this island are today 'a people who consciously or unconsciously feel the unity of their common multiracial culture'.





"Sri Lanka was not only a rich and beautiful island but it was also the seat of one of the small but important historical civilisations of Asia. The ruins of great monasteries and capital cities, colossal man-made lakes and canals, numerous inscriptions and a large body of ancient literature still survive as testimony to the achievements of the Sri Lankan people over a period of two thousand years and more. They show that from about the 3rd century B.C. to the 16th century, Sri Lanka took its place, with other countries of Asia, amongst the most advanced and developed nations of the pre-modern world".

HISTORY, CULTURE AND RELIGION

Recorded history in Sri Lanka begins with three significant 'events' of the third century B.C. : the unification of the island under a single ruler, the adoption of Buddhism as the royally-sponsored religion, which spread throughout the country, and the appearance of the first written documents in the proto-Sinhala language, in the form of inscriptions.

These developments, however, were not just a beginning ; they were a culmination of historical processes which had been going on for many centuries. As yet, much of that prehistory and protohistory remains obscure, wrapped up in myths, legends and traditions, and in incomplete archaeological researches. What we do have from this research are a number of pointers to the kind of life that Sri Lankan man must have lived in prehistoric times : fossil remains, stone and bone implements, urn burials, megaliths, areas where the natural vegetation has been changed by prehistoric farming practices, survivals of ancient ways of life like that of the Vaddas, rock paintings and clay sculptures of a prehistoric type. These are little more than brilliant and fascinating but fragmentary insights which we are as yet unable to weave into anything like a continuous story.

Looking back, however, from the surer ground of the historical period, we can conceive of at least two major transformations which took place in that shadowy era, crucial developments in the encounter between man and nature on this island. The first of these was when man began to cut down and set fire to small forest tracts to make clearings for the practice of some form of primitive, shifting agriculture. In this way he first began to supplement and later to supplant the food supply which he had hitherto obtained from hunting and gathering. The second was when he began the cultivation of rice in fields which had been dug out and ploughed and irrigated by dams and canals. It was only then that he was able to exchange a wandering, nomadic existence for the more stable conditions of village settlement.

We do not know exactly when and how these developments took place and who the people were who brought them about. The main question, that we cannot answer as yet, is whether the first agriculturalists were longstanding inhabitants of the island, or one or more waves of immigrants, or a combination of the two. The one thing that is certain is that they were the ancestors of the present-day Sri Lankans and had brought about the second of these transformations - wet-rice cultivation and permanent settlement - at least some centuries before 300 B.C. We can also see that the methods of food production and the village way of life which emerged at that time still survive to a great extent in the Sri Lankan village of the twentieth century. Similarly, many of the fishing techniques and water craft that we still see along the coasts and the lagoons may well go back to a pre-agricultural era.

The growth and spread of these early villages took place through the lenght and breadth of the island. They provided the essential foundation for the new type of social organisation, the religious ideas and beliefs, and the intellectual and artistic life that we see reflected in the three 'events' of the third century - the emergence of a new level of political organisation, the adoption of a higher religion and the appearance of writing. In time, this civilisation produced great engineering works and capital cities, vast monastic establishments, a rich literature, art and architecture, and an extensive international trade.

The history of Sri Lanka from the third century B. C. onwards is one of the best documented in the region. The island has a collection of historical chronicles and religious writings which have no parallel in South Asia. First written down between the third and the sixth centuries A.D., these chronicles drew on much earlier documents and traditions which have been lost. Pre-eminent amongst the existing chronicles is the *Mahavamsa* or 'Great Chronicle', originally composed in the early years of the sixth century, maintained and added to over the centuries, and finally brought up to date in the eighteenth century. Written in Pali, the classical language of the Sri Lankan Buddhists, and in Sinhalese, by a succession of scholar-monks, the Sri Lankan chronicles mostly record the reigns of the kings and the pious works they performed. The material of the chronicles is amply confirmed and supplemented by other literary works, and by an extensive collection of inscriptions covering a period of more than two thousand years, from the third century B.C. to the eighteenth century A.D.

There is no island in the world that has attracted the attention of authors in so many distant ages and so many different countries as Ceylon. There is no nation in ancient or modern times possessed of a language and a literature, the writers of which have not at some time made it their theme. Its aspect, its religion, its antiquities, and productions, have been described as well by the classic Greeks, as by those of the Lower Empire ; by the Romans ; by the writers of China, Burmah, India, and Kashmir ; by the geographers of Arabia and Persia ; by the mediaeval voyagers of Italy and France ; by the annalists of Portugal and Spain ; by the merchant adventurers of Holland, and by the travellers and topographers of Great Britain.

James Emerson Tennent, Ceylon :
An Account of an Island *etc.,*
London, 1859

While such inscriptions and ancient writings are of great use to historians and other students of the past, the most eloquent testimony to the character and achievements of Sri Lanka's ancient civilisations is the capital cities of that time, with their parks and palaces and Buddhist monasteries, and great, man-made lakes and canals. A great deal of this still survives in a ruined or, sometimes, restored form.

The oldest and the most impressive of the ancient capitals is the city of Anuradhapura. Founded, as legend has it, in the sixth century B.C., and laid out as a city two hundred years llater, it comes into the full light of recorded history with the 'events' of the third century B.C., which we spoke of earlier. From that time onwards, Anuradhapura becomes the metropolitan capital of the entire country, and within two or three centuries, one of the great international centres of Buddhism, the state religion. The establishment of the metropolis, with its palaces and its temples, its lakes, gardens, hospitals, cemeteries, and its working class suburbs, is described at great length in the chronicles and confirmed by archaeological studies. Even more extensive descriptions can be found in the literature and the inscriptions, about the numerous monastic

complexes that surrounded the city, for while Anuradhapura had a large, metropolitan centre and a busy, commercial life, it was also a city of monasteries. Visiting the city in the early years of the fifth century, nearly one thousand years after it was founded, the Chinese traveller Fa-Hsien recalls it thus : 'In this city are many Buddhist laymen, elders and merchants of all trades, whose houses are stately and beautiful. The roads and byways are kept in good order. At the heads of the four principal streets there have been built preaching halls, where, on (certain) days of the month, they spread carpets, and set forth high seats, while the monks end commonalty from all quarters come together, to listen to the preaching of the Law'.

For an almost uninterrupted period of nearly thirteen centuries, Anuradhapura remained the principal seat of government and the major centre of Sri Lankan culture and civilisation. Its ruler was always acknowledged as the ruler of the entire country, even at times when his authority was challenged. Its monasteries were great seats of learning, visited by scholars and pilgrims from many parts of Asia, and the abbots of the country's principal monastic sects or 'chapters' resided there. It housed an international trading community, which included traders from India, China, Rome, Arabia and Persia. It was from the court at Anuradhapura, that Sri Lankan ambassadors were despatched on several occasions to the imperial courts of Rome and China. The Great Indian Buddhist scholar and commentator, Buddhaghosa, spent many years at Anuradhapura during the fifth century, codifying the Buddhist scriptures which had been lost in India. Gunavarman, the Kashmiri monk, who carried Buddhism to Indonesia and China, passed through Sri Lanka and must certainly have visited the city's monasteries. Monks from Anuradhapura went out to many lands, such as India, China and Java, leaving there inscriptions and records of their visits.

What has been called 'the opulent commerce of ancient Ceylon' is well described by a Greek trader who visited Sri Lanka one hundred and fifty years after Fa-Hsien : 'Sielediba (or Taprobane) being thus placed in the middle as it were of India, receives goods from all nations, and again distributes them, thus becoming a great emporium... As its position is central, the island is the resort of ships from all parts of India, Persia, and Ethiopia, and, in like manner, many are despatched from it. From the inner countries ; I mean China, and other emporiums, it receives silk, aloes, cloves, clove-wood, sandalwood, and whatever else they produce. These it again transmits to the outer ports, - I mean to Malabar, when the pepper comes ; to Calliana (near Bombay), where there is brass and sesamine-wood, and materials for dress (for it is also a place of great trade), and to Sind, where they get musk, castor, and androstachum, to Persia, the Homeritic coasts (southern Arabia), and Adule. Receiving in return the exports of those emporiums, Taprobane exchanges them in the inner ports sending her own produce along with them to each'.

Although Anuradhapura ceased to be the capital of the country in the tenth century, it retained its pre-eminence in the minds of the people as the island's most ancient and sacred city. A few later kings held their coronations there and restored some of its ruined buildings. Its last royal visitor was a king of Kandy, in the eighteenth century. Some of Anuradhapura's sacred monuments, such as the shrine of the Bodhi-tree, have remained in continuous worship since their inception in the third century B.C. The restoration of Anuradhapura began in the mid-nineteenth century with the early stirrings of the national revival, while systematic archaeological work began some decades later.

Today, Anuradhapura is one of the largest archaeological sites in the world, extending over an area of sixteen square miles, and that with buried remains to a depth of about fifteen feet - the relics of one thousand, five hundred years of construction. At the centre of this area can be seen the remains of the fortified citadel, with its earthen ramparts, city gateways and palaces. Surrounding this citadel in a series of concentric circles, like several satellite towns, are the ancient monastic complexes. These are now mostly in ruins but enough survives of their various buildings, gateways, pools and avenues to reconstruct the intricate planning and elaborate construction and ornamentation which they once displayed.

To the east and the west of the city are four great man-made lakes, the earliest of them, the Abhayavava, apparently dating from the city's inception in the fourth century B.C. These provided water to the city and the monasteries and also irrigated the fields which ensured an immediate food supply. The city also stands on the banks of the Malvatu Oya, the 'Flower-Garden-River'. Water is found everywhere in the planning and layout of Anuradhapura. Numerous pools and ponds can still be seen among the ruins, some large enough to have small, boulder-strewn, ornamental islands in the middle, others planned with a fine geometrical precision. In the Royal Goldfish Park, a landscaped pleasure garden of the tenth century, are well-preserved lotus ponds, bathing fountains and swimming pools with underwater chambers. As a Sri Lankan writer remarks : 'At dawn or at sunset, across the lakes and the monasteries, we still see the shadows of the ancient parks, the spectre of the water gardens and the ghosts of great monastic palaces'. In a country with so much greenery and a civilisation based on irrigation, it is appropriate that the man-made environment of its cities and temples should be so dominated by trees and water.

Below the surface of Anuradhapura are the buried remains of many epochs of building activity. Most of this consists of the brick walls and basements of ancient monastic and royal structures. What we see on the surface today are similar brick basements, sometimes decorated with mouldings, and the stone, skeletal pillars of buildings which once had elaborate superstructures, painted walls and multi-coloured, tiled toofs. None of the elaborate and brightly coloured ornamentation can be seen today in the ruined monasteries of Anuradhapura, although a faint shadow of it remains in the carved stone entrances, decorated moonstones and pillar capitals. There is no better contrast between what there was and what has survived than in the literary description of the Brazen Palace - the huge, multi-storied chapter-house of Anuradhapura's oldest monastery - and the ruined building that we see today. What remains is nothing more than sixteen hundred stone pillars, desnsely packed together like a forest of palm trees. The *Mahavamsa,* the Great Chronicle, describes it as it was two thousand years ago, in this way : 'In this most beautiful of palaces there were nine stories, and in each story a hundred window chambers. All the chambers were overlaid with silver. A gem pavilion (was) set up in the middle adorned with pillars consisting of precious stones, on which were figures of lions, tigers and shapes of gods. Within the pavilion, gaily adorned with the seven gems stood a beauteous shining throne of ivory with a seat of mountain-crystal. Costly beds and chairs, according to rank, and carpets and coverlets of great price (were) spread about. Surrounded by a beautiful enclosure and provided with four gateways, the palace gleamed in its magnificence like the hall in the heaven of the thirty-three gods. (It) was covered over with plates of copper and thence came its name "Brazen palace".'

Presiding like great dominical mountains over the stone pillars and ruined basements of the monastic complexes are the colossal structures known as *dagabas* or *stupas.* These are of brick masonry and are the characteristic monuments of early Buddhism. First designed by the Buddhists in India, they are derived from the burial mound or *tumulus,* common to many regions and cultures. They originally served as a memorial which enshrined relics of the Buddha, but later developed into an elaborate symbol of the cosmic mountain. Embedded deep inside the mansonry are small relic-chambers which contain the relics and other sacred objects. The Indian stupa was adopted and developed, in a variety of shpaes and sizes, by the architects of other Asian countries. The Sri Lankan *dagabas* have followed the classic form fairly closely from ancient times until today. The early Anuradhapura examples reached such colossal proportions that they became the largest structures of their type anywhere in the Buddhist world, even rivalling the pyramids of Egypt in size. The tallest *dagaba* at Anuradhapura was more than four hundred feet high, while the circumference of the dome at its base is more than one thousand feet.

A monument of a very different type but of even greater antiquity than the great *dagabas* is the Bodhi-Tree at Anuradhapura, mentioned earlier. A survival of ancient tree-cults taken over into Buddhist traditions, the Bodhi-tree and the Bodhi-tree shrines were amongst the earlier sacred monuments of Buddhism. These symbolised the tree under which the historical Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama, sat in meditation and reached that state of enlightenment by which he attained Buddhahood. This histric tree, at Buddha Gaya in northern India, became one of the most venerated shrines of the early Buddhists. A sapling of the tree was brought to Sri Lanka in the third century B.C. and planted in Anuradhapura. While the original Indian tree has long since disappeared, its descendant at Anuradhapura has been preserved and maintained without interruption throughout the island's history. Surviving to this day as one of Sri Lanka's most sacred monuments, it is called, probably with accuracy, 'the oldest historical tree in the world'.

'Anuradhapura is one of the largest archaeological sites in the world, extending over an area of sixteen square miles... below the surface of Anuradhapura are the buried remains of many epochs of building activity, the relics of one thousand five hundred years of construction'.

The new capital of Polonnaruva, which lasted for two hundred years from the middle of the eleventh century, in many ways resembled the older city. Built on the banks of an immense man-made lake, the Sea of Parakrama, the walled citadel is equipped with gateways, palaces, meeting halls and baths, and has monasteries to the north and south of it. As at Anuradhapura, the monasteries are presided over by colossal *dagabas,* built one thousand years after those at the earlier city. The largest of these *dagabas* is as yet unexcavated. While not as tall as its Anuradhapura precursors, it could be as much as two thousand feet in circumference. Today, covered over with trees and shrubs, it appears like a strange, man-made mountain.

The principal shrines at Polonnaruva are generally better preserved and often of larger dimensions than those at Anuradhapura. Amongst them are the Lankatilaka and Tivanka temples, towering brick structures, enshrining colossal images of the Buddha, and the famous Vatadage, a circular temple with multiple images and entrances, enshrining a miniature central *dagaba.* The best-known of the Polonnaruva monuments are the colossi of the Gal-vihara, where a sequence of monumental Buddha images, standing, seated and recumbent, have been carved out of the living rock.

The skill and sensivity with which the Polonnaruva builders have integrated their architectural creations with natural topography and deliberate landscaping are as apparent here as at Anuradhapura. The most famous of Sri Lanka's archaeologists, Senarat Paranavitana, has described Polonnaruva in the following terms : 'Mahanam, the author of the poetical chronicle of ancient Ceylon, tells us at the end of each chapter that the purpose of his literary effort was to create the effects of serenity or pleasure and excitement or agitation in the minds of his readers. These two ends of poetry are indeed the ends which all art must strive for, and architecture is no exception. The architects of old have given as much consideration to the aesthetic efforts created by a whole ensemble or related buildings as they have to the design of an individual edifice. A slight elevation of the ground had been made use of to locate on it the principal edifices intended for religious worship. The sloping ground on all sides of this central eminence has been made into terraces. Ponds and sheets of water reflected the forms of the main buildings and the flowering trees which were planted at intervals must have contributed to the serenity of the scene. Natural boulders were made to harmonise with the scheme of building and the various edifices sat easily in their surroundings.'

Rivalling both Anuradhapura and Polonnaruva in its grandeur is the fifth century palace and citadel at Sigiriya, one of the most extraordinary artistic complexes of its time.

Its nucleus is a great rock, standing six hundred feet above the surrounding plains, at the edge of a large lake. On the summit of this immense rock is a plateau, three acres in extent, on which was built a palace with halls, terraces, pools and flower gardens. Access to this aerial palace was by means of a series of skilfully engineered staircases and galleries, sometimes rising vertically up the sheer cliff face. Completing this amazing architectural conception was the figure of a colossal lion, built of brick and plaster, which gave the rock the rock its name, 'Lion Mountain'. The principal staircase passed through the mouth of this lion, whose great masonry paws still flank the stairs which one climbs even today.

Large sections of the rock face, especially along the galleries flanking the rock, were plastered and decorated with paintings in classical, fifth century style. The summit of the rock and the palace rose above this painted 'curtain', conveying the impression both visually and symbolically that the palace 'was hanging in the heavens'. Only some brilliant fragments of these paintings - all portraits of beautiful women - have survived in a large depression in the rock face, but these have so caught the imagination of visitors and writers that the total architectural and engineering achievement at Sigiriya is often forgotten.

The architectural magnificence of Sigiriya, however, is not restricted to the palace. At the base of the rock are two large fortified citadels, one of them still unexcavated, the other an extensive pleasure garden surrounded by moats, ramparts and gateways. These fifth century gardens are perhaps the earliest surviving, landscaped rock-and-water-gardens in Asia. Long avenues, pressure fountains and ornamental water courses, symmetrical and asymmetrical pools, terraces and flower beds, rock-thrones and pavilions on top of boulders, halls by the side of ponds, and caves with painted ceilings are all part of the remains which we see today of what must once have been a most remarkable 'paradise garden'. Even in its ruined and denuded state, it still retains something of its original character.

The glory of Sigiriya lasted only very briefly. For the space of two decades it replaced Anuradhaprua, as the residence of a usurper king who imprisoned and killed his father and seized the throne from his brother, the rightful heir. Sigiriya was his masterpiece, where he sought to create a celestial fortress unlike anything else known in Sri Lanka before. Modern historians interpret this as being not just an aesthetic enterprise, but an attempt to present the king as a god and his palace as a heavenly abode, ideas which were currently implicit in Sri Lankan concepts of royalty. The drama of the Sigiriya king ends with the return of the rightful heir and the king's defeat and suicide.

I spoke
But she did not answer
Lady of the Mountain
Not
The twitch of an eyelid

Jewel eyes
Remain still
If they had
Stirred
Even a little

But, no
Not
Of my world

Sweet girl of the mountain
Teeth jewels eye flowers
Breasts chained in gold
Speak gently of your heart

Girls like you
Make hearts flow
And bodies thrill
Hair stiff with desire

Versions from the Sigir Graffiti,
7th - 9th century, adapted from
the readings and translations of
Senerat Paranavitana.

The story of Sigiriya itself, however, does not end there. Partly abandoned and partly turned into a monastery after the death of its god-king, the palace on the rock with its paintings and lion staircase becomes one of the country's artistic and architectural curiosities and an ancient resort. From the sixth or seventh century onwards the site is visited by large numbers of people drawn from all walks of life - from carpenters to kings. Hundreds of these visitors have scribbled their thoughts and emotions and their tributes to the palace on one of the walls of the staircase, known, on account of its highly polished plaster, as the 'mirror wall'. These poems have now been deciphered and published and are called the Sigiri graffiti'. Apart from a few poetic passages in inscriptions, these graffiti are the earliest literary compositions in Sinhala to have survived. An extremely rare find, they preserve the language of day-to-day poetry rather than of classical compositions. They testify to the high culture and widespread literacy of that era, and to the sensitivity and sensibilities not merely of kings and princes but of farmers, soldiers and craftsmen, who are amongst the poets featured on the mirror wall.

