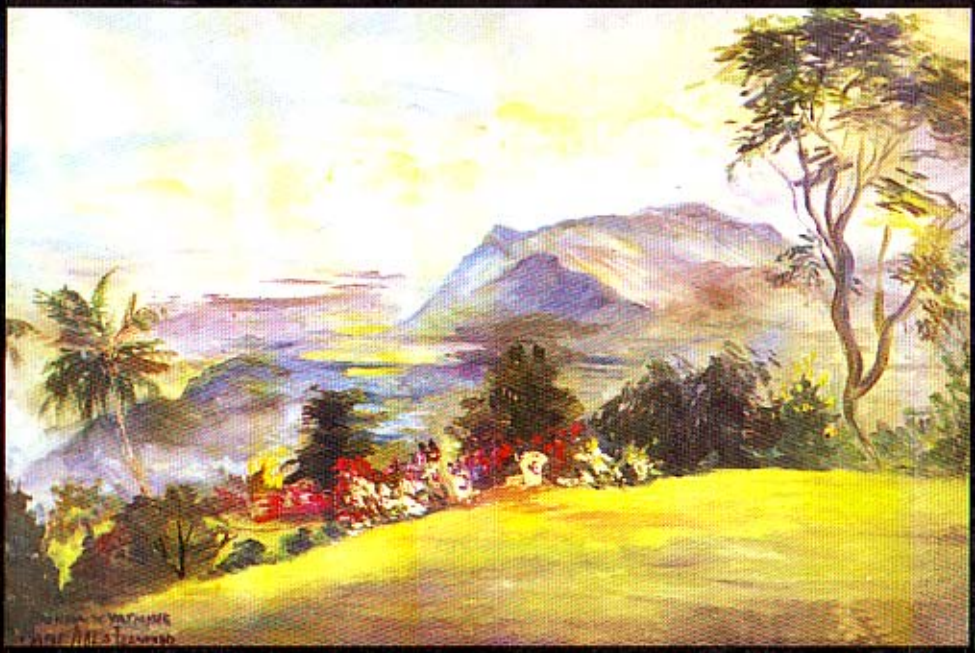
CELEBRATING SRI LANKAN WOMEN'S ENGLISH WRITING

Volume II



Yasmine Gooneratne

Women's Education & Research Centre

CELEBRATING SRI LANKAN WOMEN'S ENGLISH WRITING: 1948 - 2000

Volume II

By

Yasmine Gooneratne

A ♀ Publication

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Page of Errata

Page 326, para 2, line 3: Burden Neurological Research Institute

Page 326, para 2, line 5 et seq: Following her marriage in 1949 to Dr. Don Abraham Ranasinghe (later Professor and Head of the Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology of the University of Colombo, Chancellor of the University of Colombo, and Professor Emeritus), she arrived in Colombo in 1952, becoming a Sri Lankan citizen in 1956. She is the mother of two daughters and two sons, as well as of three children from her husband's first marraige.

Page 326, para 3, lines 6 & 7: It has been translated into nine languages (Sinhala, Tamil, Japanese, Spanish, French, German, Serbo-Croat, Dutch and Swedish).

Page 326, para 4, line 1: 15 years (1975 - 1990)

Page 326, para 4, line 4: Commonwealth Jewish Council

Page 327, para 1, line 4: symbol of endurance, and travelled with the Exhibition through Commonwealth countries with a Jewish population.

Page 327, para 3, lines 4 - 5: 'Holocaust 1944'

Page 328, para 5, lines 3 - 4: She is the only Jewish writer of Sri Lankan nationality

Page 332, under Publications, item 4: At What Dark Point

Page 335, under Other Sources, item 3:

line 1: Heimsuchung

line 2: numerous reviews of Lentz's film(45 Minutes)

Page 448, line 1: At What dark Point(1991)

DEDICATED

TO

THE FACILITATORS:

THE WOMEN WHO TAUGHT US

AND THE MEN

WHO BELIEVED IN US

Preface

It is with a sense of pride that I am settling down to write this foreword to this book. We have come to a journey's end, end of the task we undertook as regards women's writings in English in Sri Lanka This is the second of the series, the first focussing on the colonial period and this on the post colonial period of our island's literary and cultural history.

We have to thank many for their assistance. First on the list, are the Zaaire Foundation and Ms. Mia Berden who gave us a generous grant to carry out this gigantic task of recording 550 years of writing. Finding a capable and committed person to undertake the task was not easy. Credit must go to Professor Lakshmi de Silva for recommending Professor Yasmine Gooneratne as a suitable author for the second volume, an excellent choice for which we are grateful. Yasmine's task was to identify, collect, document and analyse the literary productions of 52 years, a responsibility she carried out with meticulous care and enthusiasm. Being prohibited for ethical reasons, however, from writing about her own work and career, Professor Lakshmi de Silva undertook authorship of that part of the volume.

Many writers collaborated with us in this endeavour. Very promptly (and sometimes not so promptly!) women writers sent in details of year, title, and publishers of their books, in many cases shedding light on the often difficult circumstances in which women's writing has been carried on over several decades. WERC wants to place on record its appreciation of their collaboration. We have all become the beneficiaries in the process, for, I am sure, that they appreciate the fact that inclusion in this historic volume has guaranteed their writing a place in posterity.

Yasmine was in Australia and I in Colombo, during the preparation and writing of this book. Despite this, there were no misunderstandings and no breakdown in communication during the months of our collaboration. We found electronic contact useful and rewarding, and we both are happy with the results of our hard work.