The colossal *dagabas* of Anuradhapura and the architectural complex at Sigiriya were, undoubtedly, tremendous feats of construction and artistic conception. Confronted with such monuments, we are compelled to ask : what were the material sources of the wealth and culture of Sri Lanka ? The answer comes most readily to us in the intricate network of irrigation systems which the Sri Lankans had developed in the Anuradhapura and Polonnaruva times.

Historians of science have placed the Sri Lankan builders amongst the great hydraulic engineers of the pre-modern world, on a level with those of ancient Egypt and China. The scale of their achievement can be measured when we consider that in the twelfth century there were six hundred miles of man-made canals in an island which is less than three hundred miles long. The Parakrama Samudra at Polonnaruva has an earth dam eight-and-a-half miles long and forty feet high, while the fifth century lake, the Kalavava, is said to have been originally about forty miles in circumference. At present, the largest of the great artificial reservoirs to have survived is the 'tank' at Padaviya, ten thousand acres in extent. Size alone, however, is not an adequate measure of these engineering works ; they are also distinguished by highly developed technology, precision of measurement and a bold and subtle understanding of the hydraulic potential of land forms. And perhaps most remarkable of all was the completeness of the *network* of interconnected irrigation systems which was built to cover almost the entire dry zone plains of the north and the southeast.

This entire hydraulic system was directed to one, single purpose : to augment the village reservoirs, some of them built in protohistoric or early historic times, and to irrigate larger and larger tracts of rice fields. Grain production was the basis of the agricultural economy and rice the main item of diet. Thus, water, rice and a large and increasing population were the most valuable resources of ancient Sri Lanka. It was the people's mastery over land, water and weather that provided the material basis of this high civilisation.

In the thirteenth century a fundamental change takes place in Sri Lankan society. For reasons which are not yet fully understood, but which seem to be related to a basic shift in the country's economic patterns, Sri Lankan society begins gradually to shift the centres of high civilisation from the dry zone plains of the north to the wetter southwest. While the village tanks and the village communities still continue to function - and in some areas even to flourish until as late as the nineteenth century - the greater irrigation network falls into neglect and decay. Instead, the trading economy and the rainfed agricultural systems of the wet zone plains and highlands become increasingly important and dominant. While the growing importance of the southwest and the export trade in the specialised natural products of this area can be sensed from as early as the seventh or eighth century, it is only after the thirteenth century that the old capitals are left behind and that the court and principal political arenas begin to 'drift' southwards. This drift settles in the fifteenth century in the city of Kotte, now a suburb of Colombo, and ultimately in the highland capital of Kandy, from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries.

'Unlike the enduring monuments of the great agrarian civilisations of Anuradhapura and Polonnaruva, the ephemeral wealth and opulence of the trading cities of the maritime zone have disappeared almost without trace - as with many cities of the ancient world that were founded solely on commerce. It is only in the living culture of the people of this area that some shadows of the past can still be seen.'

A significant feature of this epoch is the development of urban life in the port cities and commercial centres, especially of the western and southern maritime belt. Sri Lanka's modern cities such as Colombo and Galle have their origins during this period, when they become the major centres of the island's international trade. The fifteenth century Moroccan traveller Ibn Battuta writes of Colombo as 'one of the largest and most beautiful cities in the island of Serendib', and of its local ruler or commander, the 'Vizier Prince of the Sea', and his entourage of 'five hundred Abyssinians'. A Sri Lankan writer of the same time, Jayabahu Devarakkhita, describes the city of Kalaniya, on the opposite bank of the river to Colombo and some distance upstream, as being 'surrounded by a rampart and containing rows of palatial, multi-storeyed buildings, with walls, pillars and flights of steps decorated with frescoes, with a network of broad streets and two main arteries filled with throngs of men of various climes and with wealth of all sorts'.

A rare insight into the nature of trade and international relations in that era is provided by a letter sent by a Sri Lankan king to the Sultan of Egypt, in 1283 A.D. : 'Ceylon is Egypt and Egypt is Ceylon. I desire that an Egyptian ambassador accompany mine on his return and that another be sent to reside in Aden. I possess a prodigious quantity of pearls and precious stones of every kind. I have ships, elephants, muslins and other stuffs, brazil wood, cinnamon and all the objects of commerce which are brought to you by the banian merchants. My kingdom produces trees the wood of which is fit for making spears. If the Sultan asks me for twenty vessels yearly, I shall be in a position to supply them. Further, the merchants of his dominions can with all freedom come to trade in my kingdom. I have received an ambassador of the prince of Yemen, who is come on the part of his master to make me proposals of alliance. But I have sent him away through my affection for the Sultan. I possess twenty-seven castles, of which the treasuries are filled with precious stones of all kings. The pearl fisheries are part of my dominions, and all that is taken therefrom belongs to me'.

The substantial level of both internal and external transactions that prevailed is dovumented in the contemporary literature and in extensive finds of local and foreign coins. The sites of the ancient port cities are virtually littered with pieces of broken porcelain vessels, almost equally divided between Chinese wares and those from Western Asia. The trans-Asian trade between East and West was ferried along the caravan route across Central Asia - the famous 'Silk Road' - or by the sea route across the Indian Ocean. On this latter route, Sri Lanka was the central meeting point between East and West, the obvious stopover for ships travelling from either direction. It became one of Asia's major entrepots as well as an exporter in its own right. Inscriptions and literary accounts occasionally reveal the complex institutions which Sri Lanka had developed at that time in such matters as shipping, storage, customs dues and port administration. A rare document is a trilingual inscribed stone from the harbour at Galle, in which a thirteenth century Chinese emperor sends gifts to a local temple, thanking the resident deity for the protection he has given Chinese sailors and traders. The three languages featured in the inscription are Chinese, Persian and Tamil, the three international languages of the regional commerce at that time.

Unlike the enduring monuments of the great agrarian civilisations of Anuradhapura and Polonnaruva, the ephemeral wealth and opulence of the trading cities of the maritime zone have disappeared almost without trace - as with many cities of the ancient world that were founded solely on commerce. It is only in the living culture of the people of this area that some shadows of the past can still be seen. An archaeologist's description of one of the port cities as it was until some thirty years ago, gives us an image of these ancient ports : 'I gained some idea of what (an) ancient harbour looked like when visiting the island of Kayts in the archipelago to the north or Ceylon ; for in the roadstead there more than thirty sailing ships were lying. They were of Eastern rig, of Eastern build, and manned and owned by Eastern men. Some had three masts, and some

had only two, but all were sea-going ships, and between them they visited the coasts of far Arabia and the Persian Gulf, as well as the ports of India and Ceylon. Some, they told me, traded with the remote coral islands in the middle of the Indian Ocean. On the shore two stout ships were being built, and I went aboard one, and was shown round by the designer and head carpenter ; and as we talked to that well-informed and practical man, it seemed to me that here was a more direct route to the understanding of the old port buried among the sand dunes than could be found by scouring the sand for coins'.

As a result of the growing involvement of the country's economic structures and royal courts with the expanding foreign trade, Sri Lanka was increasingly drawn into a much closer relationship with the countries of the Indian Ocean region and beyond. Many of these trading powers began to take an interest not only in the island's products but also in its internal politics. In the past, the island had only to contend with invasions from neighbouring South India. Now invaders come from much further afield, including Indonesia or Malaysia and China. The twelfth century saw a Sri Lankan invasion of Burma, and the thirteenth to sixteenth centuries, a considerable Arab presence and political influence were felt in the island. A culmination of this process was the arrival of the Portuguese and the invasions of European colonial powers.

The period that begins in the mid-sixteenth century is a rough and bitter awakening of a two thousand year-old civilisation to the realities of the evolving modern world. It is an epoch of incessant warfare ; of long, complex manœuvring between the Sri Lankan kingdoms and the European powers, and among the Sri Lankan princes themselves ; and of the occupation of some of the richest, most populous and strategic territories of its maritime zone by the Portuguese, the Dutch and, finally, the British. In military strength, the Sri Lankans, until about the middle of the eighteenth or early nineteenth century, were quite equal to the challenge with which they were faced. The quality of their guns, for instance, was much admired by the Portuguese, and whenever they tried hard enough successive Sri Lankan kings were able not merely to hold out against the foreign invaders, but also to drive them out of the territory they had acquired. But, while they won many battles, they lost the war. The Sri Lankan's understanding of the world around them, their wider strategic perspectives and the unity of will and purpose amongst themselves were all much inferior to those of their opponents. Moreover, dependent as the Sri Lankan kings had become on the country's external trade, they could no longer afford to expel those maritime powers who controlled the shipping and commerce of the Indian Ocean. The main objective of their military resistance was to retain their sovereignty and to negotiate better terms of trade and limits of territorial control.

Faced with this historical predicament and unable to transform themselves and their country into a modern nation that could deal on a level of equality with the colonial challenge, the Sri Lankans had recourse to two alterntives : the one capitulatory, the other, militant but defensive. The first was to adjust themselves to the foreign presence and to live under colonial rule which they did in the maritime zone, for most of the time from about the seventeenth century onwards. The other was to resist by retreating to the interior and to the central highlands, maintaining there the traditional society which they had created over many centuries. It was this latter recourse which resulted in the formation of the Kingdom of Kandy, the last flowering of the island's pre-modern civilisations.

Coming into prominence in the closing years of the sixteenth century, the Kandyan Kingdom was founded at least a century or two earlier. Although beleaguered and relatively impoverished when compared with its predecessors, Kandy lasted and flourished for more than two hundred years. During that time it successfully defended the independence of Sri Lanka and produced its own manifestation of the island's traditional culture. The revival of Buddhism and its associated art and literature, the range and potential of Sri Lankan technology and the skill and sophistication of a traditional people in the arts of diplomacy and warfare, are all part of this Kandyan experience.

Some aspects of the art and architecture of Kandy still survive in a living form, illuminating for us in a way that literary descriptions and ruined monuments cannot do, the style and character of Sri Lankan civilisation. Perhaps nothing demonstrates this so effectively as the heart of the present city itself, with its lake, its temples, including the Temple of the Tooth Relic, and the surviving buildings of the royal palace. Seen from the hills above the lake, surronded by vegetation and water, this architectural complex gives us a brilliant miniature image of what the dead capitals of Anuradhapura, Sigiriya and Kotte must once have been.

Ceylon had developed an artistic heritage with tradtions and conventions of its own. Such forms as the Kandyan dance, temple frescoes, ornaments in stone and on lacquered wood... The rich stores of Buddist legend and the yearly round of obligation owed to temple, bhikkhu *and feudal overlord, kept alive in the village arts typically Sinhalese in their form and expression. As change intruded into this way of life, the traditional arts declined. Skills which village craftsmen had once brought to a level of elegance and dignity - the work of blacsmiths, of workers in brass, and wood-carvers - deteriorated. But even in their decline they showed strong traces of their earlier excellence - like the village potter's clay figures of animals, birds and gods with their pleasing design and colour... the older way of life (was) as little able to stand up against the incursion of the economy of the machine as their counterparts in Europe.*

E.F.C. Ludowyk, The Modern History of
Ceylon, *London, 1966.*

With the invasion and annexation of the Kandyan Kingdom by the British in 1815 - and the unsuccessful attempts to liberate the country from colonial domination, in the uprisings of 1818 and 1848, we see the end of an entire epoch of Sri Lankan history, which had its distant beginnings in Anuradhapura in the third century B.C. During these two millenia, Sri Lankan society has seen many changes and developments in all aspects of its material and mental life. However, the fundamental character of its agrarian economy and feudal social system had remained more or less the same through all these phases of development.

It is only in recent years that modern writers and historians have begun to describe and interpret this social system, drawing upon a number of sources such as ancient records, contemporary descriptions and modern survivals. It would appear that traditional Sri Lankan society was not very different, at least in its outward features, from societies of medieval Europe, except that it was much more deeply entrenched, and predated them by at least a millenium. As in the medieval West, the basis of the social organisation was the feudal ownership or overlordship of land and its cultivation by a tenant peasantry. As the Sri Lankan historian, C.W. Nicholas, describes it, the society of the Anuradhapura period consisted of a fundamental division into feudal lords and peasants : 'Two broad divisions of society existed. There were the vast majority of the people who tilled the land, referred to as *kudin* or *gam-vasi* (i.e. "the little folk" or "the village dwellers"), and a privileged class called *sam-daru,* "sons of lords", the members of which received a share of the yield produced by the labour of the peasants. Officials of the court and the government were recruited from the *sam-daru*... The biggest landowners (next to the king and the court who farmed out land to state officials in lieu of salaries) were the monasteries which owned far greater extents of fields than any other private owners'.

Coming into existence in the early Anuradhapura epoch, this social system continued right up to Kandyan times. Nicolas' description above echoes what contemporary observers, like Robert Percival, writing in 1800, had to say about Kandyan society of the time : 'There is no nation among whom the distinction of ranks is kept up with such scrupulous exactness as among the Ceylonese : even in the dimensions and appearance of their houses they seem restricted ; and a house of a certain size commonly annouces its proprietor to have been born in a certain rank'.

The Sri Lankan-born art-historian and philosopher, Anandar Coomaraswamy, studied the survivals of this society and of its arts and crafts in the early years of this century. He saw in the Kandyan society of the past a peacefulness, a harmony and a sense of social integration that appealed to a particular nineteenth century vision of medieval society :

'There is a great charm as one walks along the narrow village paths, in coming upon some hillside clearing where twenty or thrirty men are at work, singing in chorus with an old man leading them ;... How strongly we are reminded of mediaeval England, and Langland's "faire field full of folke... of all manner of men, the mene and the riche"... Observe how remarkably the different parts of the social organisation fitted and dovetailed together ; there was a place for every man, and no man could be spared ; class distinctions were not invidious, more emphasised by differences of culture...'.

Horrified by the crisis of industrial civilisation, Commaraswamy believed that these rural Kandyan survivals recalled a way of life which was in sharp contrast to what he found in modern Europe, or even in the Sri Lankan cities of that time. In his idealisation of the past, he did not see that harmony and unity were not the only qualities of such societies and that conflicts and contradictions were also inherent in them ; that poverty, sickness, malnutrition, illiteracy, and oppression were also part of the grim realities of 'mediaeval' life.

Sri Lanka's rude awakening to the realities of a changing, modern world had begun as early as the sixteenth century. But it was only two hundred and fifty years later, after the occupation of the Kandyan kingdom, that the consequences of this began to be felt throughout the entire country. The 'integrated and harmonious' life that men like Coomaraswamy saw - if, indeed, it ever existed in that much idealised form - was shattered, and the people of Sri Lanka had begun a painful but necessary transformation of their traditional society. It had not come about on their own terms, but it forced them to break out of a historical shell. The disintegration of traditional society, however agonising and distorted a process it had become, also meant the release of human potential and social energies that lay trapped within the limits and bonds of the old system. It is precisely the tasks of that transition which have been faced for the last one hundred and fifty years.

As with any traditional society, an understanding of Sri Lanka's history and culture also requires a knowledge of its religious beliefs and institutions. This applies in particular to *Buddhism*, which has been the dominant and distinctive religion of the island since its first introduction in the third century B.C. From that time onward, it has been the religion of the majority of the Sri Lankan people, enjoying centuries of royal sponsorship and deeply affecting all aspects of the country's mental and spiritual life. Buddhism has contributed much to the way in which man in Sri Lanka looks at his own life and at the world around him. A great deal of the country's national wealth has been expended on its religious institutions and most of Sri Lanka's enduring arts - especially its literature, art and architecture - have arisen out of a Buddhist context.

Through many vicissitudes of history, Buddhist belief and practice in the island have had a constant and basically uninterrupted evolution, marked by varying phases of development, decline and revival. It is indeed a remarkable experience to stand before such living monuments as the cave-temples at Mulkirigala or Dambulla or the Bodhi-tree shrine at Anuradhapura and to see the inscriptions and works of art which testify that these sites have been in almost continuous worship for more ttan two thousand years, and that neither the character of the place nor the rituals and beliefs associated with it have changed very much since their inception.

Sri Lanka's major contribution to the religions of the world has been its preservation and development of *Theravada Buddhism* and the classical literature associated with that tradition. The term 'Theravada' means literally 'the Doctrine of the Elders'. It represents the oldest existing school or sect of Buddhism, preserving many of this religion's earliest traditions. Closely linked with the Theravada is the Pali language, a northern India dialect used by the Buddha himself and his early followers, which became the classical language of early Buddhism. It was in this language that the first and most complete version of the Buddhist Canon - the essential writings or sacred scriptures, preserving many of the Buddha's own sayings and ideas - was committed to writing. This historic event took place in the first century B.C. at the Aluvihara temple, a few miles away from Kandy. Some five hundred years later, the codification of the Canon, that is to say, the preparation of a fixed version of it, was carried out at Anuradhapura. So complete is the identification of the island with the preservation of this earliest form of Buddhism, that all existing canonical writings in Pali derive from these two sources.

Theravada Buddhism is sometimes known as 'Southern Buddhism', to distinguish it from that other great tradition, Mahayana or 'Northern Buddhism'. Southern Buddhism still survives in Sri Lanka and in the Southeast Asian countries of Burma, Thailand, Laos and Cambodia. Being the most ancient centre of Theravada, Sri Lanka has maintained close connection with these countries especially since the tenth century, when Theravada Buddhism began to be extensively adopted in that region.

The essence of Theravada doctrine, distinguishing it from Mahayana and from other religions, is the belief that salvation - in the sense of release from suffering and from the cycle of rebirth - or spiritual improvement can only be achieved through individual effort. The life, the actions and especially the mental 'exertions' of the individual are the only things that are important, not rituals or the interventions of priests, gods or other supernatural beings. The Buddha is not worshipped as a god or a saint who can grant worldly or spiritual favours, but is paid homage to as a teacher, 'a fount of wisdom'. Relics and images of the Buddha and other sacred memorials such as the Bodhi-tree are symbols of that teacher and his teachings, objects for veneration, respect and edification. There are no priests ; the Theravada ideal is the monk, or the bhikkhu, and the monastic community, which constitutes the most suitable environment and discipline for the understanding and practise of the doctrine. When that monastic organisation exists, as it often does, in the midst of lay society, it provides a living and tangible example of the disciplined Buddhist life.

In practise, however, very early on in its developmet, Buddhism became a complex religious system. In the past, as today, there seems to have been no fine distinction in the popular mind between veneration and worship. A pantheon of gods and other deities, who are inferior to the Buddha and are his loyal subjects, have been incorporated form the earliest times. The monastic order is not just a disciplined body of ascetic and scholarly monks, withdrawn from the world, but a major social institution, owning extensive property and playing a major role in many spheres of national life - not only in the teachings and administering of religious ideas but as a socio-political force.

These differences between the philosophical essence and the religious tradition as a whole arise from such factors as the popularisation of Buddhism and its royal sponsorship as a national institution. In its development as a widely accepted religion, Buddhism absorbed or attached to itself in some form, various theistic and ritualistic concepts and practises. This took place both internationally and locally. Thus, in Sri Lankan Buddhism we see a number of such syncretistic elements or accretions, including the many-layered 'folk religion' of the country, as well as a number of gods and goddesses drawn from local theistic cults and from classical Hinduism. It is this entire complex of belief and religious practice that forms the religion of the Buddhist Sinhalese. The complexity and flexibility of this religion permits, on the one hand, pure philosophical and moral concerns, with a rationalist and humanist basis, and, on the other, ritual practices such as the worship of gods and the invocation of demonic spirits, within the parameters of a single religious tradition.

Buddhism's social and political role derives from the ownership of property - in the form of large, monastic estates - its sponsorship of artistic and literary activity, including the massive building programmes which have given us the great monuments of Anuradhapura and Polonnaruva, and its special relationship with the king and the political leadership of the state. As the Venerable Dr. Walpola Rahula observes : 'Buddhism in Ceylon became the state religion from the day of its introduction... The monasteries formed the centres of national culture, and bhikkhus were the teachers of the whole nation - from prince to peasant. They helped the king to rule the country in peace. It was the duty of the bhikkhus to side with the kings. They used their influence over the masses to support the king who, in return, looked after their interests'.

Buddhism in Sri Lanka has passed through many phases. The first fifteen hundred years, from the third century B.C. to the twelfth century, is a period of almost uninterrupted development. From time to time, a number of new doctrinal and institutional elements are absorbed into the religion, such as the cult of images and of the Tooth-Relic, the worship of *bodhisattvas* or Buddhas-to-be, and the concept of the ruler as a god-king. Rivalry between various chapters of the monastic order, religious schisms, the influence and sometimes even the ascendancy of new doctrinal developments, such as Mahayanis or Tantra, and the periodic renewal of the more conservative or 'orthodox' tradition are all part of this evolving religous system. From the thirteenth century onwards, Hindu gods and other theistic cults come to occupy and increasingly important position, and major shrines to these gods are established throughout the country. A partial collapse of the Buddhist tradition is seen in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, when the continuity of the higher ordination of monks - maintained in a direct line of succession from the time of the Buddha and his immediate followers - is interrupted. This continuity is renewed by embassies to Burma and Thailand, and a major revival begins in the mid-eighteenth century. In the nineteenth century this revival merges with the nationalist movement and becomes a part of the country's modern political life, especially with the struggle for political and cultural independence.

A considerable 'modernisation' of Buddhism has taken place in the last one hundred years, especially in the intellectual sphere, with a re-statement of the rationalist and humanist philosophical core of Theravada doctrine and the rise of new, urban-based lay organisations. Popular Buddhism, however, stil displays many of the traditional features that have been in existence for centuries, with only the subtlest changes in interpretation and practice.

A Buddhist temple today, as in the past, has three essential elements : first, a ritual complex, containing a *dagaba,* an image-house enshrining one or more figures of the Buddha and containing elaborate paintings and sculptures, and a *bodhi*-tree ; a preaching-hall, where people gather to listen to sermons and sacred hymns, and a chapter house, where the monks formally congregate to perform acts of discipline relating to the monastic order ; and, finally, residential accommodation for the monks, who constitute the brotherhood attached to that temple. This institutional and architectural pattern exists in contemporary temples as clearly as in the monasteries of Anuradhapura and Polonnaruva.

Although gods and supernatural beings of one kind or another are associated with Buddhism from its earliest phases and are constantly represented in its art and architecture, it is only from the thirteenth century that images and shrines of gods become a regular feature of the temple complex. Today, shrines of both local and Hindu gods are found in almost every Buddhist temple. It is characteristic of the relationship between Buddhism and these cults that the Buddhist monks play no part at all in the theistic rituals, even when the shrine forms an integral part of the Buddhist image-house. If any formal rituals or ceremonies are performed, a lay-priest of the god-cult presides over them. At some of the most sacred religious centres of the island, these god shrines are part of an almost independent cult, with major architectural monuments and elaborate rituals dedicated to the presiding deity. Often featuring Hindu gods such as Vishnu and Skanda, the only important difference between such temples and those of Hinduism is that these cults accept the supremacy of the Buddha and exist largely in a Sinhalese Buddhist context.

The *'folk religion'* - as it is sometimes called - of the Sinhalese is, of course, far more complex than the rituals of these major cults and includes the worship of a large pantheon of various local gods, spirits and demons, the consultation of oracles, the practice of astrology and various forms of magic. The most dramatic of these is a series of curative rituals which involve the exorcism of spirits and demons, believed to be the cause of disease. Song, dance and drum sequences, and hypnotic trances are characteristic of these ceremonies, in which the dancers are sometimes masked. This folk religion exists more or less parallel with Buddhism, sometimes clearly immersed in a Buddhist context, at other times merely representing a formal acknowledgement of the Buddha's supremacy over all gods and supernatural beings. As one analysts observes : 'The gods and demons of the folk religion were looked upon as mere instruments whose help man could obtain in the ordinary business of day-to-day living', while Buddhism aimed 'at solving the ultimate problem of sorrow and recurring evils of birth, old-age and death'. It is precisely in the worship of gods, and other rituals that Buddhism is sometimes closely interwoven with the beliefs and practices of Hinduism.

One of the remarkable features of Sri Lankan religious history is the important position that four of the world's major religions occupy in a single, small country. While the greater proportion of Sri Lanka's people is Buddhist (nearly seventy per cent), there are nearly two-and-a-half million Hindus, a million Christians, and almost the same number of Muslims.

Hinduism is the country' second major religion and is largely Saivite - dedicated to the worship of Siva and related gods and goddesses. Apart from minor local differences, Sri Lankan Hindu traditions are more or less identical with those of India. Since the nineenth century, local Hindu scholars and religious leaders have made important contributions to the modern revival of Hinduism, both in Sri Lanka and in southern India. The presence of *Islam* goes back at least to the tenth century, if not earlier, and is attested to by inscriptions and writings of Arab travellers and geographers. A Nestorian *Christian* community at Anuradhapura is known from an even earlier period, and they have left behind a single archaeological object, an inscribed Nestorian cross. The present Christian traditions in the island are of more recent origin, and date from the arrival of the Europeans in the sixteenth century.

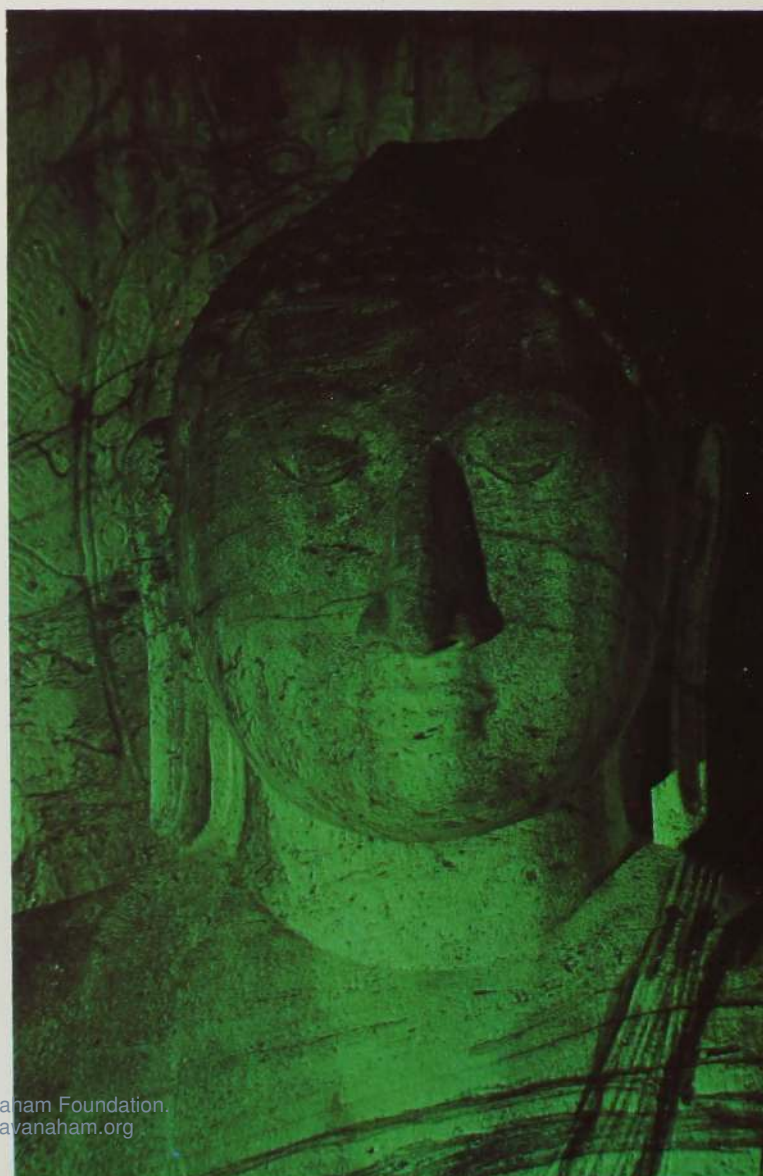
As significant as the coexistence of these four religious groups is the level of religious amity that has existed between them. There is no record of major religious conflicts or religious persecutions, apart form those of colonial times. Sri Lanka's reputation for religious tolerance is reflected in an early tradition reported by the twelfth century Arab geographer, Al-Idrisi, who mentions a royal council of sixteen consisting of four Buddhists, four Muslims, four Christians and four Jews. While this may well be legendary, there are more tangible symbols of this religious harmony. Two of Sri Lanka's most sacred places, Adam's Peak and Kataragama, are revered alike by Buddhist, Hindus and Muslims, and also visited, though not in any formal sense, by Christians.

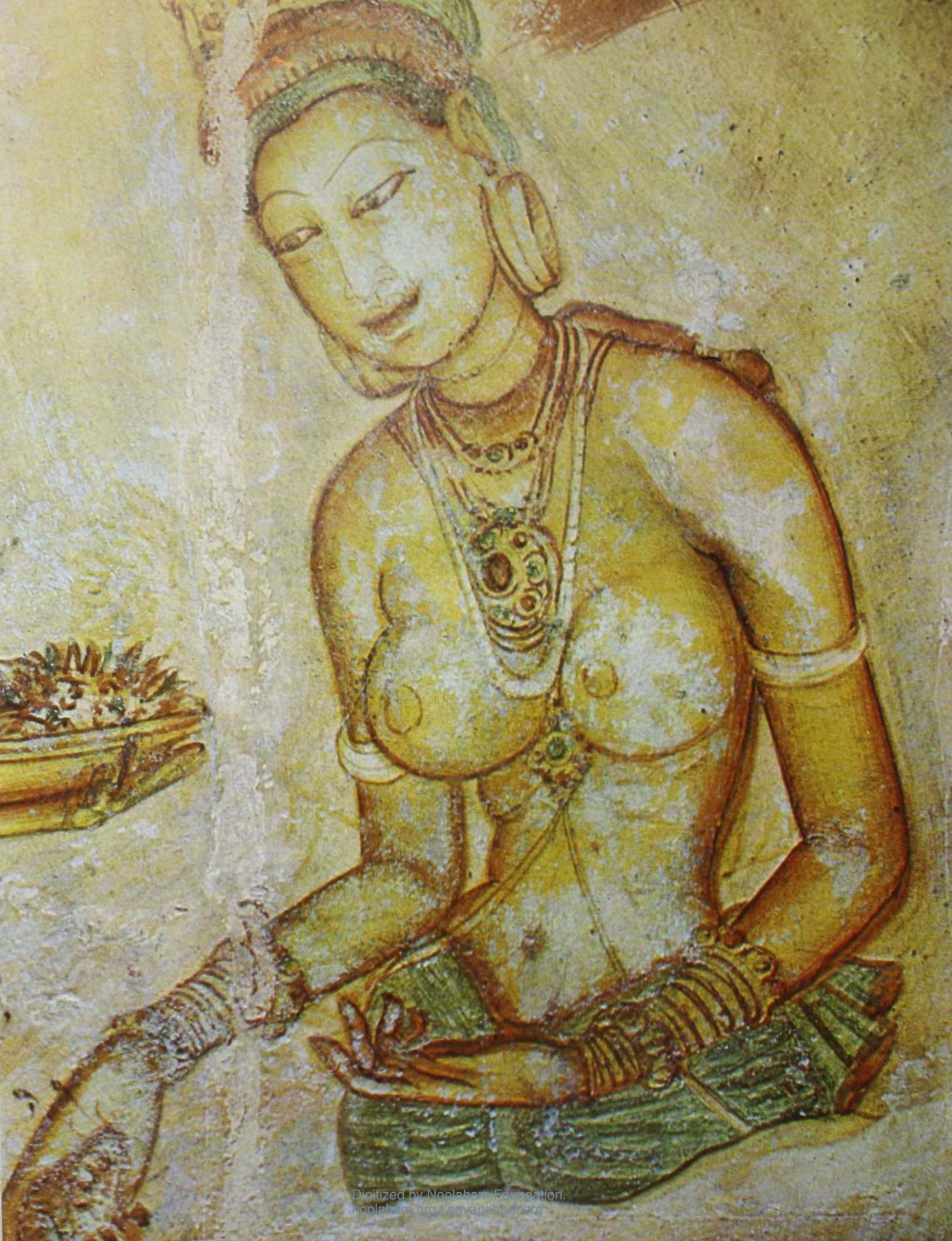
Man's reverence for mountains goes back deep into prehistory and is common to most cultures. It is appropriate that one of Sri Lanka's highest peaks is also the expression of the unities and co-existence of its religious traditions : 'The Peak must be one of the vastest and most widely reverenced cathedrals of the human race ; but the shrine itself is only a little tiled roof raised upon four pillars, or it may be eight, open on all four sides to every wind that blows, and untended by any human being for months at a time when the rains are at their heaviest, and the only other building there in my time was a small mud hut of one room, which I was lent by the monk in charge.

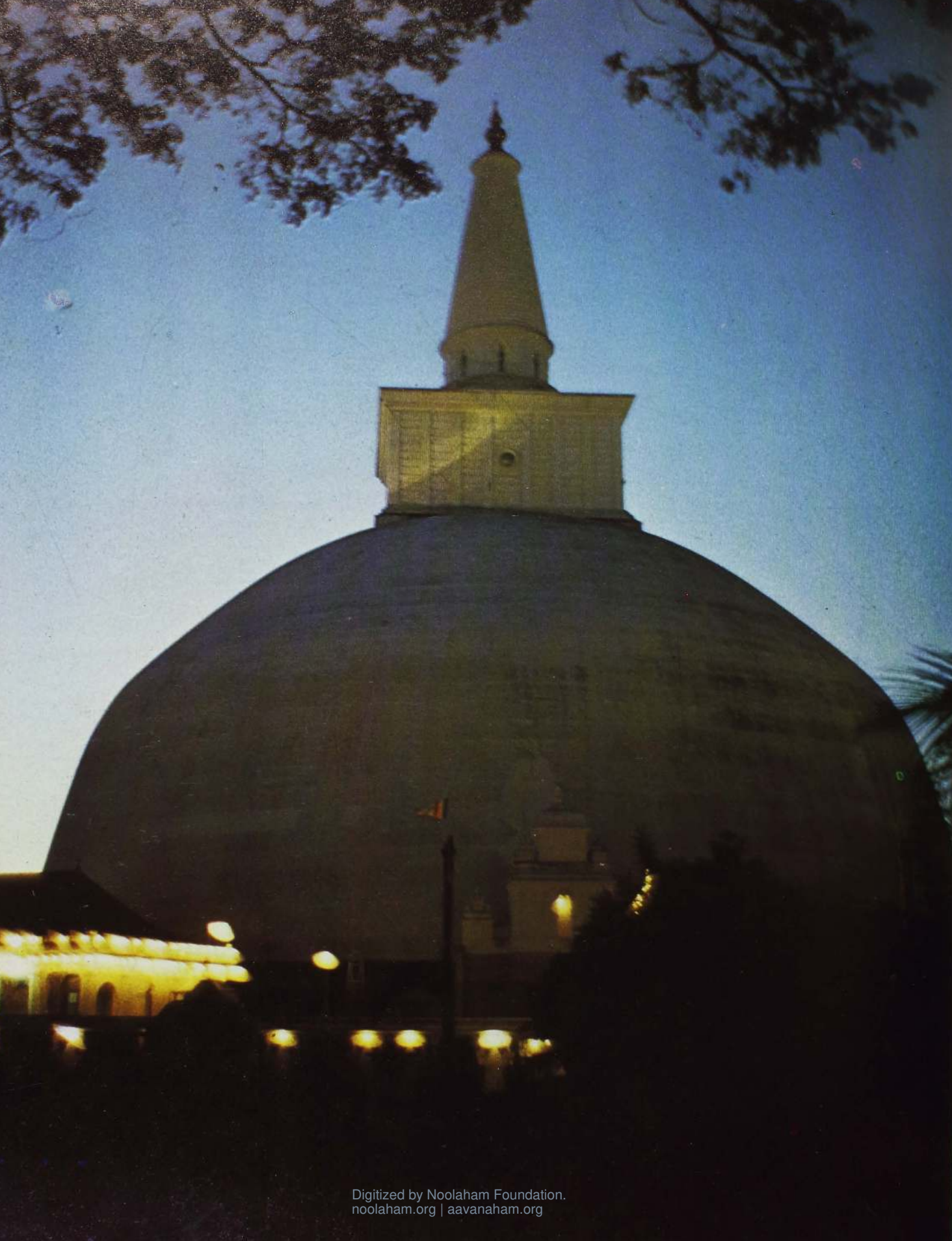
'Right to the very summit of the Peak the forest grows, and from the parapet wall itself one may pick blossoms from the tops of old wild rhododendrons and read in their mottled throats the name of god written in letters that all may read who will. Looking down from this wall one can see how for miles and miles on every side each fold of the hills and every valley is clothed in an ancient forest that has never known the axe, and is justly named the Wilderness of the Peak. The profusion of its beauty alone would inspire any sensitive being with a feeling of awe and it may have been this unparalleled loveliness that led some man, who knows how many thousands of years ago, to name it holy'.