One other person whose contribution to the project was of the utmost importance was Sunandaseeli, who typeset the manuscript, wrestled with formatting problems during a period in which Colombo was plagued with power cuts. She proved herself indispensable in accomplishing all the related work. I thank her most sincerely for all her help.

Selvy Thiruchandran
Women's Education & Research Centre. 2002

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INTRODUCTION

In researching and documenting for this project the fiction and poetry published in English by Sri Lankan women living in the island and outside it between 1948 and 2000, I have benefited from assistance that came to me from many directions. Two publications by Eva Ranaweera, her book *Some Literary Women of Sri Lanka* (1991) and a special issue of her journal *Voice of Women* (2000) which focused on Sri Lankan women's writing, provided useful starting-points for the study. Eva herself, together with Lakshmi de Silva, Anthea Senaratne, Anne Ranasinghe, Rajiva Wijesinha, and Tissa Jayatilaka have been especially helpful in putting me in touch with many contemporary writers in Sri Lanka and overseas. My husband Dr Brendon Gooneratne's extensive library of Sri Lankan first editions was an indispensable resource. And then - appropriately to a project involving Sri Lanka - 'serendipity', too, has played its part: my husband's happening on Karen Roberts's novel *The Flower Boy* while browsing in a Canberra bookshop, a chance meeting with Jeanne Thwaites at a Writers' Workshop at the "Wadiya" in Colombo, an inquiry from Dipti Saravanamuttu about a possible Residency at Pemberley ... There have been many such happy discoveries. Inevitably, since time available to the project was limited, and since some writers were travelling during the time of its preparation and could not access their papers, there are omissions too. But at least an outline has been provided, which others will fill in during the years to come.

The entrance of Sri Lankan women into the field of English creative writing is by no means a new phenomenon. The first novel written in English by a Sri Lankan woman (Rosalind Mendis's *The Tragedy of a Mystery: A Ceylon Story*) was published in London **circa** 1928; Eileen Siriwardhana's poetic consciousness (as Lakshmi de Silva notes in her preface to *Realisation*) 'bridges both the colonial and the post-colonial eras'. Sri Lankan women have

become during the last fifty years 'the standard bearers of Sri Lankan writing in English', as Carl Muller described them in *The Island* last year (see the **General Bibliography**). Poetry and fiction (in the form of the short story) have been perennially popular genres with women writers, partly because they take less time to write than novels; and time to spend on writing, as the entry in this survey on the work of Kamala Wijeratne indicates, is what most Sri Lankan women writers do not have.

A point that was made by Ryhana Raheem and Siromi Fernando in 1979 is relevant in connection with the difficulties encountered by female creative writers. They asserted that 'all ... women who have engaged in creative English writing in Sri Lanka come from an English-speaking, westernised upper class', i.e., they belonged to a numerically limited group of socially privileged Sri Lankan women who had either benefited from the intensive exposure to Western culture that was generally available only in city schools in Sri Lanka or in schools and colleges overseas; or, they had the private means to avoid having to earn their own living; or, they could afford the domestic help with child care and household chores that gave them leisure for the concentrated effort which goes into creative writing. The literary biographies in this survey show that as a result of the profound social, political and economic changes which have occurred in Sri Lanka since Independence, the 'group' of Sri Lankan women who write creatively is no longer subject to these particular limitations, although the cultural conditioning that inhibits the creativity of its members appears to remain, except in special cases, unchanged (see the case studies relevant to women's attempts to reconcile their roles at home and in the work-place cited in S. Kiribamune, ed., *Reconciliation of Roles* 1992).

To this might be added a further observation (made by Eva Ranaweera in the special issue of *Voice of Women* devoted to "Women Writing" (2000) referred to earlier) that

> neglect and marginalisation of women writers has taken place over the years. For a long time women's writing had been looked at by the critical male-dominated establishment as limited in

> experience and 'womanly' in expression as well as non-'scientific' in content.

These were factors that brought the credibility of women's writing into question. They were, as is well known, replicated in other societies, in both Europe and Asia. The idea, once very common, that the natural talents of women are limited to 'reflections of domestic life and of autobiographical experience', has of course long been disproved. But it had, while it lasted, a crippling effect on the development of women's writing in Europe; while in Asia (as in Victorian England), matters were made worse by the force of rigid conventions that confined women to their 'proper sphere' of domestic life, the smooth running of households and the rearing of docile and obedient children. The writing of women was - it had to be - a private indulgence (no doubt often accompanied by feelings of acute guilt that time which should have been devoted to household tasks had been selfishly 'wasted' on writing), and it was not taken seriously by anyone who 'mattered': certainly not by male critics, many of whom were academics, or by male readers, most of whom regarded their own professional careers and leisure activities such as playing bridge and the watching of cricket matches as much more legitimate activities than the writing by women of novels and poems.

It has become very clear to me as I worked on this project - and especially on the works and careers of early pioneers such as Rosalind Mendis and Eileen Siriwardhana - that the lack of understanding prevailing in Sri Lanka fifty years ago of the writer's social function, and of the tensions from which the English-language writer works must have been general and total. Many authors wrote without the active encouragement of publishers, and without any but the most misguided sympathy and admiration from a public that either respected them for their command of English or saw them as supporting some political faction or other, not crediting them for a moment with other compulsions to write than the demonstration of that command, or the voicing of a political opinion. Nearly all Sri Lankan female authors who persisted in writing in such discouraging circumstances wanted to express themselves and had no other means by which they could do so.

They certainly didn't do it for the money! Rosalind Mendis, Sri Lanka's first woman novelist, had her submission accepted by a British publisher, but the payment she received was only 'in kind' - i.e., in the form of 500 authors' copies. Presumably it was these copies that she put on sale in Sri Lanka, where, as she recalled in 1991, they were 'a sell-out'.

Reporting on a conference on Sri Lankan poetry in English that was held at the British Council in January 1991, the short-story writer and poet Gertrude de Livera noted that in general discussion it had been observed that editors of magazines treat poetry 'as a sort of space filler in their columns'. Unfortunately, the view that literature is merely a pleasant distraction from everyday realities dies hard in a country that is struggling through times of unprecedented hardship to industrialise itself on the one hand, and to rid itself of the burden of an ethnic civil war on the other. That readers and educationists within the island are beginning to acknowledge the value of local literature is due to the efforts over fifty years of a handful of enlightened reviewers and translators who kept standards high in the daily and weekly press; to such university magazines as *Harvest* and *Sankha*, and later C. R. Hensman's *Community*, which not only insisted on taking Sri Lankan writing seriously, but circulated it to readers at home and abroad from as early as 1962; to the *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, which has published an annual bibliography of Sri Lankan writing in English since 1966; and to the independent journal *New Ceylon Writing*, established in 1970 by two academics at the University in Peradeniya with a view to putting Sri Lankan writers in touch with one anothers' work, and with an informed audience in Sri Lanka and overseas. *New Ceylon Writing* carried out its objectives successfully from 1970 to 1984. Making clear its interest in encouraging writing that drew on local situations and used Sri Lankan idiom and speech rhythms, the journal awarded prizes from its limited budget to the best English short story and poem in a particular year. Its successors, *Navasilu, New Lankan Review, Channels,* and *Waves* among them, have continued this useful function to the present day.

In 1976 a group of University teachers put together *Reading With Understanding*, an anthology of literature for senior school students that broke with convention by including for the first time the work of local writers. State Awards now exist at the national level for English writing, Sri Lankan critics and authors occasionally serve on juries for the Commonwealth Writers Prize, and these factors, together with the establishment of the Gratiaen Prize for resident writers in English, have helped to create a reading public that is much more encouraging than that of fifty years ago.

A major obstacle to the development of creative writing in Sri Lanka generally has been the absence of good publishing houses. The kind of institution that would encourage and nurture beginning writers, appoint experienced literary editors to advise them on such matters as the structuring, editing and (in these days of computers) formatting of their work, and do their best to secure for them a readership at home and abroad, has simply not been available. In addition there is the problem that, with a very few exceptions, Sri Lanka's publishers will not pay for the printing and distribution of a book unless it has an assured market as a school or university text book. Writers have, for this reason, been forced in most cases to publish their fiction and poetry privately, at their own expense: which means, to have their manuscripts printed by a local press, and to handle the burden of publicising and distributing the finished work themselves.

Among the publishing houses that have supported creative literature, and made it possible for writers to appear regularly before the public are: Lake House Investments, Colombo; Hansa Publishers, Colombo; K. V. G. de Silva, Colombo; Vijitha Yapa, Colombo; Godage Poth Mendura, Colombo; and M. D. Gunasena, Colombo. Among the printing establishments that have given privately published authors good presentation should be mentioned T. B. S. Godamunne & Sons of Kandy; Pagoda, Nugegoda; Sarvodaya Vishwalekha of Colombo; General Printing (Pvt) Ltd., Colombo; and Wimal Enterprises, Colombo. A few publishers, such as Lake House Investments, the Women's Education Centre, Hansa Publishers, K. V. G. de Silva, Voice of Women, and Vijitha Yapa have, however, shown their faith in Sri Lankan writing by helping authors to become known and available in paperback.

Penguin Books India and other publishing houses in the sub-continent, too, have been active during the last fifteen years or so in publishing books written or edited by Sri Lankan authors.

The last thirty years have witnessed the establishment of numerous creative writers' groups and workshops. A Creative Writing course initiated in the early 1980s (see the entry in this survey on the writer Maureen Seneviratne) was possibly the first of this kind: today several organisations, including the English Writers' Co-operative of Sri Lanka, encourage the practice of writing. The useful work done by *Community* and *New Ceylon Writing* in opening up communication lines between English-language writers and the larger community, and between those writers themselves, has been continued by *Channels*, an annually published journal of creative writing produced by members of this Co-operative. Maureen Seneviratne, who was associated with Anne Ranasinghe and Rajiva Wijesinha in editing and producing the first issue of *Channels*, described succinctly in her editorial the cultural situation that had inspired the venture:

> Writers Cooperatives exist in many countries today and, doubtless like ours, arose 'spontaneously in response to some pressing need': in this instance the need to establish a 'channel' for publication of qualitative creative writing - stories, poems, plays, *belles letters*, reviews etc. in English; in a milieu where writers, even of a high calibre and recognised, find it almost impossible to find publishers for their work and the encouragement they need, by the very 'channel' of publication, to spur them on to even more creative writing.

Channels comes each year from a different editorial hand, thus providing opportunities over time for Sri Lanka's authors to gain practice in editing, printing, designing and publishing the literary efforts of their contemporaries. This is a wonderful idea, and provides a most useful service, for it offers writers a way to hone their editorial skills without taking too much time away from their own writing. Volume 1, No. 1 of the journal has become, like the first issues of *Community* and *New Ceylon Writing*,

collectors' items in Sri Lanka. The works by women in the historic first issue of *Channels* include Anne Ranasinghe's moving prose account of her family's destruction by the Nazis in 1944; poems by Jean Arasanayagam and her daughter Parvathi that stress in different ways their identity as descendants of an 'undeniable [Dutch] past'; Punyakante Wijenaike's first-person narrative of a naive young Sri Lankan's 'foreign investment', his 'adoption' by a pair of European homosexual adventurers; Alfreda de Silva's poem 'Notes on an Exhibition', and Kamala Wijeratne's melancholy verse meditation on a woman's funeral garment, her 'White Saree'.