55

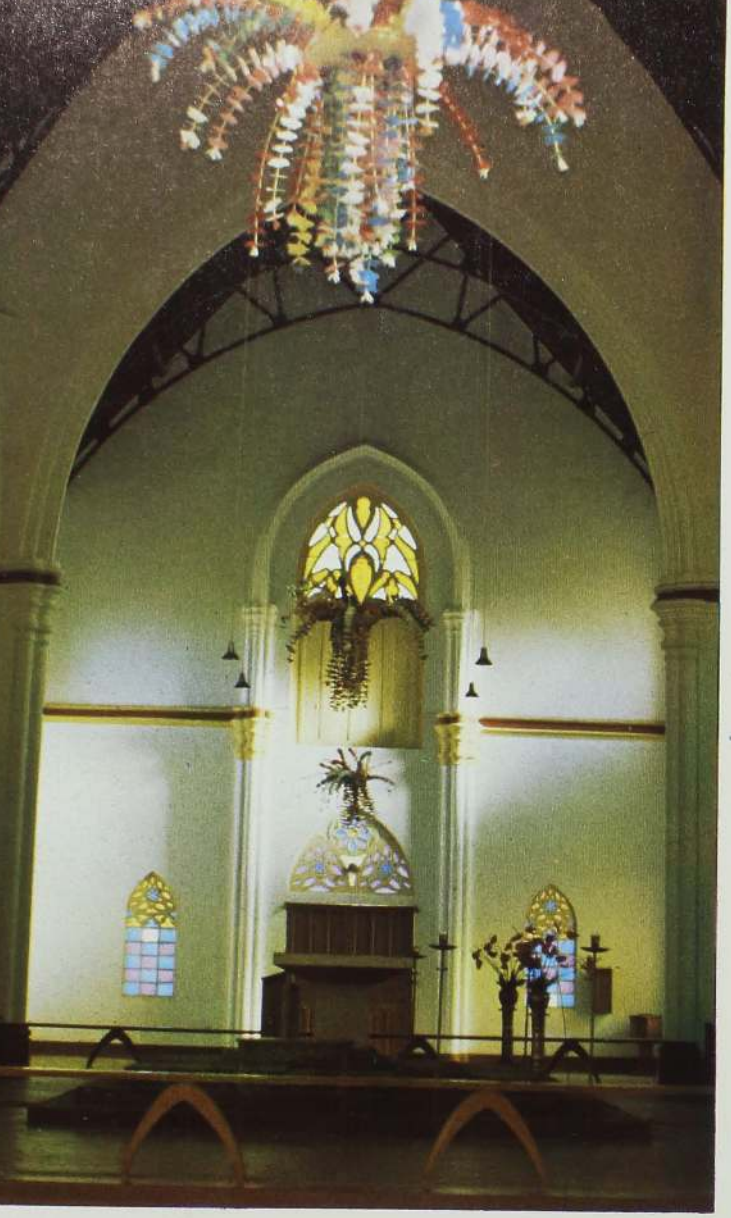
56

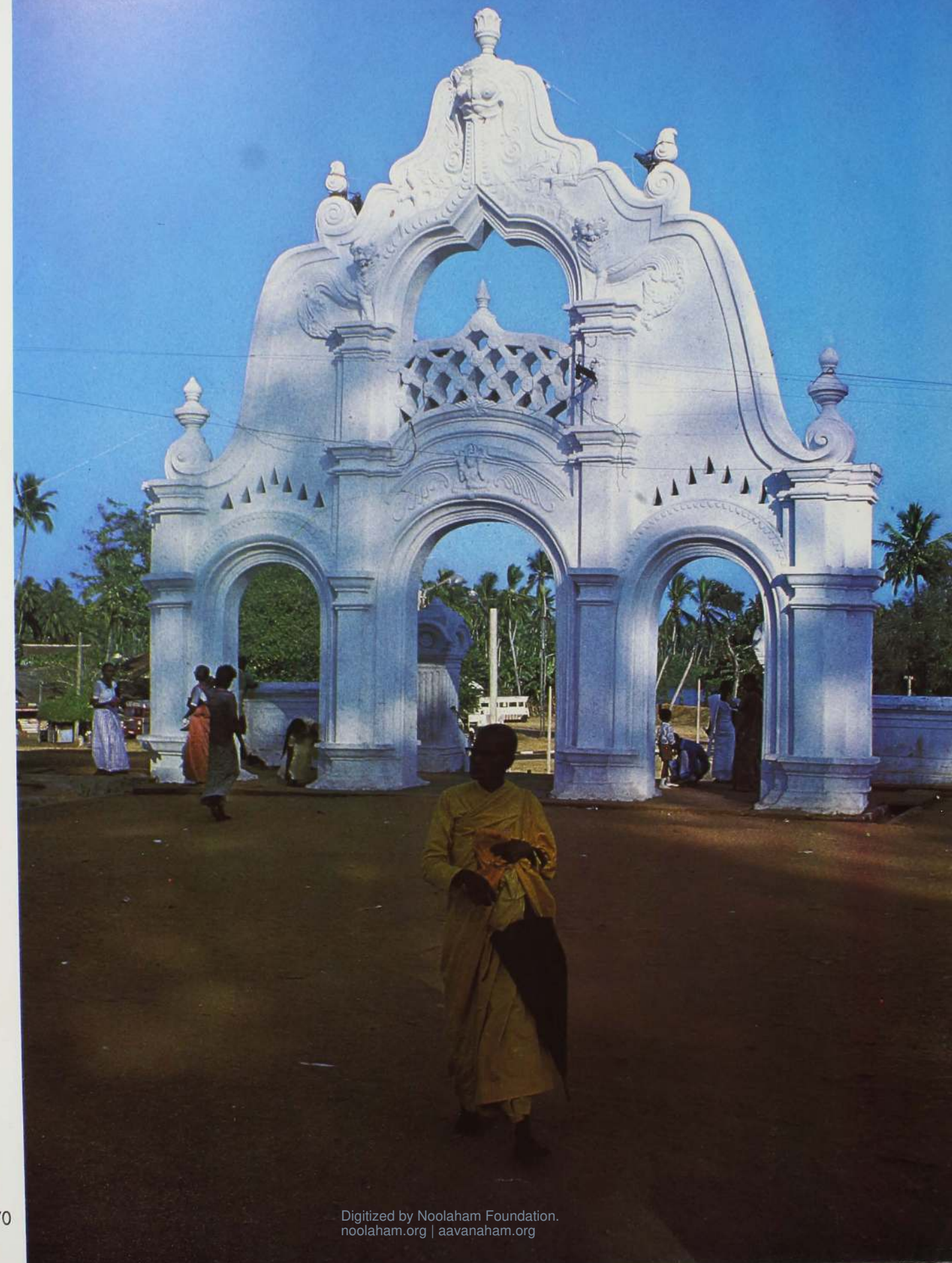


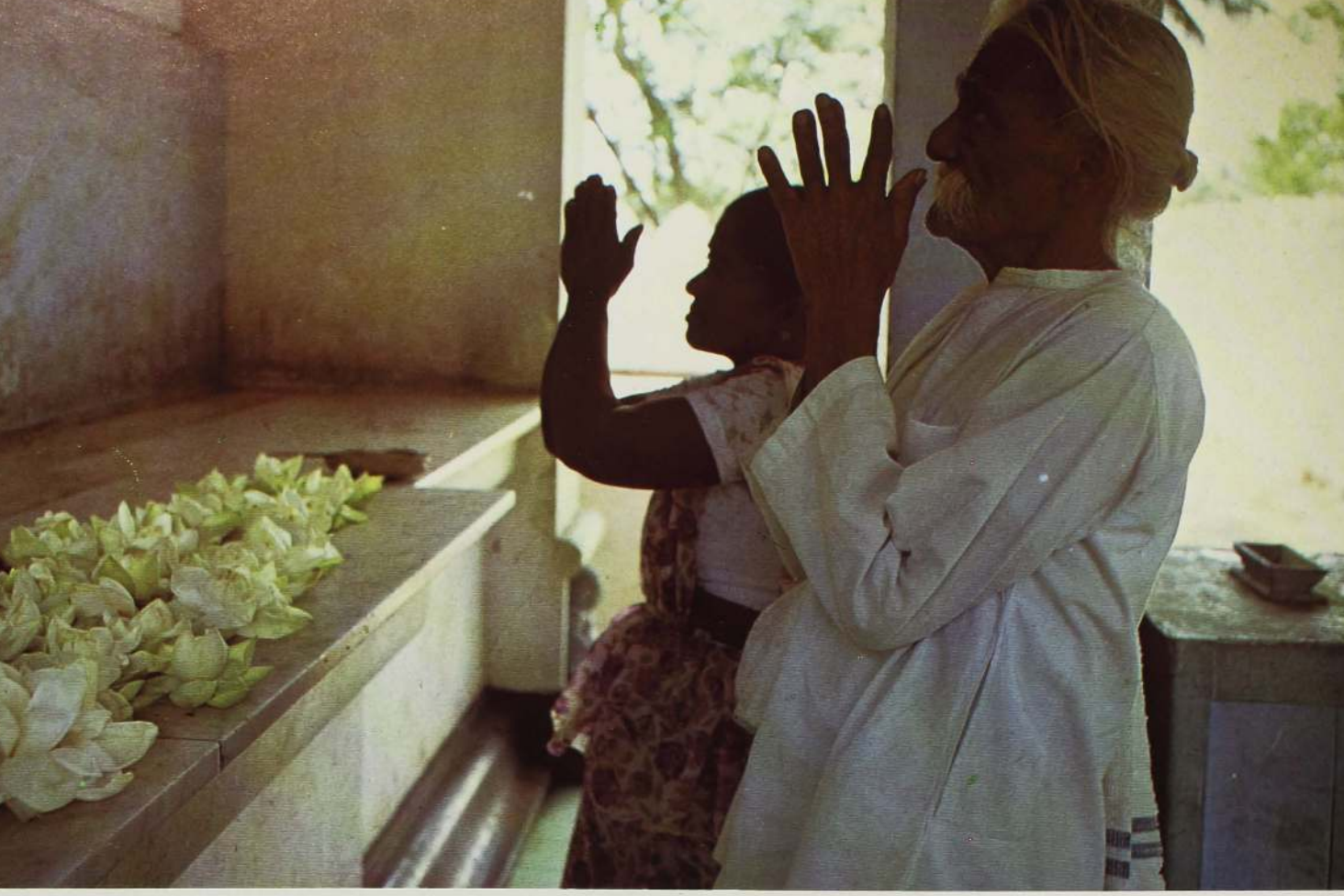




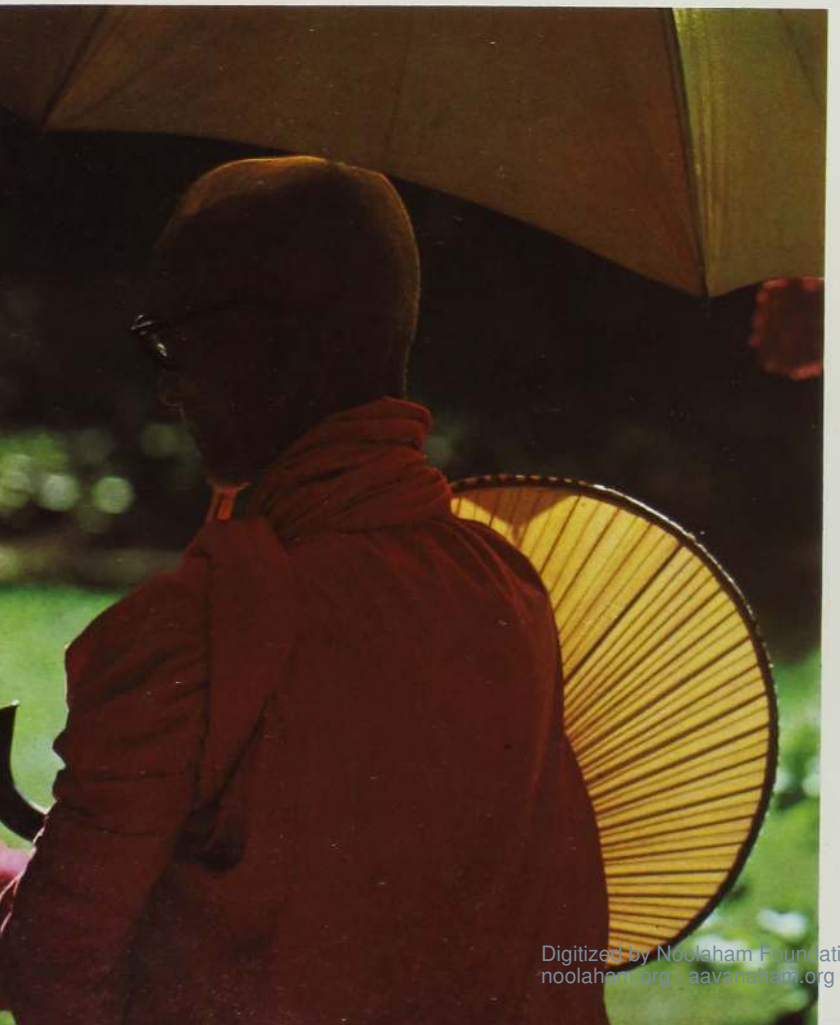
67



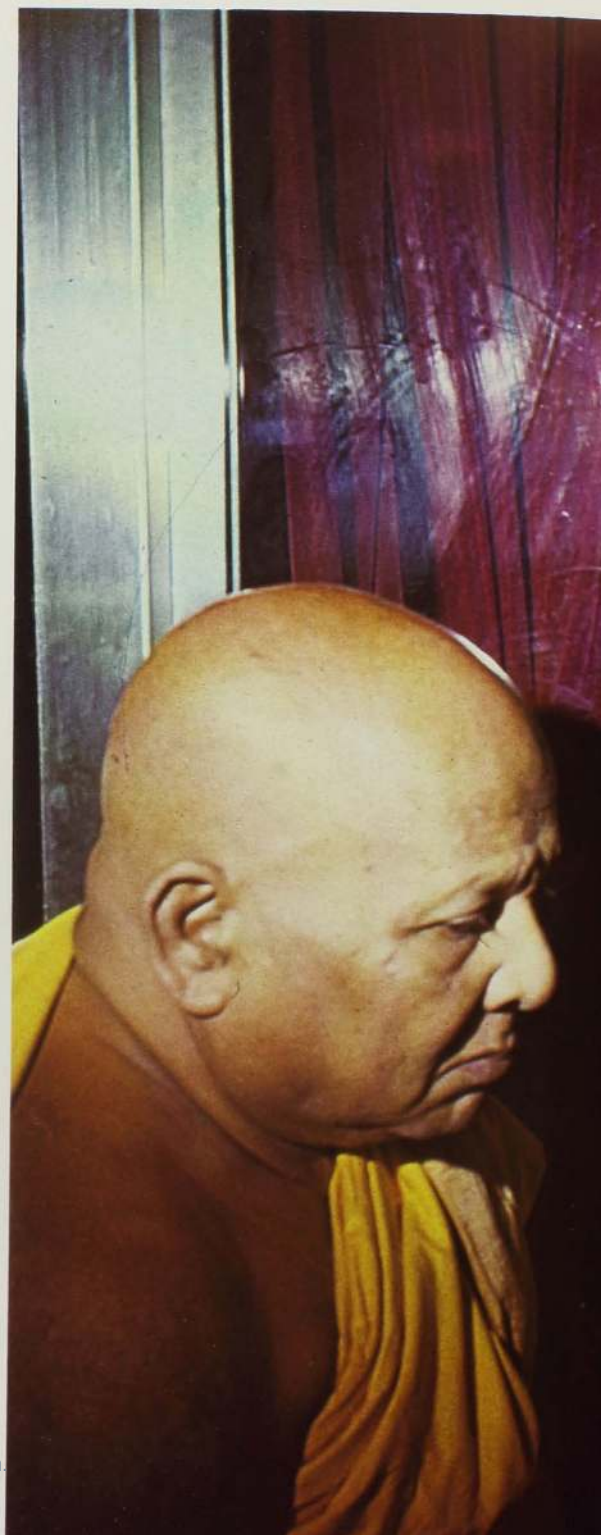


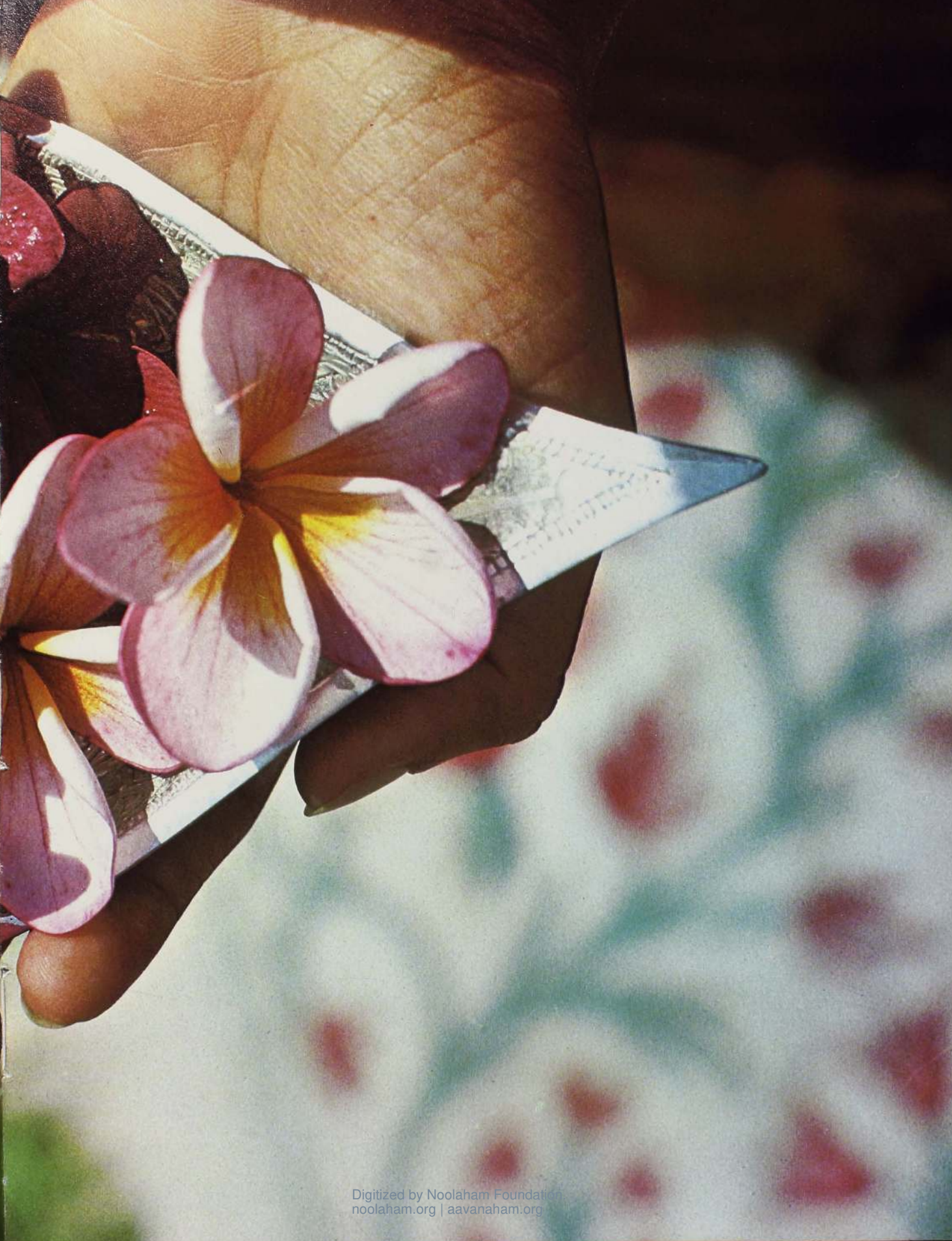


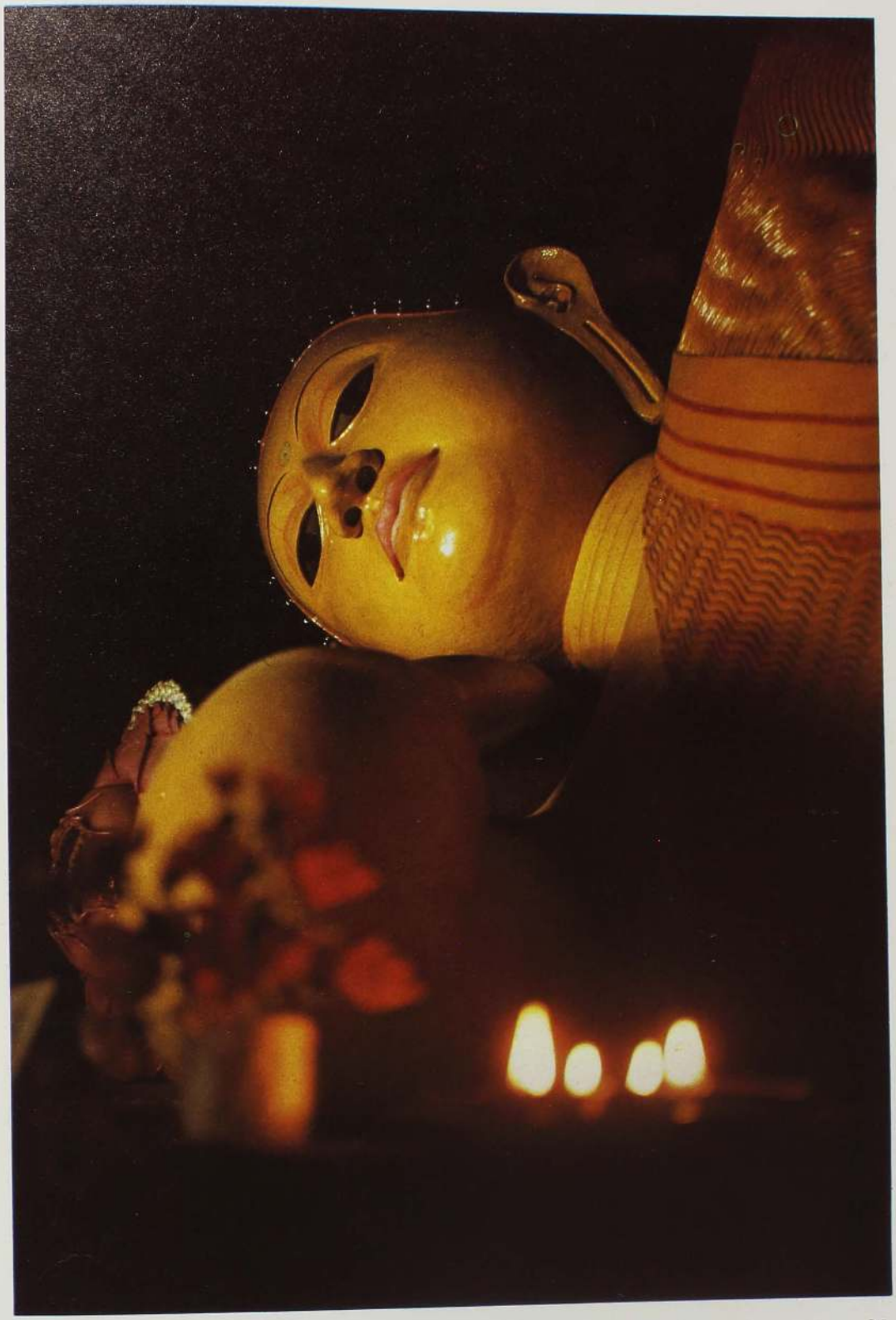
77



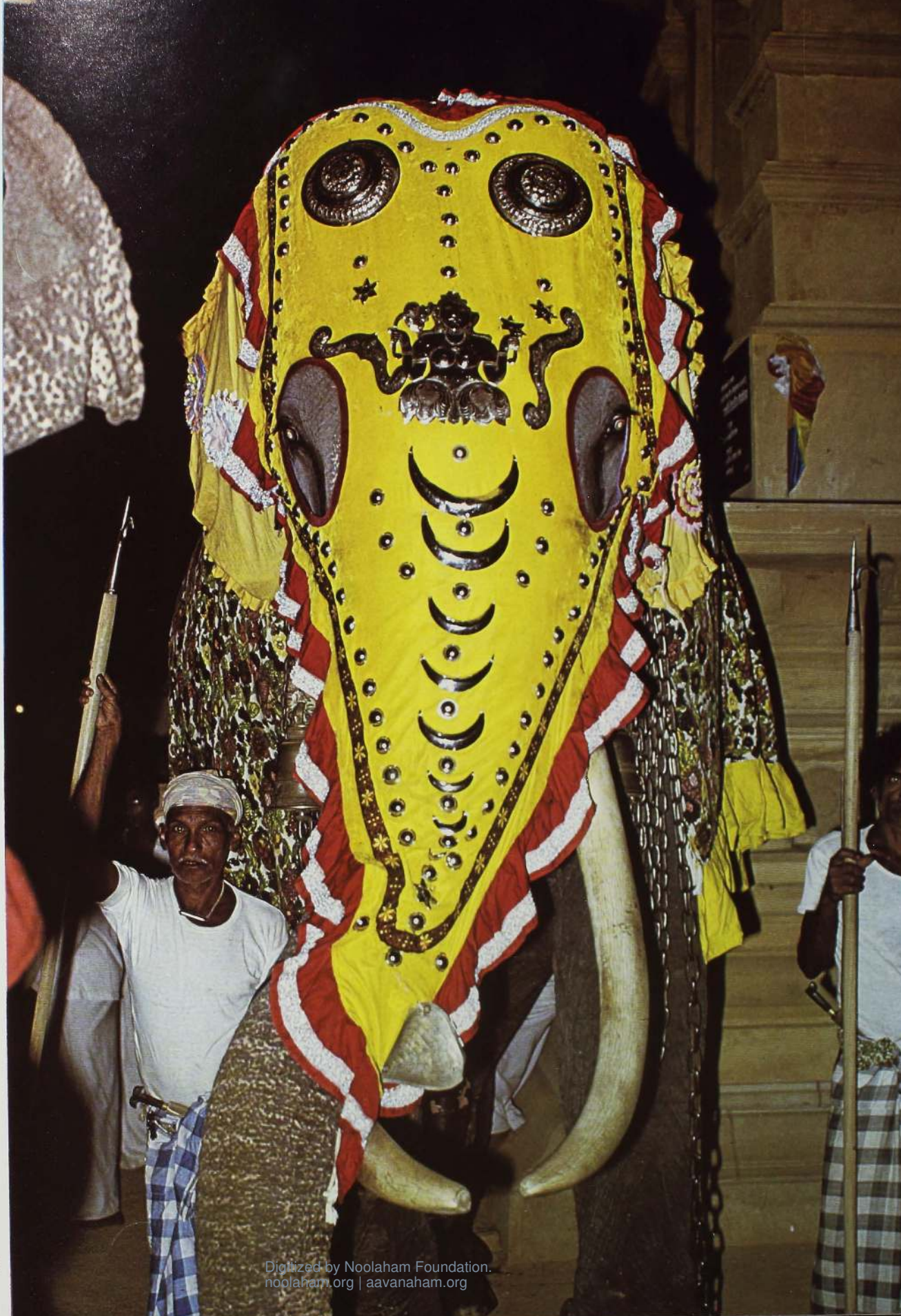
78







81



THE MODERN TRANSITION

Today, Sri Lanka is a country intensely aware of its past, eager to realise its future. Everywhere one still sees the social and cultural landscapes, the patterns of life and economy, of a society immersed in many of its traditional modes ; just as everywhere one is aware of the dominant structures of modern life and technique and of the contemporary visions and aspirations of its people.

Along its coasts, rafts and dugouts belonging to a prehistoric era quite easily accomodate modern outboard motors, while canoes with outriggers and pleated sails compete with motorised fibreglass boats made in local factories. The largest centrally-controlled fleet of buses in the world belongs to the Ceylon Transport Board, which runs its red and aluminium coaches along the island's network of thirty thousand miles of macadamised roads. Villages linked by these buses still grow rice by methods which have changed little over thousands of years. In the hills and mountains, tracts of primaeval rain-forest, now fast diminishing, stand side-by-side with the neatly stacked slopes of tea and rubber estates. Rubber tappers collect the milky latex in coconut shells, while modern factories nearby, powered by hydro-electricity, produce tyres or porcelain or water pumps. On the First of May, a million unionised workers march through the streets of Colombo ; not more than a mile or two away from the city limits, tenant farmers carry a portion of their rice harvest to absentee, middle class landlords working in modern offices.

It is possible to reproduce a million such contrasting images. They capture, sometimes in an instant, the essence of the transformation that has now been under way for somewhat more than a hundred years.

The roots of these changes lie as far back, perhaps, as the thirteenth century, when a growing commerce and urbanism began to bring about subtle changes in a deeply-entrenched agrarian social order. Subsequently, the confrontation with the West and two hundred and fifty years of colonial occupation of the maritime zone, accelerated and retarded these changes. When the British invaded the Kandyan kingdom and annexed it, the entire country passed under foreign rule. Fundamental changes in economy, social and political organisation and culture followed soon after and the mid-nineteenth century saw the early beginnings of that transformation which characterises the society that we see all around us now.

We do not as yet understand the connections between the changes that had been taking place in Sri Lankan society prior to the sixteenth century and those which took place after the colonial invasions. Certainly, the rise of new social elements - such as powerful merchant groups and a 'free' peasantry without direct obligations to feudal lords - the increasing use of money in the country's internal economy and the emergence of many petty principalities and independent or semi-dependent kingdoms, must be numbered amongst these. Portuguese and Dutch conquest not only arrested the independent development of these processes in the rich and strategic maritime zone which they occupied, but it also prevented it taking place to any significant extent in the much larger but beleaguered kingdom of Kandy.

At the same time, increased economic activity in the coastal areas promoted the development of similar social and economic processes in that region, but now under the strict control and limitations of the colonial structure. We see much more clearly than in the previous era, the emergence of new social elements - officials, clerks, traders, soldiers, etc. - who still have their roots in the older society but whose evolution and existence is entirely determined by colonialism. Most visible of all are the cultural aspirations and life style of this 'new class' : a mixture of indigenous tradition and europeanised modernity.

Perhaps one of the first to express the classic predicament of the colonised elite was an exiled Sri Lankan prince of the seventeenth century writing to his Portuguese patrons : 'I state, Senhor, that I was born with a strong predilection for the Portuguese nation. In my earliest years, greatly to the satisfaction of the Queen, my mother, there was assigned to me as Mestre the Padre Frey Francisco Negrao, who taught me to read and write. Under his instruction I learnt very good customs and etiquette and some special habits which Royal persons should employ. Though I am a Chingala by blood, I am a Portuguese in my ways and affections ; it may well be that this is the chief reason for my losing my Kingdom, treasures, the Queen my wife, my son and all that I possessed, at least reaching this state in which I see myself...'

Of course, the Sri Lankans were not passive victimes of their fate. From the very start not only did they fight bitterly against the colonial invasions but they also sought to master the new experineces which they gained from the European encounter and to turn them to their advantage. A British writer's observation on Kandyan warfare makes the point succinctly - although not entirely historically accurate as Sri Lankans had known the use of guns before the coming of the Portuguese : 'At the beginning of the struggle guns and gunpowder were unknown to them ; they possessed, however, amongst their citizens workers in metal more skilled than the Portuguese, who soon produced excellent fowling pieces, which were described by their foes as "the fairest barrels for pieces that may be seen in any place, and which shine as bright as silver". Long before the war ended they were as well equipped in respect of weapons as their European adversaries'.

From the very beginnings of the anti-colonial struggle, the Sri Lankans had to make a tremendous effort of imagination to understand their opponents from a distant world. One aspect of this effort is reflected in Prince Vijayapala's lament above ; an entirely different one in this exhortation of a seventeenth-century Sri Lankan lord to his companions :

'How long, illustrious companions, shall we live as slaves to these vile Portuguese, whose harsh servitude you have borne for nearly 125 years without any liberty other than what they permit us ? Is it possible that you should be so far removed from reason that, though liberty is the thing of greatest value among mortals, you should be so habituated to slavery as altogether to forget it, or to despise it to such an extent that, being able to be free men and lords, you exchange your freedom for slavery, without letting the remembrance of what your ancestors held, raise an honorable thought in your hearts ? If the Spaniards have done so to the Africans, who have been inhabitants of Spain for 800 years, even though they were baptized : if the Persian king did so to the Armenian nobility... what better terms do we expect from the Portuguese who are anxious to perpetuate themselves in Ceylon and enjoy altogether its riches and delights. Who does not see that our religion is fallen, our nobility extinct and our riches drained. There is not a year when all there is in Ceylon does not pass to Goa and from Goa to Portugal'.

The very effort of the struggle had brought about a new awareness of themselves and of the world around them and a more than nodding acquaintance with the Europe of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. That evolution, however, took place entirely within the limits of the colonial world order. Neither the humanism nor the scientific discoveries of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment were available to the Sri Lankans, and, even if they had been, the people of this country were scarcely in a position to master these and apply them to the necessities of their time and place.

The basic nature of traditional Sri Lankan society both in the coastal belt and the Kandyan kingdom remained unaffected by the changes in social and political organisation or commercial and cultural activity during the seventeenth, eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The essence of the colonial objectives was the extraction of primary products that could be marketed in Europe. Local administration was solely directed at ensuring the security of this process and at making it as efficient and as cheap as possible. While some changes took place, such as the loosening of feudal ties, the growth of a middle class and the spread of European languages, the country itself and the progress of its culture and economy lay trapped and drained by the colonial process. Thus Sri Lanka's real encounter with the modern world came nearly three hundred and fifty years after its first confrontation with Europe.

The apostles of the Renaissance in the East were not the scholars of the Eastern Roman Empire, but the captains of Portugal, the merchants of Holland, and the agents of the Court of the East India Company in London. In these persons and the forces they represented Asian society was confronted with something new in its history, for here was no invader who conquered its territory and then settled among its peoples as the Moguls had done in India and the Manchus in China. The invaders were interested in trade, and sought to create and maintain those conditions most favourable to their business... these changes were carried out in Asian society by agents that were external to it, primarily in their own interest.

R. Attygalle in Approaches to
Community Development, *The Hague, 1953*