During his time at the British Council in Colombo, Dr Rajiva Wijesinha set in place a new Council initiative, the promotion of Sri Lankan writing; and in University English departments throughout the country, interest gradually increased in Sri Lankan writing as a home-grown version of the 'Commonwealth', 'New' or 'Postcolonial' English literatures that had come to be recognised since 1965 as a valid discipline in universities worldwide. Though none of this activity focused primarily on female writers, it did not exclude them. The gradual creation of a favourable atmosphere for literature in general has encouraged the establishment of such journals as *Voice of Women*, edited by Eva Ranaweera, and *Lanka Woman*, edited by Anne Abayasekara, journals which cater especially to the needs of women writers.

A somewhat different situation exists in the area of drama: theatre in Sri Lanka is an art form to which several women writers have made notable contributions over the years. Nedra Vittachi, Madhubashini Disanayake, and Ruwanthie de Chickera are among those whose names are very well known, chiefly through stage productions of their work, although some examples of Vittachi's writing for the theatre and Disanayake's have appeared in D. C.R.A. Goonetilleke's book *Modern Sri Lankan Drama* (New Delhi 1991) and the literary journal *Navasilu* respectively. Plays are rarely published as separate works, although some journals, e.g., *New Ceylon Writing*, made a point of presenting plays (or extracts from them) from time to time. Lacking a perm anent form and the presence that appearing between two book-covers can give, many Sri Lankan playwrights and their works are in danger of being forgotten. It is a source of great regret to me that since the current project is

restricted to the genres of poetry and fiction, I have not been able to include detailed bio-bibliographical entries on Sri Lankan women dramatists. I hope the entries I have provided in the **General Bibliography** on Goonetilleke's volume, and on Shelagh Goonewardene's book about Sri Lankan theatre, *This Total Art* (1994), will encourage enterprising publishers to ensure that the writing of Sri Lanka's innovative playwrights soon appears in print.

The youth insurgency of 1971 had important effects on creative writing in Sri Lanka, which had hitherto looked inward, and concerned itself almost exclusively with the personal feelings and private emotions of sensitive individuals. For the first time in its history, the English-educated middle class was startled into a critical examination of its own aspirations and its comfortable way of life, a process that was captured at the time by "A Troubled Summer", a collection of poems in *New Ceylon Writing*'s second issue (1972), some of which had been written at the time of the insurgency. In `Sinhala New Year 1971', Anne Ranasinghe recognizes what the servant who bows, `Touching with his forehead/The ground at my feet' according to traditional custom before departing to his ancestral village, does not seem to understand:

> How is it that he could not hear
> the echo of the rifle
> The voice of the soldier cry:
> Halt, who goes there
>
> As he knelt on the mat of bast
> worshipping with betel -
> Holding in his joined hands
> An age that has passed.

In the same collection, Lakshmi de Silva's 'Tangalla, 9th April 1971' contrasted the familiar, well-loved 'reality' of 'foam lit blue sea, cloud lit blue sky', and the natural beauty of the southern Sri Lankan landscape within which she lived at that time, with a new and terrifying 'reality' (but one equally valid) as

> this night we lie
> Silently, listening to the
> crash of guns.

Suvimalee Karunaratne observed a significant difference between the gay, even garish Vesak celebrations of past years with which Colombo's Buddhist population had celebrated the birth, enlightenment and death of the Buddha, marking this religious event with

> paper lanterns in the streets ...
> huge pandals with painted scenes
> from Buddha's life;
> ... Sense-seekers in seething strife
> illusion bound
> whirling round
> electric jets

and the sober observances of 'Vesak 1971' during which

> in each homestead
> oil lamps were lit
> and flags unfurled
> this time with mindfulness

and she asked the important question:

> Did it take
> spouting blood
> and tongues in guns
> to strafe our minds awake?

The care with which the poets quoted above have dated their writing in the examples above is itself an indication of the impact that April 1971 made on their literary sensibilities. Political developments of the 1980s, however, were to make the events of 1971 seem like a children's game. As

Professor Mukherjee observes in relation to Jean Arasanayagam's fiction, 'it is not easy to read [the literature of recent years] as mere fiction, because history impinges on [it] relentlessly'.

The diversity that had developed in the English writing of Sri Lankan women since the 1930s was notably demonstrated in the last issue of *New Ceylon Writing*, published in 1984. With a cover in the colours of gray and black, appropriate to a society that was mourning its lost tranquillity and honour following the race riots of the previous year, this issue included a section which recorded the reactions of Sri Lankan writers, several of them women, as one horrifying event succeeded another during the race riots of 'Black July', 1983. It also contained, for the first time since the inception of the magazine, an editorial essay ('A multi-ethnic community in document and literature'), the complete text of Lakshmi de Silva's English translation of Sarachchandra's play *Sinhabahu*, Lalitha Witanachchi's prize-winning story 'The Truth', an outstanding essay by Malika Jayasinghe which memorably analysed the relationship between language policies and racial unrest in Sri Lanka, deeply moving poems by Manel Abhayaratne, Premini Amerasinghe, Jean Arasanayagam, Devika Brendon, Ianthe de Silva, Yvonne Gunawardena, Raina Macintyre, Jegatheeswari Nagendran, Anne Ranasinghe, Kamala Wijeratne and Lakshmi Wijeyeratne on the theme of "Mushal Parva, Season of Despair", a review of Chitra Fernando's *Three Women* by Lalitha Witanachchi, and another (by Fritz Blackwell) of Yasmine Gooneratne's critical study of the work of novelist and screenwriter Ruth Prawer Jhabvala.

As for the last two decades of the century, the compilation of such a survey as this during a period in which a long-drawn-out civil war and repeated racial outbursts inspired by deliberately conflated ethnic hatreds have touched the lives of every Sri Lankan citizen has provided valuable insights into the contemporary writing of women. One of Jean Arasanayagam's characters in a recent collection of short stories wonders: "Will the war ever be over? ... Will the record of our battles be documented in military histories? Is the history of a small island like ours important to the rest of the world?" Commenting on this passage, Professor Mukherjee notes

accurately that `there is hardly one serious writer living in that island today who can dissociate him/herself from the devastation caused by the continuous situation of unrest'.

The events of 'Black July' 1983, which impelled many women into writing verse who might not, until the horrors of that period penetrated their quiet lives, have seriously considered themselves to be 'writers', illustrate this point. Some of those women writers went on, after 1983, to develop themselves creatively, and today have several works to their credit; others will be remembered for a single piece of poetry or prose which encapsulated the powerful emotions that surfaced at that time. Women's poetry of this period expresses a multitude of intensely experienced feelings: anger, fear, guilt, sorrow, and (as Kamala Wijeratne wrote in her poem 'Dear Mabs')'misery and shame':

> the weight of history made my shoulders sag
> its pages heavy with the grim saga of our war-torn races.

Many poets mourned dead or alienated friends and neighbours.'You can never be merely an observer in this context', writes Jean Arasanayagam.

Her observation applies as much to 'diasporan writers' (the currently fashionable term for those who live and write outside their homelands) as it does to writers such as Arasanayagam herself who continue to live and write in the island. It is interesting to note, in relation to Sri Lanka's 'continuous situation of unrest', how several Sri Lankan women writers living and writing abroad have coped with their emotional involvement with what they hear of deteriorating conditions for peace in Sri Lanka. Thankfully, most Sri Lankan women writers living abroad appear to have sensibly resisted the temptation to 'gleefully mine [their homeland's] tragedy for literary mileage', as Dinali Fernando trenchantly described this popular expatriate activity in a newspaper article in 2001 (see **General Bibliography**). Rather than attempt to write fiction set in a Sri Lanka from the contemporary wartime realities of which they are inevitably remote, they have chosen to write of what they know intimately through study or experience.

Examples of this may be seen in Chandani Lokuge's *If the Moon Smiled* (2000), a novel set partly in south Australia, partly in the well-remembered Sri Lanka of her childhood; in Michelle de Kretser's *The Rose Grower* (1999) which is set in pre-Revolutionary France, a historical period in which she has immersed herself through study; and in Chitra Fernando's *Cousins* which is set entirely in Sri Lanka, during periods of its modern history that she knew intimately: the Kalutara of her adolescence, the Peradeniya of her undergraduate years, and the two JVP uprisings of 1971 and 1989, during which she revisited her homeland from Australia. Karen Roberts's *Flower Boy* recalls a Sri Lankan upcountry childhood in affectionate detail, and her second novel, *July*, presents without sensationalism the events of July 1983 as she personally experienced them as a girl of eighteen living in a Colombo suburb. In 'Untold Stories: Novels by Sri Lankan Women Migrant Writers', a paper presented at the ACLALS Triennial Conference in Canberra in July 2001, Shamara Ransirini noted that in their respective first novels 'both Chandani Lokuge and Yasmine Gooneratne, Sri Lankans by birth and citizens of Australia, [choose to] explore the dynamics behind expatriation'.

By making these choices as to subject and theme and developing them in their fiction, Sri Lankan women migrant writers have kept their work clear of blunders perpetrated through ignorance. If I may venture a personal opinion on a controversial subject that concerns me deeply as a Sri Lankan novelist and academic living and working abroad, fiction works best when an author has first-hand experience of what he or she is writing about. It has always done so; and in countries and ages other than our own. 'By all means send your characters to Ireland,' Jane Austen advised a novel-writing niece; 'but as you have never been there yourself, you had better not go with them.' It has become quite evident to me in documenting the work of my contemporaries, that while diasporan authors can only know present-day Sri Lanka at second-hand, there are several creative writers resident in Sri Lanka today (Jean Arasanayagam, Suvimalee Karunaratne, Sita Kulatunga, Anne Ranasinghe, Maureen Seneviratne, Jeanne Thwaites, and Punyakante Wijenaike are perhaps pre-eminent among women writers in this regard) who have the skills and the emotional range to take contemporary Sri Lanka as their subject. Indeed, as the present survey demonstrates, they are already

doing so; and it is only the woeful lack of energetic and enterprising publishers and distributors in this country that denies their work a worthy international audience.

The biographical entries that are an important part of the survey have been based in many cases on information provided by the writers, and have been shaped by my wish to place each author in the context within which she was writing a particular work of poetry or fiction. Questionnaires distributed at the inception of the project brought in a great deal of interesting material: especially writers' testimony as to the family members and teachers who actively encouraged their writing. It is worth noting, especially in relation to Sri Lanka's reputation as a male-dominated society, that it was quite often a literary-minded father or uncle who put books in a woman writer's way, and not necessarily a mother or an aunt. The questionnaires also uncovered the names of several women of the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s who are no longer alive, but were obviously outstanding teachers, sympathetic, imaginative and innovative in the guidance they provided. I am glad to have had the opportunity, in the text of this survey as well as in its Dedication, to put the invaluable contribution of these 'facilitators' on permanent record.