It was only in the mid-nineteenth century, with the introduction of new forms of land ownership and agricultural production, and related developments in administrative and cultural spheres, that fundamental changes began to take place in Sri Lankan society. An entirely new plantation economy was superimposed on the traditional food-growing village society. Between the 1840's and the 1910's, lands were planted with such crops as coffee - later replaced by tea - coconut, cinchona, cacao and rubber. They increased from an insignificant or non-existent acreage to over a million acres of mainly tea, rubber and coconut estates. It is possible to say that the entire modernisation of the country took place in the one hundred years between 1850 and 1950, on the basis of this commercial agriculture, more than half of it owned by foreign companies and individuals, the rest by a new class of Sri Lankan landowners. Although profoundly affecting the society and economy of the village, it also left unchanged, and now backward, its productive basis of rice farming, home gardens and shifting cultivation. A fundamental imbalance had been created in the Sri Lankan economy.

During this time there also arose a substantial indigenous 'middle class' with a base in plantation agriculture, trade, government service and the professions. This middle class was both self-conscious and aware of the world at large. Schools and colleges comparable with and often modelled on those in Europe had been opened throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century. A Medical College was established in 1870 and a Council of Legal Education in 1874, later to become the Law College. Colombo had piped water and a modern sewage system by the last decades of the nineteenth century. A heavy engineering workshop for the railways was opened in the 1880's. Although the process of modernisation was limited, often superficial, dependent, highly imitative and entirely dominated by the colonial process, at the same time it meant that the people of Sri Lanka were themselves able for the first time to lay hold of modern ideas and techniques. Doctors, lawyers, engineers and a widespread professional class soon became the intellectual and often the political leaders of the country. The emergence of a strata of local entrepreneurs whose interests often did not coincide with those of the colonial establishement, the rise of the country's traditional intelligentsia and the growth of proletarianised urban masses, brought new social and political forces into existence.

A modern revival of Buddhism, in opposition to the dominance of the Christian missionaries, developed rapidy under the patronage of these new social groups and became one of the focal points of a resurgence of national culture. Parallel movements arose amongst the Hindus and the Muslims. A contemporary Sinhalese and Tamil literature flourished. Books, journals and newspapers appeared in the national languages and a highly active and nationalist urban theatre became one of the most popular forms of entertainment. Schools and other educational, cultural and welfare institutions were established under the impetus and control of the national revival. As a result of these developments, the process of modernisation incorporated not only the newly emerging urbanised elements but also the traditional cultural and intellectual resources of the country, that had lain neglected and impoverished since the fall of Kandy.

The cultural resurgence of the nineteenth century displayed, in a brilliant manner, the inherent vitality and dynamism of Sri Lankan society. It showed that society's ability to mobilise its resources through its own efforts as well as the tremendous creative potential it had for both renewal and innovation. Old forms and concepts were invested with a new vitality and significance and an imaginative boldness was displayed which was also quite ready to abandon those forms and to create or to master new ones. Nothing demonstrates this better to us today than the rich and fertile developments in painting and architecture in the latter half of the nineteenth century that still survive for us to see.

There is a tremendously rich development of painting in this latter half of the 19th century. This is related to the religious, social and economic developments of the period.

L.T.P. Manjusri

--- (these paintings) constitute a distinctive Sri Lankan contribution to the art of Asia. Hundreds of Buddhist temples and shrines with brightly painted interiors still exist throughout the country. They represent the last phase of a Sri Lankan tradition of mural painting that is over 2000 years old. At the same time, these late period murals are the products of a specific cultural and religious resurgence...

Ven. Kamburupitiye Wanaratan Nayaka Thero
in L.T.P. Manjusri, Design Elements from
Sri Lankan Temple Paintings, *Colombo, 1977*

The middle of the nineteenth century saw the last of the historical - or 'traditional' - attempts to win back the country's lost independence, the uprising of 1848 and, soon after, the beginnings of that process which was later to become the modern movement for national independence. Religious, cultural and intellectual in its early stages, it was not until the closing years of that century and the first decades of the present one that it took an explicity political form. There now emerged political institutions of a type that could scarcely have been imagined fifty years previously - an index to the transformation that Sri Lankan society had undergone during that period. The first trade union was formed in 1893 as the result of a strike amongst printers and bookbinders, the trade union movement ultimately producing the country's first political party, the Labour Party, established in 1928. There also arose in the early decades of the twentieth century a number of nationalist associations, such as the Ceylon Political League, the Ceylon National Association, the Ceylon Reform League and several Temperance Associations, which finally merged in the Ceylon National Congress, established in December 1919. 'New forces are at work among us', said Ponnambalam Arunachalam, the first president of the Congress, 'a new era is dawning for our country'.

By the early 1930's, some measure of governmental autonomy and the formation of an assembly, with representatives chosen by country-wide elections based on universal franchise, had been negotiated with the British. The country was now administered by a locally-constituted Board of Ministers under a British Governor. Then, thirty years after Arunachalam's declaration, and propelled by a rising tide of political activity in the twenties and thirties, the political independence of the country was achieved in the aftermath of the Second World War, in 1948.

After one hundred and thirty years of total colonial domination, Sri Lanka once again took its place among the countries of the world as a sovereign state. Although its economy was no longer self-contained, as it had been in the pre-sixteenth century era, and its cultural autonomy and self-confidence had given way to a complex process of dependent and derivative evolution, Sri Lanka was once again politically free to manage its own affairs - at least within the social, economic and cultural constraints that it had inherited from its own feudal past and from the colonial epoch. It is the tackling of those constraints and the transformation of that inherited situation that have been the predominant concerns of the Sri Lankan people in this post-Independence era. The people of this country are today much better equipped to face that task than they have ever been before in the island's history.

The three decades since Independence have seen considerable change and development, on the one hand, and the absence of any basic transformation of the pre-Independence situation, on the other. Crucial to the processes of development have been major changes in the cultural and political atmosphere of the country : the extension of literacy, education, and modern modes of communication throughout the length and breadth of the country ; a considerable knowledge of the contemporary world amongst broad sections of the populace ; the emergence of a scientific and secular outlook and a generalised familiarity with machinery and modern technology ; a fifty-year-old tradition of parliamentary democracy and massive popular participation in the electoral process and political life in general ; a keen sense of people's rights and democratic freedoms ; all these have attained a degree of maturity in the last thirty years that was inconceivable in the early decades of the century. At the same time, fundamental to the absence of a basic change, is the continuing structure of its export-import, agrarian economy, still dominated by the export of tea and other plantation crops and the small-scale local production of rice ; characteristic of this stagnation and underdevelopment are the persistence of poverty, unemployement and landlessness and the unchanged living conditions and life style of the peasantry and the urban poor.

As in historical times, the production of grain remains one of the country's major concerns. While the trading centres of coastal Sri Lanka had already begun the importation of small quantities of rice in pre-colonial times, the development of an export-oriented colonial economy led to the massive underdevelopment of an agriculture that had in the past entirely supplied the island's needs. Now, Sri Lanka no longer produced its own food. Staple items of diet, such as rice and wheat flour, other foodgrains and pulses, onions, chillies, potatoes as well as many 'luxuries' such as meat, fish, milk products and dried fruits were imported : as a visiting economist observed in 1959, 'at present fish caught in Scotland is eaten in Ceylon'. A major perspective of Sri Lankan economic planning since Independence has been to extricate the country from this predicament and make it self-sufficient in food. Much has been achieved in this regard in these thirty years. Today, food imports are more or less restricted to the single major item of foodgrains : wheat from the United States and rice from China and some other Asian countries. Over the last ten years the import of these basic items has been between half and two-thirds of the country's consumption. Today, about three-quarters of the rice supply is produced locally.