Women's creative writing in Sri Lanka has benefited from the work of several women writers whose work may only occasionally fall into the 'creative' category specified by the WERC project, but who have through their ideas, committed to print, exercised a powerful influence on the thinking of their creative contemporaries: they include Anne Abayasekera, who was the only woman in the Lake House editorial department in 1947 (joined in 1948 by Sita Jayawardana, and a short time later by Jeanne Pinto, Maureen Seneviratne, and Ranji Handy), Deloraine Brohier, Radhika Coomaraswamy, Malathi de Alwis, Neloufer de Mel, Dinali Fernando, Shelagh Goonewardene, Pauline Hensman, her daughter Rohini Hensman, Kumari Jayawardena, Kishali Pinto-Jayawardena, Sonali Samarasinghe, and many others. Sri Lanka is fortunate to have, or to have had, such women working as leaven in its society; and fortunate, too, in the presence of several male writers and critics whose generous encouragement is gratefully acknowledged by many of the writers listed: they include C.R. Hensman, Ediriwira Sarachchandra, Kenneth

de Lanerolle, Carl Muller, Regi Siriwardhana, Thiru Kandiah and, perhaps most notable of all in recent times, Rajiva Wijesinha, Professor of Languages at the University of Sabaragamuwa.

Rajiva Wijesinha's publication of the *New Lankan Review* from 1983 to 1990 provided a regular outlet for a number of women writers at a time when such outlets were not readily available, and when Sri Lankan writing in English was finding a new identity in view of continuing political crises. His involvement in the English Association of Sri Lanka and its publication, *Navasilu*, was a further source of support, since he assisted both, either as Editor or by serving on the Editorial Board. Professor Wijesinha also edited several anthologies that showcased women writers in particular, e.g., *An Anthology of Contemporary Sri Lankan Poetry in English* and *A Selection of Sri Lankan Short Stories in English*, and initiated academic programs which provided for the study of women writers and for making their work easily available. He was the prime mover in the establishment, first through the English Association, of the English Writers Co-operative, which publishes *Channels* (the most consistent outlet for writers in English, the great majority of whom are women). He also provided public recognition for writers, most of them women, through launches and felicitation programs at the British Council, which played a large role while he was Cultural Affairs Officer there, in promoting Sri Lankan writing in English. His unflagging devotion to, and interest in, good writing has made Professor Wijesinha a conscientious and exemplary reviewer in the national press of new books, his critiques serving as an antidote to the publishers' blurbs that all too frequently masquerade in the guise of reviews in the daily and weekend newspapers.

In this connection, it should be noted that in the bibliographies compiled for the authors listed in this survey, newspaper reviews have been included where available. This is, of course, unusual: a review published in a daily or weekly newspaper is often regarded as unimportant because it is, by its very nature, ephemeral. In the context of Sri Lanka, however, a country in which the climate for literature has become a shadow of what it once was, and in which high-quality literary journals have become practically

non-existent outside the Universities, newspapers are of great importance in announcing the publication of new books, and having them reviewed when they are published. Editors of 'Book Pages' have a responsibility to choose fair-minded reviewers who possess a knowledge of the country's culture, an understanding of the nature of literature, and standards of assessment and literary judgment that transcend their personal likes and dislikes.

Readers of this survey who take the trouble to look up the reviews accorded to writers who interest them will be able to judge for themselves whether the basic requirements that I have listed above are satisfied by the reviews published in Sri Lanka's English newspapers. Many readers with whom I have discussed the matter in the course of working on this project say that they are not. Such readers are aware of something of which a good many 'professional' reviewers in Sri Lanka appear to be ignorant: that the standards applied in the island's English-speaking literary world are standards which have been largely created overseas, by British and American critics and academics. Literary 'prizes' awarded in Britain and the USA are faithfully reported world-wide, especially when they carry a large financial reward. Publishers boost literary reputations with shamelessly obvious hype; and although readers in the West itself are alert to such activity, Sri Lanka's tiny literary world, it seems, is not. Some reviewers in Sri Lanka seem to be completely unsuspecting of the political and other agendas that govern many 'international' awards: they display a tendency - very pleasing to boo ksellers, no doubt, and to others in the book trade - to accept publishers' blurbs as if they had the sanctity of holy writ. If our reviewers do not develop a very precise understanding of the difference between a review and an advertisement, it is difficult to see how the quality of English literary writing in Sri Lanka can improve.

Of the factors that promote good English writing in Sri Lanka, it has to be said that newspaper reviews - at least as they exist in the island today - are of problematic value, to say the least. The English language newspapers print reviews which vary considerably in quality. Although they, as well as certain periodicals print (or re-print) articles in which informed reviewers measure contemporary works by international standards, the great majority of published newspaper 'reviews' are rehashes of publishers' blurbs that, with

few exceptions, appear to be written by authors' relations and friends in order to encourage sales.

Many perceptive analyses and discussions of Sri Lankan writing by Sri Lankan critics are often not read locally at all, since they appear in foreign journals. Unless a local journal or newspaper reprints them, local readers have no access to them. If Siromi Fernando and Ryhana Raheem's 'Women Writers of Sri Lanka', which was published first in an American literary journal, *World Literature Written in English* (1978), had not been picked up and reprinted by *New Ceylon Writing* in 1979, readers in Sri Lanka (outside of a handful of academics) would not know that it had ever been written.

The ineffectiveness (or lethargy?) of local publishers in promoting and distributing their books has been compensated, too, by certain informed critics overseas who have made Sri Lankan women's writing the focus of their research and/or teaching interests. Norman Simms (a New Zealand critic) has done a very great deal to promote and publicise the work of Jean Arasanayagam; Anders Sjobohm (of Sweden) has published several articles, and some translations into Swedish, too, of Sri Lankan literary fiction in English in *World Literature Today* and *Sydasien*; Alastair Niven, to whom I had the pleasure of introducing Punyakante Wijenaike's work at an ACLALS Conference, gave this novelist her first overseas review, and has since written perceptively of other Sri Lankan writers; the late Anna Rutherford (of Australia and Denmark) has supported Sri Lanka's women writers, among them Chandani Lokuge and Jean Arasanayagam, as both editor and publisher; Professor Rudiger Ahrens has made Sri Lankan fiction the subject of several research publications, and teaches Sri Lankan novels at the University of Wurzburg. Meenakshi Mukherjee, Alka Nigam, Meenakshi Bharat, and Manjushree S. Kumar are among the Indian critics who have written with sympathy and understanding of Sri Lanka's women writers, the last having made a documentary on the work of one of them, "Sonata Beyond the Shores" for the information of her students in India.

It will be observed that I have, in the cases of some writers, ventured beyond the confines of 'Creative Writing' as defined by WERC to list in their

bibliographies works they have produced in the general area of 'Non-Fiction' (e.g., works of literary criticism, biography, or social comment). This is because I feel it to be absolutely essential to a project that explores the themes which recur in women's creative writing, that the responses of creative writers to the world outside their homes should be placed on permanent record. Striking instances of this may be seen in the overtly feminist themes which dominate the fiction of such writers as Rohini Hensman, Laleen Jayamanne, and Yasmin Tambiah (to name a few) and surface also in the poetry of Eva Ranaweera and Ranjini Rebera. Feminist concerns figure side by side in the biographies with the more 'traditional' themes relating to home and family which are also well represented. Similarly, works in the genres of autobiography and memoir such as Alfreda de Silva's *Pagoda House* and Punyakante Wijenaike's *A Way of Life* have been listed. Memoirs and autobiographies have been briefly discussed or analysed when it was obvious that they had close connections with their authors' poems and/or stories.

I hope it will not be long before a project similar to the present one takes Biography and Autobiography as its subject, giving published memoirs such as Beryl Mitchell's *Tea, Tytlers and Tribes* as well as yet unpublished works such as Olive Fernando's 'Recollections of the Past', Florence Kahawita's 'Every Life has a Story', and many other examples of 'life-writing' the attention they deserve.

Except in cases in which authors have specifically requested that personal details be suppressed, postal or email addresses have been given at the end of each entry which will, I hope, facilitate contact between authors and future publishers, while encouraging contact among the authors themselves, as *New Ceylon Writing* did some years ago. The provision of uptodate addresses will also, I hope, help remove one of the most formidable obstacles to accuracy and comprehensiveness that I have faced in compiling this survey: the failure of many women authors to keep adequate records of their published work. As a result of that failure, the documentation provided for writing both 'creative' and 'non-creative' varies considerably in quantity and detail, depending as it does on variations in the availability of resources.

Whether such failure is caused by women authors' innate modesty about the importance of their own writing, or by the absence of an archive that would take on the responsibility for the keeping of detailed records, I cannot be certain, but it has confronted me repeatedly with lists of titles devoid of dates, places of publication and details of pagination. Where detail has been available, I have included it. Where it has not, queries directed to the authors themselves have, though often with difficulty and delay, elicited further information. The contact addresses provided at the close of each entry should help readers of this survey who wish to go further than I have been able to do in the time assigned to the completion of this project. This is especially true of an entry such as that on the author and children's illustr ator Sybil Wettasinghe, whose creativity is of a kind that defies classification. It is to be hoped that the information provided in this survey will lead readers to further research into her work and that of others, uncovering areas that will supplement and expand the information accumulated so far.

In the survey as a whole, authors are listed alphabetically according to the surname they have chosen to use when appearing in print. (My original plan, to present them chronologically, had to be abandoned in the face of some writers' decision to keep their date of birth to themselves.) Each author-entry provides a family name in the case of single women authors, both family names and husband's surnames in the case of married authors (family names being printed first, and placed within brackets), a contact address if available, a list of known publications alphabetically arranged, and a select bibliography of works relevant both to works discussed in the text, and to the writer's work as a whole. Information provided by the authors themselves as to dates of publication, etc., have proved especially helpful, Sri Lanka being notoriously a country in which books and magazines go into print without a date of publication. (Even the indispensable *Channels* does not date its issues: as a result, they have to be cited by volume and issue numbers alone.) Quality and/or cultural importance have provided the criteria governing the selection of authors for detailed discussion. Some authors, it should be noted, have contributed to more than one literary genre, or have lent their encouragement as editors, publishers, translators and reviewers to advancing the writing of others.

In this connection, I wish to express my special obligation to Dr Lakshmi de Silva, formerly of the University of Kelaniya, on whose unrivalled knowledge of contemporary Sri Lankan letters I have been privileged to draw at every stage of my work on this project. In the midst of her own teaching, and while continuing to translate into English the most valuable texts of some of the country's seminal authors (Martin Wickramasinghe, Ediriwira Sarachchandra and Henry Jayasena are three among many) she has for many years lent her time and expertise to reviewing books by established writers and nurturing the talents of aspiring ones. In gathering material for this project I encountered Lakshmi de Silva's name frequently in the roles of critic, reviewer, translator (and frequently, mentor); indeed, I have cited her published opinions and quoted from them so often in the course of my survey that I feel it would be correct to assign to her most of any commendation that might come the way of my part in the project.