The current situation in rice farming characterises the nature of the modern transition : what has and what has not happened since historical times. While farming methods which were first used in eolithic times can still be seen everywhere - the buffalo, the plough, the simplest of wooden and metal implements, the sowing of seed and transplanting of germinated seedlings by hand, sickle-harvesting and human or animal threshing - the use of tractors, chemical fertilisers, high-yielding hybrid varieties and some marginal mechanisation of other processes, such as fan-winnowing, have brought about a limited increase in productivity. The development of rice production in modern times has depended more on the traditional method of increasing the area of land under cultivation by large-scale irrigation works, than on intensive local development and increasing yield. The area under rice cultivation has doubled since 1948, form one million to two million acres.

The structure of ownership is also a vital part of the problem of development, and tenurial changes have been the concern of both farmers and policy makers. While no great landlords remain, tenant farming is still substantial and applies to about fifty per cent of the rice paddies under cultivation. A large extent of rice land is in very small plots of less than half an acre, while an equal amount is owned by petty landlords who use hired labour.

An acre of paddy field in Sri Lanka today yields only one and a half times as much as it did in 1952, and much less than half the yield obtained in Japan or the United States. The potentialities of Sri Lankan rice farming are clear but the social and technical processes which would lead to the mobilisation of that potential are far more complex and have yet to be achieved. The situation has been aptly described as one of 'stagnation, slow change, a growing sense of the immediate possibilities and an immense future potential'.

Similarly, nineteenth century plantation agriculture has seen a slow but substantial increase without any major agronomic or technical changes. A land reform in the plantation sector took over all foreign and locally owned estates over fifty acres and placed them under state ownership. The scientific methods of cultivation introduced in this area a hundred years or more ago have been extended considerably but have seen no qualitative change in agronomic patterns since that time. The production techniques and machinery used on a tea, rubber or coconut estate today are very similar to what they were in 1900. Innovations and extensions of these methods to other crops such as tobacco, cotton and potatoes and to the cultivation of multiple crops in the same field at the same time, are some of the new developments in agriculture in recent years. Still limited to specialised contexts and to small areas, their generalised acceptance and spread will signify a new stage in the country's agricultural evolution.

'The most dramatic and visible manifestation of the modern transition, however, is the contrast between city and countryside. The capital city of Colombo, surrounded by an arc of satellite towns, semi-rural suburbs and villages, epitomises the achievements and the constraints, the acute problems and the distortions, the progress and the backwardness of modern Sri Lanka'.

The most significant change in the country's economic structure in the last thirty years has been the development of modern industry. Although certain modern industrial techniques had been employed in areas such as the processing of tea and heavy engineering repairs to locomotives and ships, since the late nineteenth century, there were virtually no industrial manufactures in the country in the pre-Independence era. The traditional craft industrial systems developed in historical times, especially in such areas as the production of high grade iron and steel, fine metalwork, mining and textiles, had entirely disappeared or been relegated to the sphere of exotic or luxury handicrafts. No indigenous industrial development had taken place and there was no link between the ancient industrial structure of the country and its modern industrial needs. All manufactured goods, from the simplest household items upwards, were imported from Europe.

An important, though not as yet fundamental, change has taken place in these last twenty or thirty years. Basic industries such as cement, steel and petroleum refining have been established and a whole gamut of light industrial goods, including many domestic articles, electrical equipment, textiles and processed foods, are now produced locally. The harnessing of hydro-electric power resources and the electrification of the country have been primarily accomplished and the national power grid extends over the entire island. At least a sixth of its economic output comes from modern manufacturing processes employing a tenth of the country's work force. Agreater part of the industrial sector, especially in the basic industries, is state-owned.

Although intended to supply the country's industrial needs from its own resources, this industrialisation has been achieved by the wholesale importation of technology as well as capital and raw materials and therefore stills remains very much a form of dependent industrialisation. Nothing like an industrial infrastructure, capable of independent, self-sustained growth, has been seriously considered as a viable option in the present economic context. Despite the limitations of such marginal modernisation, the growth of even this level of industry has given the Sri Lankan people a direct experience of handling contemporary methods of manufacture and shown them the possibilities of creating in this land a modern industrial and scientific civilisation. The present low level of industrialisation has had quite serious economic and social consequences for the country and its people. At the same time it has allowed them to study the experience of industrialisation elsewhere ; it has given them the opportunity to choose, in the future, a path of industrialisation that would avoid the social and human costs and the cultural and environmental destruction which is the common legacy of the advanced industrial nations.

Sri Lanka's particular combination of resources opens up great possibilites for its agricultural and industrial development. A natural fertility, as displayed by its rich vegetation, ample supplies of water, a variety of crops and climates and an educated rural population, with age-old agricultural skills and a modern outlook, are the most valuable assets for an agricultural transformation. In a land which is still so largely rural and where more than half the workforce is engaged in agriculture, it is only such a transformation that can provide the basic conditions for the improvement and modernisation of the people's life.

Of course, many other sources of national wealth exist. A long coastline of fishing beaches with numerous small and large harbours, and a continental shelf teeming with marine life, are amongst its traditional fishing resources. As yet almost unused are extensive inland waters and a large deep sea 'economic zone' demarcated under the new sea laws. A part of its ample hydro-electric supplies are already being utilised and its scientists are beginning to study the future possibilities of harnessing new energy sources such as solar, wind and nuclear power. Mineral wealth includes extensive deposits of nuclear sands, iron ore, phosphates and precious and semi-precious stones. Geologists estimate that nearly nine-tenths of the total area of Sri Lanka contain precious stones at various depths, a virtually unlimited supply of one of the island's most ancient exports. Although the extraction and export of minerals and gems is an important, though minor, part of the economy, the systematic extraction of these resources and their exploitation on any substantial scale have scarcely begun, while their industrial processing is as yet quite undeveloped. This remains, like the agro- and water-based industries, a potential area of economic development in the foreseeable future.

The creation of an independent and advanced industrial structure is a further stage and a much more distant prospect - but inevitable and necessary if the Sri Lankan people are to complete their modern transition and to provide themselves with conditions of life and levels of national development commensurate with man's modern needs and expectations.

Whatever the country's natural wealth and however much money, technology and expertise are generated, such transformations can only be brought about by mobilising the tremendous social energies and creative power of its people. There is no doubt that Sri Lanka's richest and most vital resource is its highly literate, conscious and educated population. The level of communication that exists through the country, the popularity of the radio, the large variety and wide circulation of newspapers and journals, the advancing scientific outlook, despite the persistence and even increase - in the face of developing social and economic tensions - of backward traditions and supertitious beliefs, the dynamic literary and cultural atmosphere : all these are part of the 'equipment' which the Sri Lankan people have generated from their own traditions and sources as well as from their apprehending of modern ideas, and with which they have set about tackling their contemporary predicament.

An index to the country's modern cultural levels is its educational achievements. In the thirty years since Independence, Sri Lanka has trained about 5,000 doctors and 3,200 engineers, entirely through the organisation of its own academic resources. Sri Lankan scientists both at home and abroad have made important contributions to the world's scientific development in many fields of natural science including astronomy, space research, nuclear physics and microbiology, while historical and social science research is one of the country's most developed fields in this postwar era. Five thousand students enter the university every year. There are ten thousand schools and the school going population numbers nearly two and a half million.

The culture of this transitional epoch can be seen as the combination and the co-existence of traditional and modern modes. A great deal of modern theatre, for instance, employs a mixture of traditional forms of stylisation and modern dramatic conventions, but deals almost exclusively with contemporary themes. At the same time, a number of religious festivals and folk rituals exist and even flourish in a context of traditional belief. The great *perahara* or procession associated with the Tooth Relic temple at Kandy is as much an expression of ritual devotion as it is a colourful and dramatic pageant or spectacle enjoyed by thousands of people. The Buddhist festival of *Vesak,* marking the birth, enlightenment and the passing away of the Buddha, it also a popular celebration, a festival of lights. Towns and villages around the country are ablaze with millions of lamps, from the simple clay bowls and ornate bamboo and paper lanterns to elaborate illuminated scenes and arches made from hundreds of flashing electric bulbs.

The co-existence of the traditional and modern is best seen in such areas as the treatment of sickness and disease. At least three distinct medical systems are in common use, sometimes employed simultaneously. There has been, for about the last hundred years, an island-wide network of modern hospitals and clinics run by the state, and since Independence all aspects of medical and health care have been provided free. At the same time, the traditional systems of medicine, based largely on herbal remedies and the application of oils and plasters, continue to be practised. These two modes of treatment have not been combined in any systematic way, except by the people themselves who use them as alternative methods. Scientific research into traditional medicine is only just beginning, but already indicates a rich and valuable store of medical and pharmacological knowledge, born of centuries of experience in and island which has a number of endemic medicinal plants and herbs.

A third and less well-defined system - effective mainly in the sphere of psychosomatic aliments and dependent entirely on the patient's belief in its efficacy - has its roots in even earlier traditions, involving magical practices and demonic cults. Its principal methods are the propitiation of gods and the exorcision of demons, in elaborate dancing and drumming rituals, sometimes employing masked dancers.

Economic, social and cultural reasons - in addition to medical ones - account for the co-existence of the three systems. Belief, accessibility and familiarity, as well as effectiveness, uphold the traditional systems, which are also much more intimate and human than the 'formalities and bureaucratisation' of modern medical treatment. The urban orientation of the latter and its inherent costs and inconveniences are some of its other disadvantages. At the same time, its greater scientific scope and efficacy and continual development are readily recognised, accounting for the increasing demands made on it. The integration of traditional and modern medicine into a single system is not an unforeseable prospect in the future, especially as it has a sound basis in social practice.

The most dramatic and visible manifestation of the modern transition, however, is the contrast between city and countryside. The capital city of Colombo, surrounded by an arc of satellite towns, semi-rural suburbs and villages, epitomises the achievements and the constraints, the acute problems and the distortions, the progress and the backwardness of modern Sri Lanka. Colombo is built around one of Asai's major harbours and has two airports to the north and south of it. With a metropolitan population of one and a half million, the city is nearly a hundred times more densely crowded thant the rest of the country. Nevertheless, it still merits the title 'the garden city'. Looking out over it from one of its rare high-rise buildings, one still sees an unending expanse of greenery and red tiled roofs. As in any other metropolis, thousands of office workers and commuters queue for trains and buses ; but restrictions on the import of private cars have produced relatively low traffic densities, with the result that Colombo is free of traffic jams and petroleum fumes.

Although as early as 1953 Colombo had a greater density of population than London or New York, its is not - as yet - a concrete jungle ; it still preserves a human scale, from the leafy avenues, trim lawns and mansions of the rich, large and widely-spread areas or urban and suburban middle-class houses, standing in small, shady gardens, to the 'invisible' slums and tenements of the urban poor. Speaking of the city in the early decades of this century, a historian recalls that 'the slums of Colombo, eupheistically called "gardens" - because there had been one upon a time a patch of green around which tenements had been built - were as overcrowded, malodorous and profitable to their owners as those of any metropolis'.

Legislation and controls have almost eliminated that type of landlordism, and 'the odours of the poor no longer assault the noses of the sensitive or go unnoticed by those of the desensitised', but recent surveys have shown that more than half the city's population still live in temporary or semi-permanent housing.

What is true of Colombo is even truer of the village. To a world tired of the smoke and dust of cities, the concrete and macadam of highways and the highly mechanised and polluted environnement of uncontrolled industry, Sri Lanka's twelve thousand villages must certainly seem like *'forty miles from Paradise'* : 'an abundance of greenery filtering bright sunlight, an explosion of flowers, great trees laden with fruit, buffaloes basking in rice fields, men and women bathing in streams, an architecture - of mud walls and thatched roofs - emerging out of the earth and the slow click of wooden cartwheels, like a gentle pacesetter governing the slow but purposeful tempo of rural life...'. But for the people who live in them and enjoy, often unconsciously, their 'serenity and charm', there are also other realities : poverty, landlessness, unemployement and conditions of life which have scarcely changed for hundreds and perhaps thousands of years.

To a visiting artist who painted what she saw as the simplicity, well-being and contentment of rural life, an angry Sri Lankan poet replies :

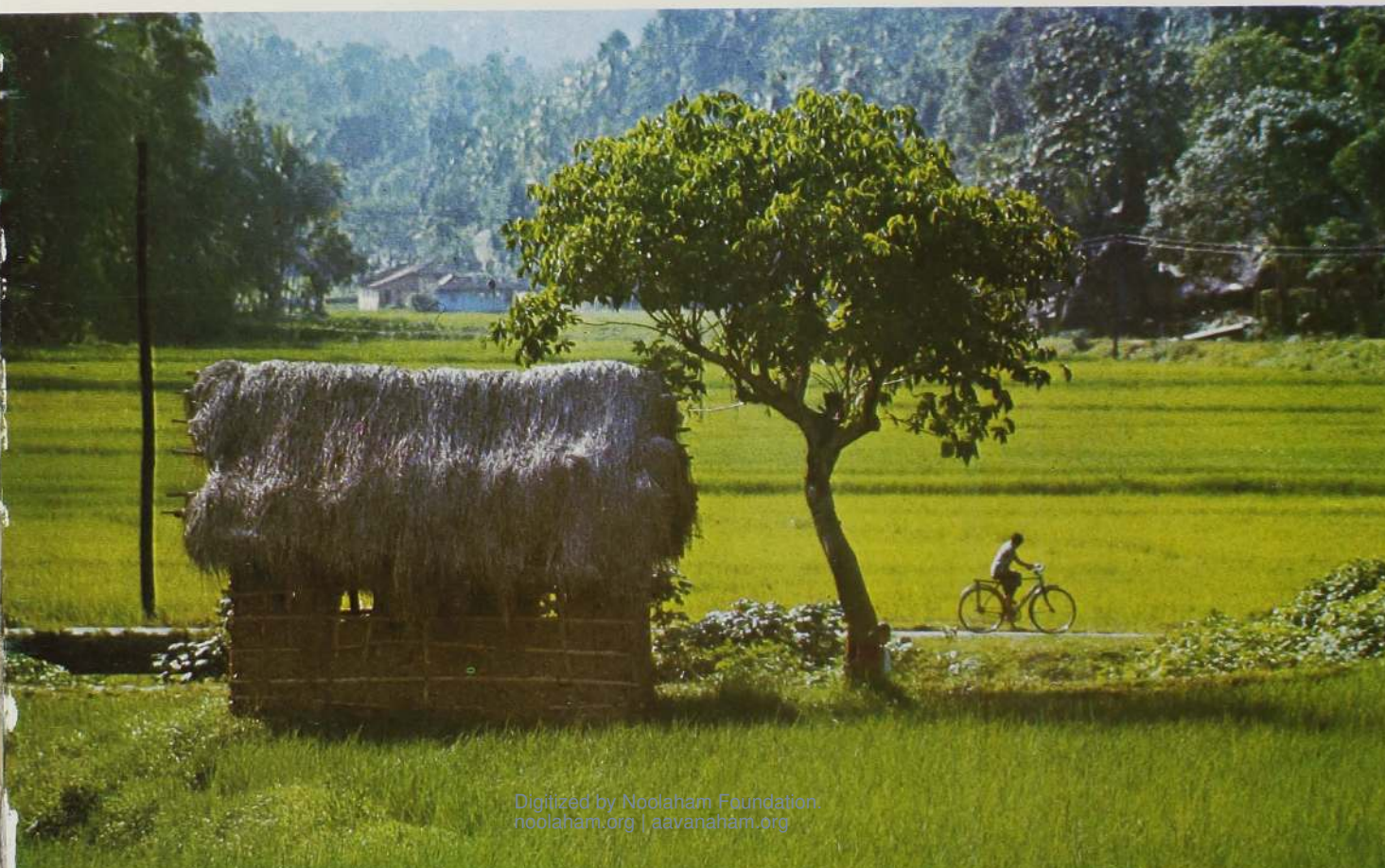
Senora !
Was it you
Who tinted the dark valley of our lives
In the lurid greens of your imagination ?

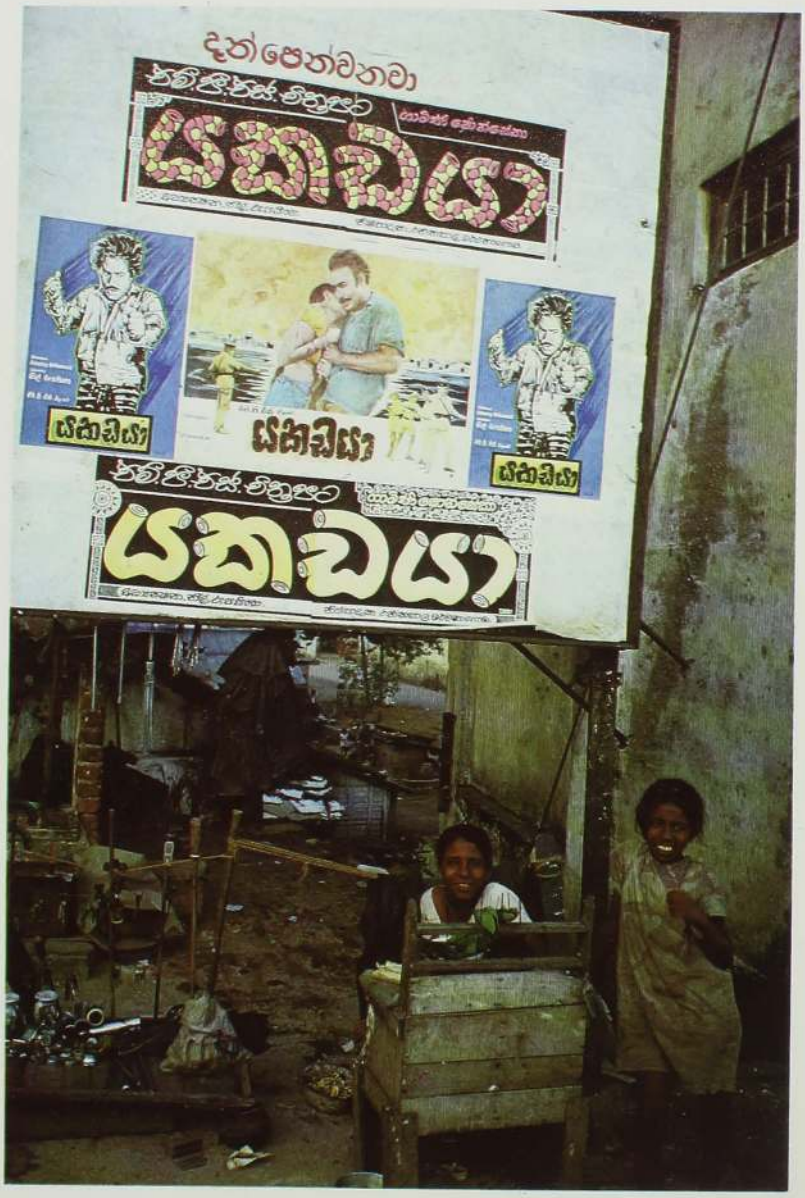
What it you
Who said
We were calm, content ;
Was it you
Who confused
Hunger with continence
Deprivation with simplicity
Destitution
With the economy of line ?

Was it you ?
Answer that !

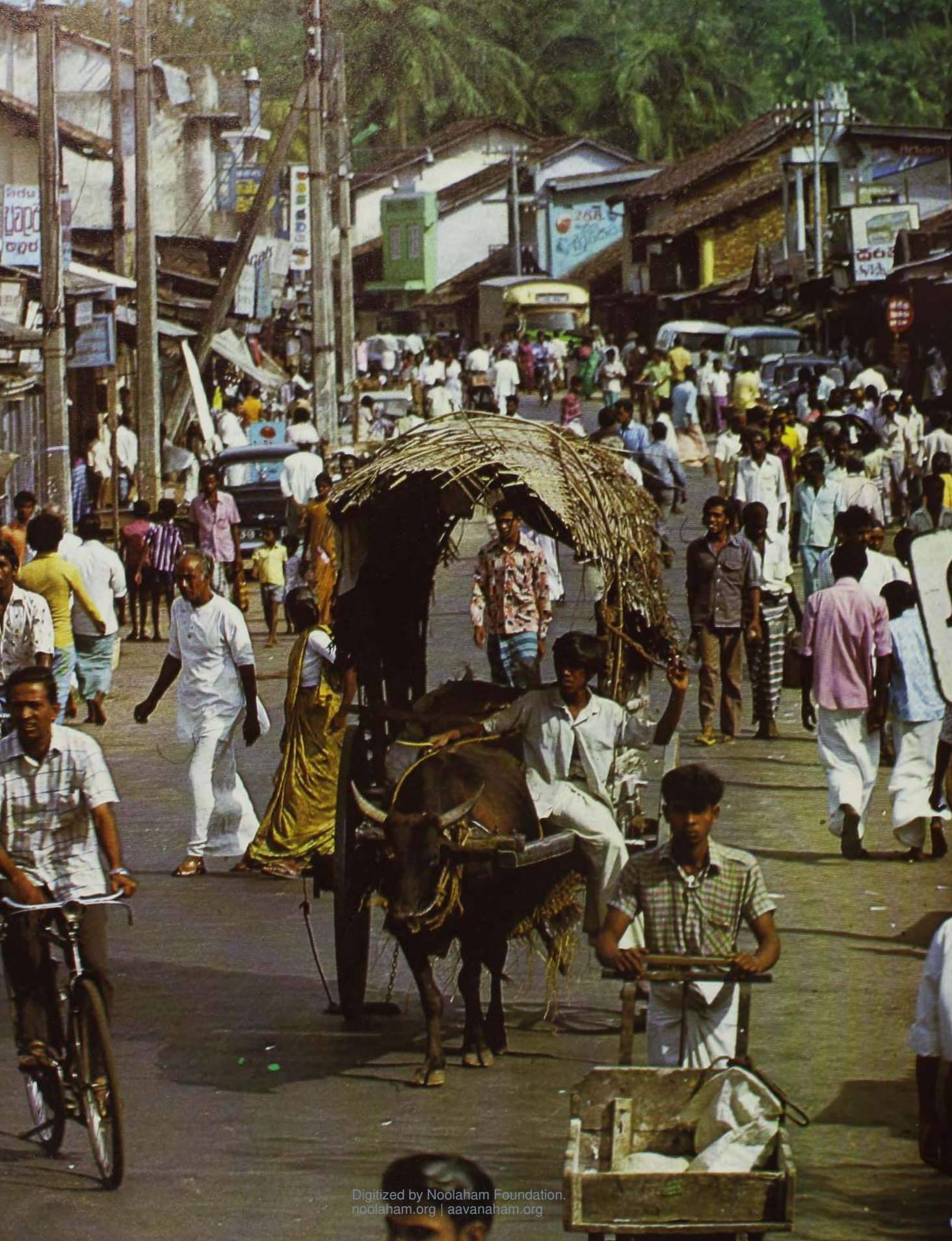
There is no doubt that Sri Lanka, despite its great natural wealth, rich history and articulate people, is a poor and backward country with outstanding economic and social problems. One million of its labour force of about five millions are unemployed, and a large number of this unemployed is talented and educated youth. The island is still dependent on the export of a few primary products - fifty per cent of its foreign earnings coming from the sale of a single commodity, tea - while most of its industrial needs and half its basic food supply are imported. Over the last thirty years there has been a steady decline in its terms of trade, the prices for its agricultural exports falling far below what it pays for its industrial imports : only twice in the last two decades have its annual earnings from exports exceeded its import bills. This resulting trade deficit has been met every year with international loans, creating a heavy burden of debt.

Sri Lanka of the last quarter of the twentieth century is still a traditional society. it has neither lost the rich social, cultural and natural environment which its people have shaped and preserved over the centuries, nor has it extricated itself from the impoverishment, the backwardness and the limitations that are also part and parcel of that inheritance. Its daily life bears both the significance of tradition and its drawbacks ; the slow pace of its modernisation enjoys 'the advantages of placidity and the social and economic price of tardiness'. There is no question of staying in the same place, or of going back : but problematic as the present may be, the modern Sri Lankans are fully capable of determining their island civilisation's path into the future.



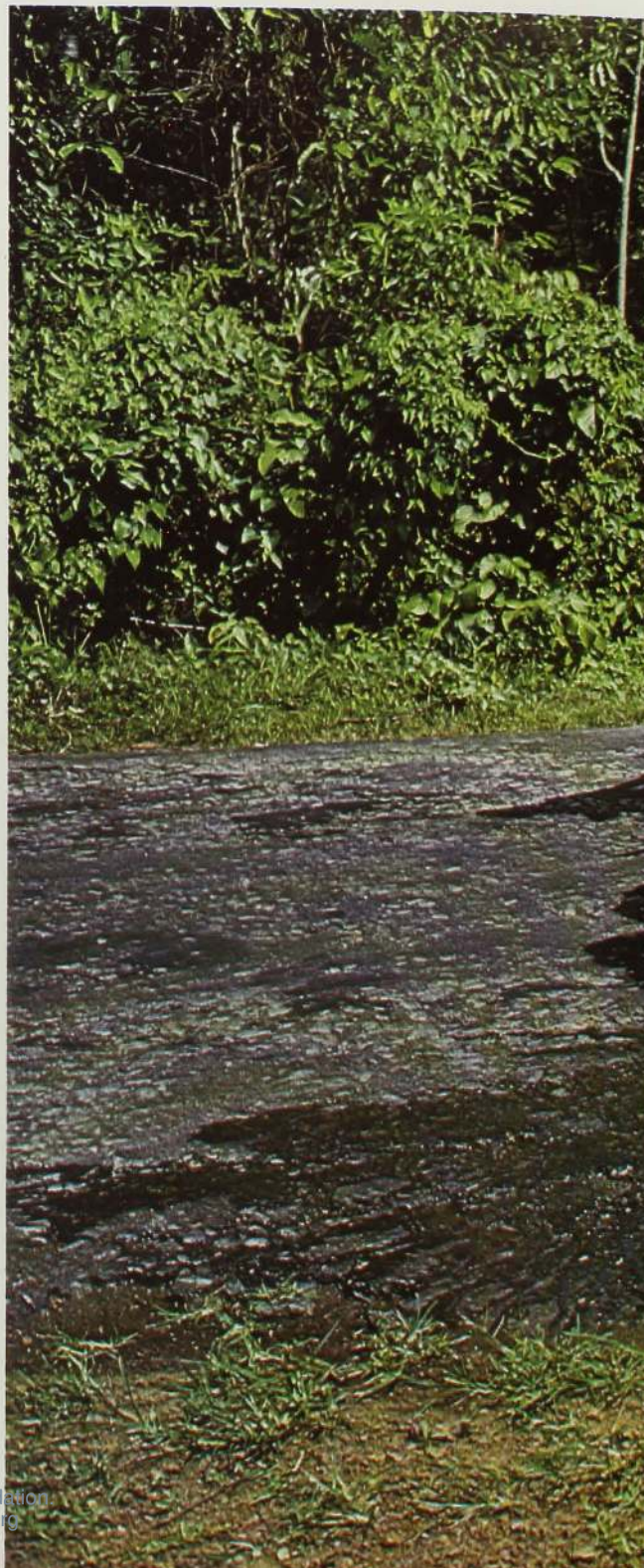


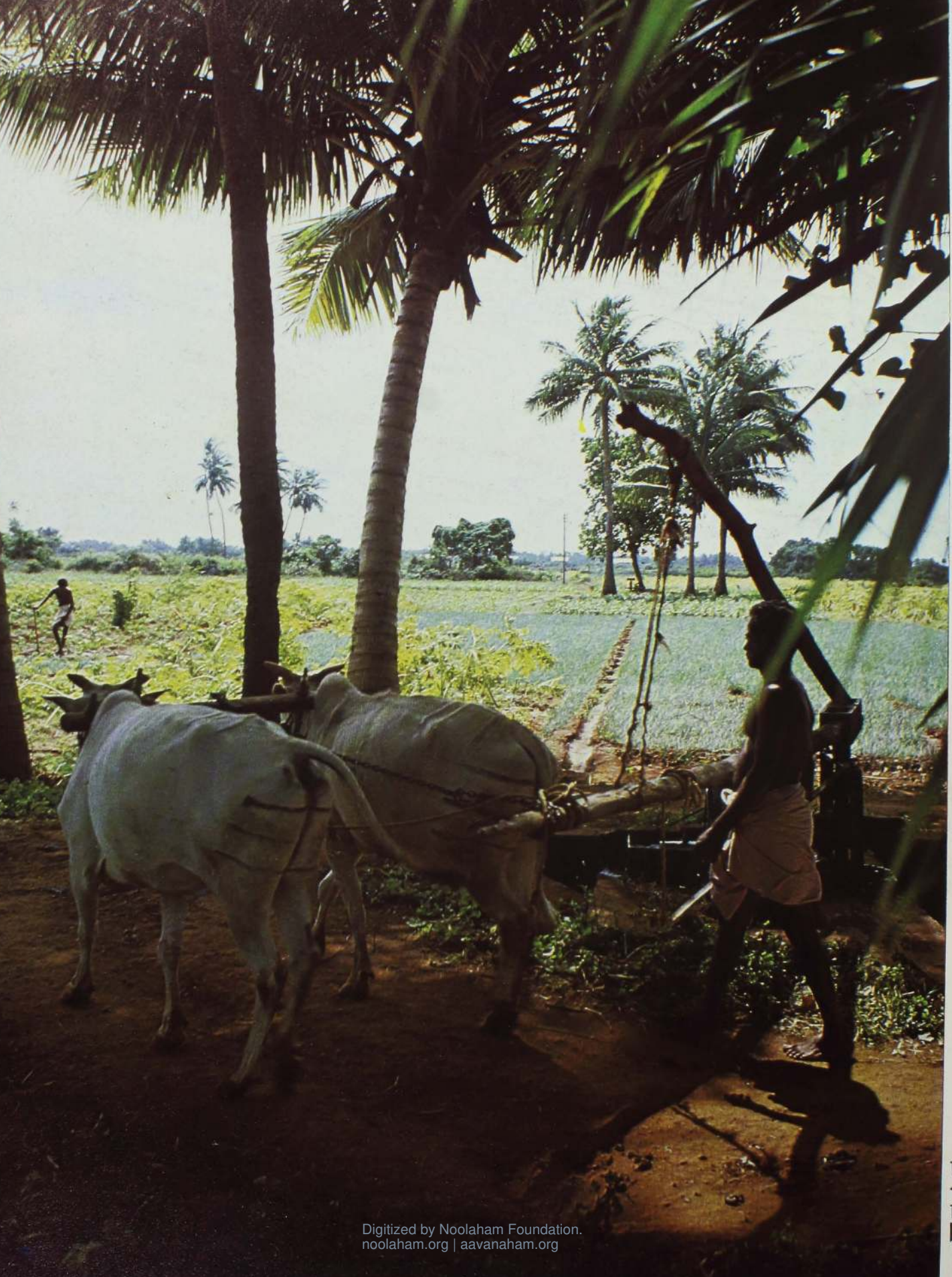
93

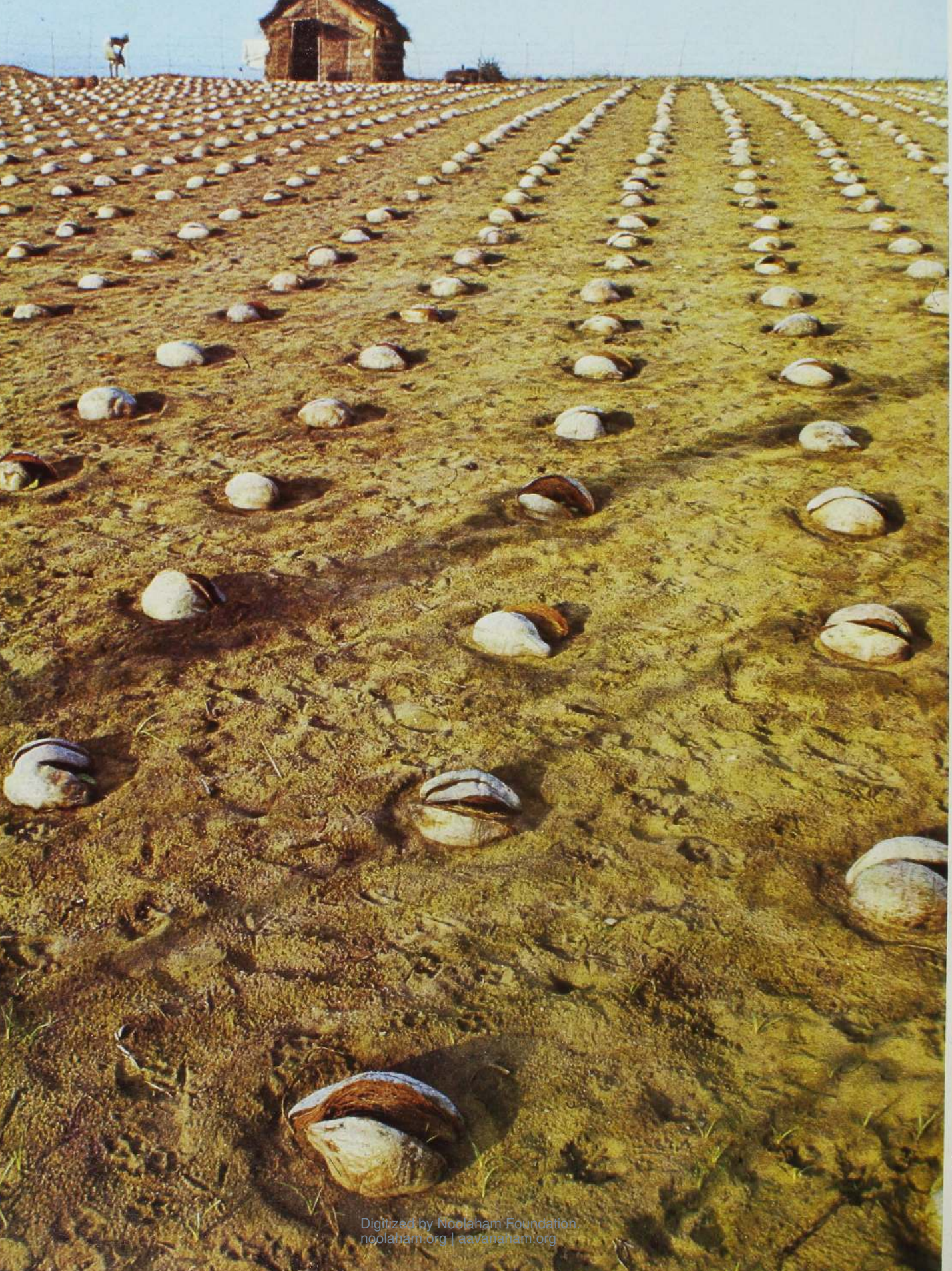


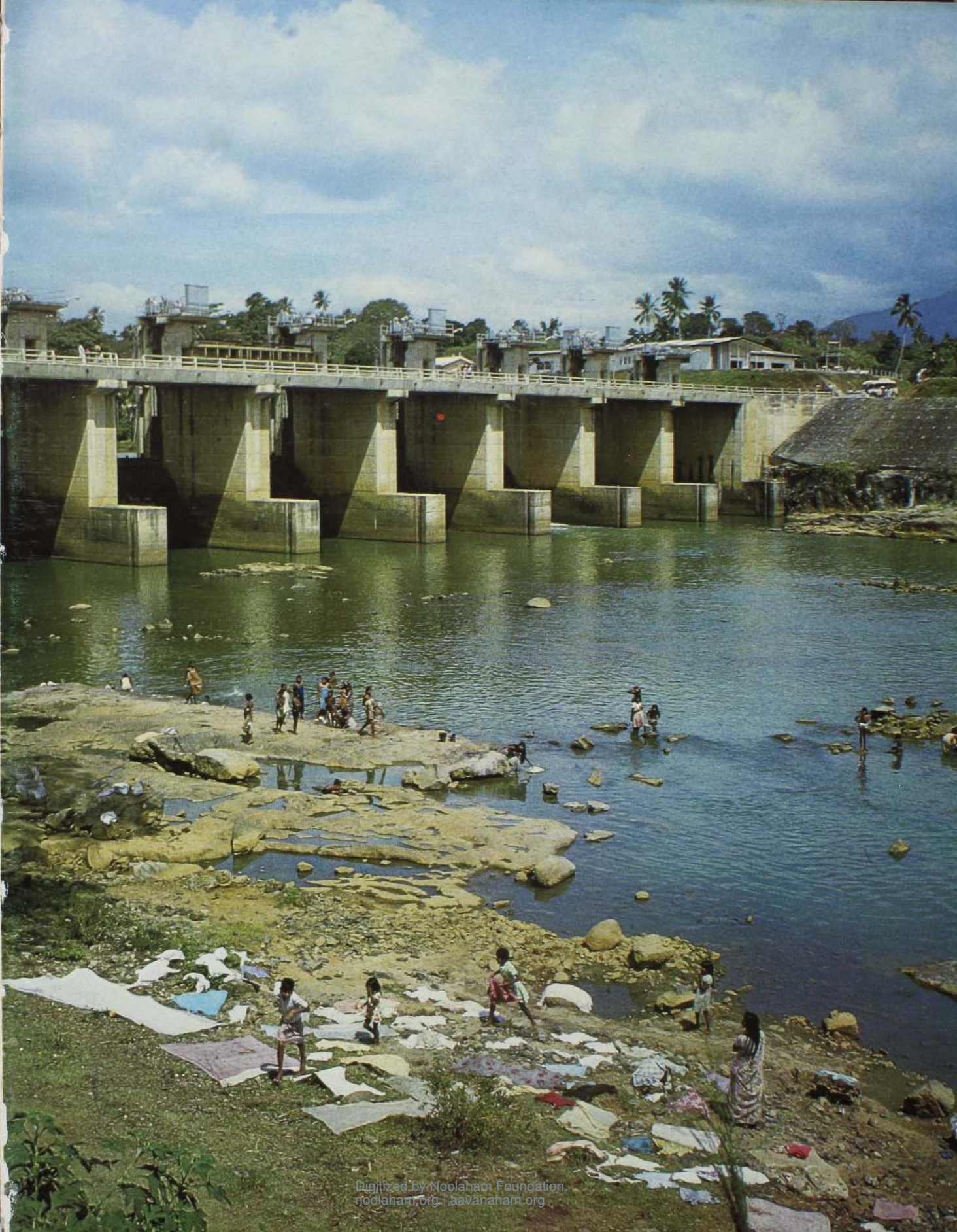
105▲106▼

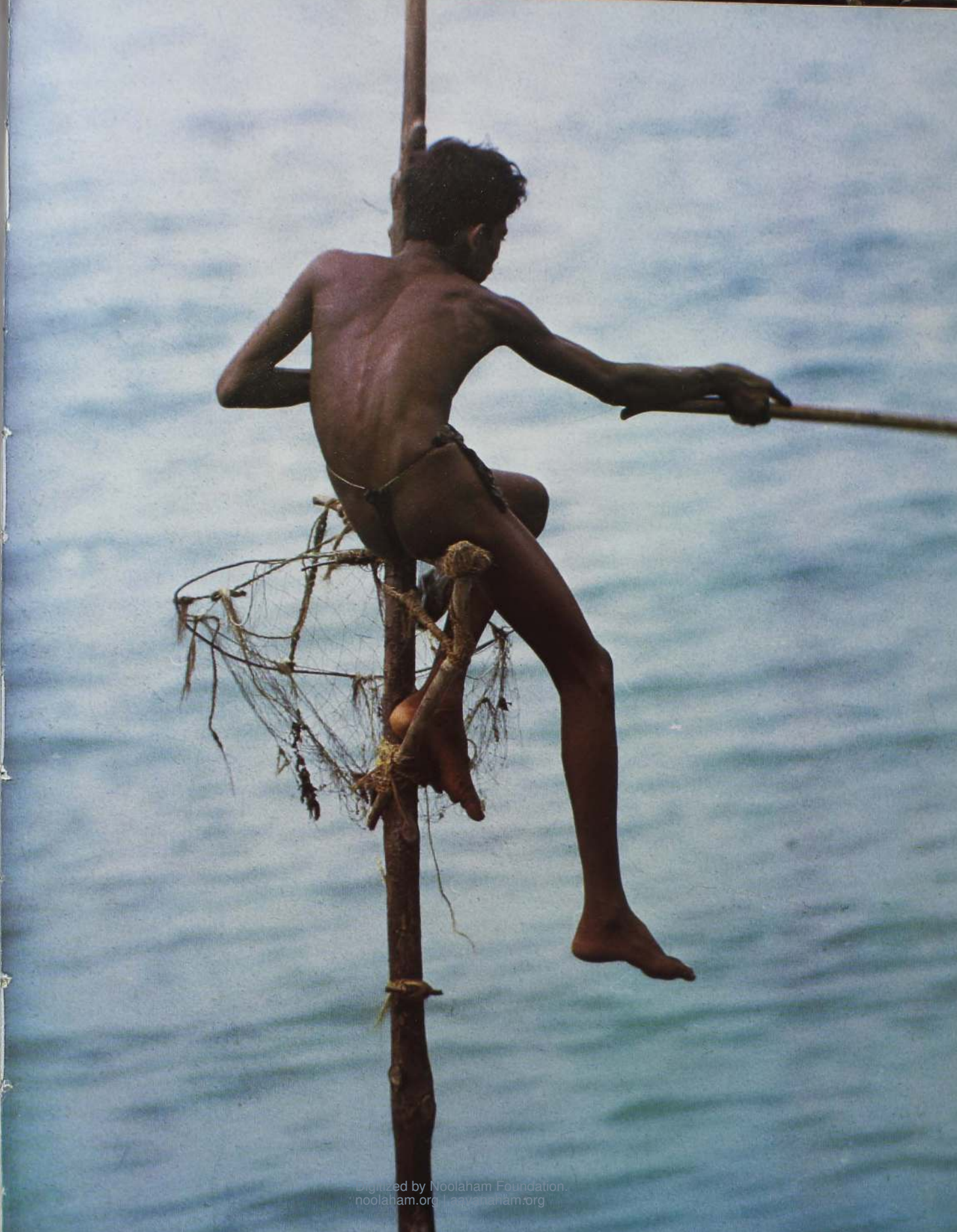
107 ▲ 108 ▼



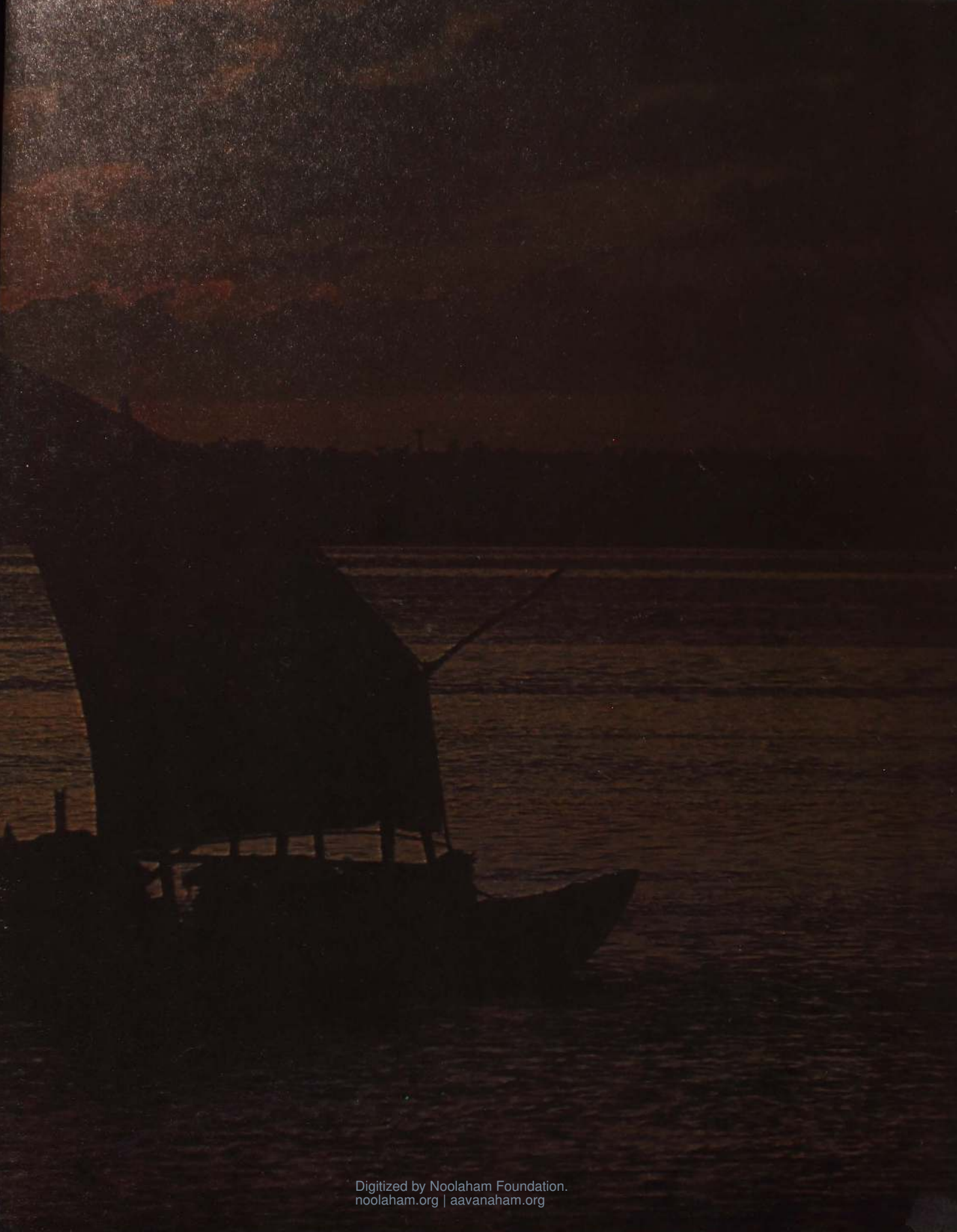








127



PLATES

1. *Betel leaves: ceremonial offering.*
2. *Paddling in the sea at dusk, Colombo.*
3. *Ancient elephant wall (restored), Ruvanvalisaya Dagaba, Anuradhapura.*
4. *Hand holding a lotus bud, Sigiriya paintings, 5th century.*
5. *Tea leaves and tea-plucker.*
6. *Family strolling by the sea.*
7. *Orchids.*
8. *Flowering tree: Cassia fistula.*
9. *Banian (ficus) growing on palm tree-trunk.*
10. *An ancient man-made lake: Nuvaravava, Anuradhapura.*
11. *Beach and island at Weligama.*
12. *Stream in a dry zone forest.*
13. *Palmyra tree and desert landscape, Jaffna peninsula.*
14. *Water carriers at sunset, Duva, Negombo.*
15. *Red water lilies.*
16. *Terraced rice fields near Kandy.*
17. *River and buffaloes.*
18. *Buddhist monks in monastic park, Anuradhapura.*
19. *Dunhinda Falls, Badulla.*
20. *Tea plantations, forests and mountains.*
21. *Boats with pleated sails, Jaffna lagoon.*
22. *Tooth-Relic Temple, palace building and lake, Kandy.*
23. *Fisherman at sunset, near Colombo.*
24. *Peradeniya Campus, University of Sri Lanka.*
25. *Waterhole, forest and sand dunes, Yala National Park.*
26. *Adam's Peak.*
27. *Parakeets.*
28. *House sparrows.*
29. *Blue jay.*
30. *Elephants.*
31. *Spotted deer.*
32. *Ceylon jungle fowl.*
33. *Black Stork.*
34. *Water lizard.*
35. *Wild duck.*
36. *Batik painting: peacock.*
37. *Peacock dancing.*
38. *Buffalo.*
39. *Buffaloes.*
40. *Buffalo.*
41. *Leopard drinking.*

42. *Girl.*
43. *Woman's face (detail) from Sigiriya paintings, 5th century.*
44. *Girl and child.*
45. *Girl and child with baby goat.*
46. *Market vendors.*
47. *Boy and orchids.*
48. *Bathing woman.*
49. *Water carriers at sunset, Duva, Negombo.*
50. *Old man.*
51. *Father and daughter.*
52. *Sunset at Anuradhapura: colossal dagabas and man-made lake.*
53. *Rock-cut images of standing and reclining Buddha, Gal-vihara, Polonnaruva, 12th century.*
54. *Rock-cut image of standing Buddha, Polonnaruva, 12th century (detail).*
55. *Seated Buddha image and throne, Polonnaruva, 12th century.*
56. *Seated Buddha image and throne, Polonnaruva, 12th century (detail).*
57. *Sigiriya: gallery wall and ascent to the palace on the rock, 5th century.*
58. *Woman, Sigiriya paintings, 5th century.*
59. *Golden railing and elephant wall around Sacred Bodhi-Tree at Anuradhapura.*
60. *Thuparama dagaba and remains of circular temple, Anuradhapura.*
61. *Ruvanvalisaya Dagaba, Anuradhapura.*
62. *Stone rice trough, monastic refectory, Mihintale.*
63. *Rock-cut images of the Bodhisattva Vajrapani and attendants, Buduruvagala, 7th-10th centuries.*
64. *Buddhist monasteries, Abhayagirivihara, Anuradhapura.*
65. *Moonstone at entrance to monastic residence, Mahavihara, Anuradhapura.*
66. *Stone pillars of a ruined monastic building, Anuradhapura.*
67. *Hollow circular Buddhist temple in the form of a dagaba (modern), Kalutara.*
68. *Interior of a Christian church, Negombo.*
69. *Modern Hindu temple on a tea plantation in the central hills.*
70. *Entrance archway, Kalaniya Temple, 19th century.*
71. *Oil lamps and flower offerings.*
72. *Ancient elephant wall, Ruvanvalisaya Dagaba, Anuradhapura.*
73. *Wall-paintings in the image-house of the Subhodarama temple, Dehiwela, 19th century.*
74. *Devotees at Sacred Bodhi-Tree shrine, Anuradhapura.*
75. *Woman in meditation.*
76. *Doorway of Tooth-Relic Temple, Kandy.*
77. *Monk with umbrella and fan.*
78. *Golden reliquary containing the Sacred Tooth-Relic. Tooth-Relic Temple, Kandy.*
79. *Offering temple flowers (plumeria).*
80. *Ceremonial dressing of a young dancer.*
81. *Reclining Buddha image, Subodharama Temple, Dehiwela.*
82. *Painted wooden panel depicting the "Nine-women-elephant", Tooth-Relic Temple, Kandy.*
83. *Ceremonial elephant, Kalaniya Temple procession.*
84. *Religious procession - batik painting.*
85. *Mosque, Pettah, Colombo.*

86. *Fish vendor by the sea.*
87. *Village hut and rice fields.*
88. *City/Centre, Colombo - aerial view.*
89. *Bangle stall, Pettah, Colombo.*
90. *Modern hanging lamps.*
91. *Bandaranaike Memorial International Conference Hall, Colombo.*
92. *Wayside stalls, Galle.*
93. *Film posters and betel seller.*
94. *Film posters and street sweeper.*
95. *Sweet seller, Jaffna market.*
96. *Street scene, Kandy.*
97. *Fruit stalls.*
98. *Sea Street, Colombo.*
99. *Fish vendor.*
100. *Pineapple seller and canon, Galle Face Green, Colombo.*
101. *Sunset on Galle Face Green.*
102. *Nineteenth century houses, Galle.*
103. *Central Bus Station, Kandy.*
104. *Cricket on the esplanade, Galle.*
105. *Villagers and bullock cart.*
106. *Suburban home.*
107. *Fisherman.*
108. *Modern fishing boats, Negombo.*
109. *Flaming torches at Devolmaduva ceremony (propitiation of gods).*
110. *Dancer wearing Snake-demon mask.*
111. *Rubber tapper.*
112. *Making rubber sheets.*
113. *Palmyra palms.*
114. *Tea plantation.*
115. *Turning the water wheel, Jaffna.*
116. *Elephant feeding.*
117. *Tobacco farm.*
118. *Bathers by dam.*
119. *Elephant and truck.*
120. *Batik printing.*
121. *Drying paddy, Batticaloa.*
122. *Gem mining.*
123. *Cut and uncut gems.*
124. *Panning for gems.*
125. *Stilt fishing, Weligama.*
126. *Hauling in the net, Galle.*
127. *Fishing boats at sunset.*
128. *Girls.*
129. *Sunset over the lagoon, near Hikkaduva.*

NOTES

The quotations in the text are taken from the works listed below. In some cases quotations have been edited and translations modified for ease of reading.

Introductory Chapter

page 6 Translation of Onesicritos' observations by Arthur Golding quoted in Elsie K. Cook, **Ceylon : Its Geography, its Resources and its People,** Madras, etc., 1951.
page 6 De Marignolli quoted in Henry Yule, **Cathay and the Way Thither,** London, 1886.
page 6 **Rajavali,** translated by B. Gunasekara, Colombo, 1954.

The Environment

page 46 L.H. Cramer, 'Taxonomic and Floristic Aspects of Plant Conservation in Sri Lanka', **Sri Lanka Association for the Advancement of Science - Special International Sessions, Colombo, 1976.**
page 48 Savitri Gunatilleke in talk given to the Sri Lanka Association for the Advancement of Science, Colombo, April 1978.
page 48 John Still, **The Jungle Tide,** Edinburgh, and London, 1930.
page 50 J. Haafner, **Travels on Foot through the Island of Ceylon,** (translated from the Dutch), London, 1821.
page 51 Alfred Clark, **Sport in the Low-Country of Ceylon,** London, 1910.
page 51 Harry Storey, **Hunting and Shooting in Ceylon,** London, etc., 1907.
page 51 **Epigraphia Zeylanica** Vol. 2, Pt. 2, edited and translated by D.M. de Z. Wickremasinghe, 1914.
page 53 Lyn de Alwis in **Ceylon Observer Pictorial,** 1969.
page 54 D.J.G. Hennessy, **Green Aisles,** Colombo, 1949.
page 55 D.J.G. Hennessy, op cit.
page 56 'Gira-Sandesaya' (The Parrot's Message), translated by H. Peiris and L.C. van Geyzel in **An Anthology of Sinhalese Literature up to 1815,** edited by C.H.B. Reynolds, London, 1970.
page 56 C.W. Nicholas in **University of Ceylon History of Ceylon,** Vol. 1, edited by Senerat Paranavitana, Colombo, 1959-60.

People

page 75 Kartigesu Indrapala in **University of Ceylon History of Ceylon,** Vol. 3, edited by K.M. de Silva, Colombo, 1973.
page 76 Robert Percival, **An Account of the Island of Ceylon,** London, 1803.
page 76 Martin Wickremasinghe, **Sinhala Language and Culture,** Dehiwela, 1975.

History, Culture and Religion

page 94 Fa-Hsien,**A Record of the Buddhist Countries,** translated by Li Yung-hsi, Peking, 1957 ; and **The Travels of Fa-Hsien** by H.A. Giles.

page 95 James Emerson Tennent, **Ceylon : Ana Account of the Island,** etc., 1959.

page 96 **The Mahavamsa of the Great Chronicle of Ceylon,** translated by Wilhelm Geiger, London, 1912.

page 98 Senarat Paranavitana, **Art and Architecture of Ceylon : Polonnaruva Period,** Colombo, 1954.

page 101 **Nikaya-samgraha** of Jayabahu Devarakkhita, translated by C.M. Fernando, Colombo, 1908.

page 101 Translation from al-Maqrizi, in H.W. Codrington, 'A Sinhalese Embassy to Egypt', **Journal of the Ceylon Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society,** Vol. 28.

page 101 John Still, op cit.

page 104 C.W. Nicholas and Senarat Paranavitana, **A Concise History of Ceylon,** Colombo, 1961.

page 104 Robert Percival, op cit.

page 104 Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, **Mediaeval Sinhalese Art,** Broad Campden, 1907.

page 106 Walpola Rahula, **History of Buddhism in Ceylon,** Colombo, 1956.

page 107 E.R. Sarachchandra, **The Folk Drama of Ceylon,** Colombo, 1956.

page 108 John Still, op cit.

The Modern Transition

page 143 P.E. Pieris, **The Prince Vijaya Pala of Ceylon 1634-1654,** Colombo, 1927.

page 143 H.W. Cave, **The Book of Ceylon,** London, etc., 1908.

page 144 From a document published in Portuguese sources and quoted by George Davidson Winius, **The Fatal History of Portuguese Ceylon,** Cambridge, Mass., 1971.

page 149 Joan Robinson in **Papers by Visiting Economists, Colombo, 1959.**

page 155 E.F.C. Ludowyk, **The Modern History of Ceylon,** London, 1966.

page 156 'The Lady of the Terrace', **The English Bulletin,** N° 2, April 1978, The English Association of Sri Lanka, Colombo.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A book of this nature depends on the collaboration and assistance of a number of people. A special word of acknowledgement, however, is due to Victor Walatar who first conceived of this publication and who organised and coordinated the project throught its various stages. His enthusiasm, tact and persuasiveness saw it through the many inevitable problems, while his advice and comments have added considerably to its final form. Manel Fonseka did much of the research and made many useful and creative suggestions, contributing greatly to the editing and shaping of the text. The maps were drawn by P.L.M. Liyanage of the University of Sri Lanka.

Printed by Editions DELROISSE
107-109, rue de Paris - 92100 BOULOGNE - France

Photographs Christian and Nadine ZUBER
The photographs listed below are by
Rohan de SOYSA (photos 90 - 109 - 110)
Ganini JAYASINGHE (photos 7 - 8 - 10 - 52)
Fred MALVENNA (photos 19 - 26 - 88)
Dr. M. S. WEERAKOON (photos 46 - 68 - 69 - 77 - 86 - 87 - 89 - 105 - 106 - 107 - 108 - 110)

Exclusivity for the sale LAKE HOUSE BOOKSHOP
COLOMBO – SRI LANKA

Dépôt légal No 811
ISBN 2-85518-037-6

PEINTURES
HAITIENNES
HAITI
GUADELOUPE
MARTINIQUE

DJIBOUTI
TAHITI
NELLE CALEDONIE
LOYAUTE

COMORES
REUNION
SEYCHELLES

St PIERRE
et MIQUELON
HONDURAS
ÎLE de PÂQUES
EQUATEUR
GALAPAGOS
ARGENTINE
SURINAM
NICARAGUA
COSTA RICA
EL SALVADOR
PANAMA
BOLIVIE
COLOMBIE
GUATEMALA
CHILI

CACHEMIRE
NEPAL
RAJASTHAN
CEYLAN

THAILANDE
INDONESIE
JAVA BALI
SUMATRA
LES CÉLÈBES