My suggestion, made to the Women's Education Research Centre at the inception of this study, that Dr de Silva should be the person invited to undertake the post-colonial segment of the project, was refused by Dr de Silva on the grounds of family commitments. Fortunately for me, another request (on which, incidentally, my own participation in the project depended) that she would consent to undertake the composition of one entry in the survey, my own, was not refused. I am grateful for the care that she brought to the task and the characteristically meticulous scholarship with which she has honoured my work as a Sri Lankan poet and fiction writer in English.

Working on this project has been for me a most educative and enjoyable experience. It has given me the opportunity to re-read works with which I had thought myself familiar, to do homage to the dead, to evaluate living authors of Sri Lanka whose ages range from eighteen to eighty, and to discover new and hitherto unknown writers at home and abroad. It has left me with some memorable images that will doubtless some day be part of the tradition of women's writing in Sri Lanka: of Alfreda de Silva as a wide-eyed five-year-old, investigating the mysteries of the *kadanguwa* at "Pagoda House"; of Jean Arasanayagam longing as a child to make `the bold ascent' up Dawson's Tower that would have given her a better view of the Kandyan

countryside; of Christine Wilson seated outside a tent in Yala, typing her first stories on a Baby Corona; of Jeanne Thwaites smuggling forbidden books in her school `bloomers' to read on the quiet; of Punyakante Wijenaike's first reviewer congratulating her on having risen above the Colombo 7 world of `cocktails and canapes'; of a family elder who warned one author's father that "Girls should not be troubled with book-learning ... Girls should grow up naturally: like flowers"; of a reviewer who urged her readers to go out and buy copies of a novel that she admitted she had not read herself, but as its author had won an international award for *another* book some years previously, this book *must* be good!; and of Anne Ranasinghe observing with wry amusement that her book *Mascot and Symbol* had been alluded to (by someone who hadn't read it) as `Muscat and Sambol' ....

Finally, let me take this opportunity to warn my successors in this field of research that our women writers tend to vary considerably in the matter of keeping records of their writing, and also in talking/writing about their experiences of authorship. Some of them - especially academics and teachers, who are accustomed to keeping cvs and resumes up to date - can contribute pages of reference and reminiscence, others believe that a sentence or two will suffice; and there are others still who have kept no records at all, and have to rely on memory. Given a free hand by the Women's Education Research Centre to design this part of the project as I thought best, and with the firm conviction that all the writers listed have produced writing that is either valuable in itself, revelatory of Sri Lanka's cultural context, or potentially valuable to the future development of Sri Lankan women's writing, I have chosen to record everything significant that has come my way. Now, or at some future date, a creative writer or a research scholar will be glad I did, and grateful to the Women's Education Research Centre and the De Zaaire Foundation for having made comprehensive documentation possible.

Yasmine Gooneratne
Sydney, 2002

Manel Abhayaratna

Manel Abhayaratna is an Arts graduate of the University of Peradeniya, and has worked successively as a teacher and as an administrator, serving the Department of Information, first as Director of the Government Film Unit and then as Director of Information. She is the author of a Sinhala novel, *Maya*. Her poem 'Fragments', inspired by the race-driven killings in Sri Lanka in August 1983, was the winner of one of *New Ceylon Writing*'s six poetry prizes awarded in 1984 on the recommendation of Mark Macleod, Poetry Editor of the Australian literary magazine *Meanjin*:

Fragments

Stifling in the black heat
Struggling to breathe
Polluted air -
I stretch
Grasping hands
Unknown to prayer
And ask forgotten gods
For rain
Life
To my betrayed land.

'Fragments' was first published in Manel Abhayaratne's volume of poems, *Tomorrow is Too Late* (Colombo 1981)

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Publications

'Fragments'. In *New Ceylon Writing 5* (1984) p. 75. Poem

Tomorrow is Too Late. Privately published. Colombo 1981. Poems

Dewasundari Arasanayagam

Poet and short story writer Dewasundari Arasanayagam was born in Kandy, Sri Lanka, and lives at present in Toronto. Her parents, Jean (Solomons) Arasanayagam and Thiagarajah Arasanayagam, are both writers and teachers, and are resident in Kandy. Educated at St Anthony's Convent, Katugastota, and at Good Shepherd Convent, Kandy, Dewasundari Arasanayagam attended the University of Peradeniya (where she edited the magazine *Kaduwa*) before graduating from Bowdoin College, Maine, USA, with a BA degree, and commencing postgraduate study towards a MA degree at the University of Toronto.

Magazines and journals that have published her work include *Kaduwa, Channels, Kunapipi, Political Feminist Quarterly* and *Fireweed*. Awarded the Hawthorne Longfellow Award for Best Story while at Bowdoin College, she serves on the editorial boards of the Women's Educational Press and *Women's Almanac*, Toronto.

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Jean Arasanayagam

Poet, painter, short story writer, lino print maker, batik artist and teacher, Jean Lynette Christine (Solomons) Arasanayagam was born into a family of Dutch descent with roots in colonial Sri Lanka. She was educated at the Girls' High School (a private Methodist missionary school) in Kandy and at the University of Ceylon in Peradeniya. Her parents (Charlott Camilla Grenier-Jansz and Harry Daniel Solomons) gave her the freedom to write: 'we always had books on every variety of subject at hand; relations gifted us with books on every occasion'. In 1961 she married a teacher, Thiagarajah Arasanayagam. Marriage provided the insight into, and sympathy for, the intimate life of a conservative Tamil household that have shaped such poems of hers as 'Daughter-in-law' and 'Stranger', and a prose work, *The Outsider*. Her husband and their daughters Dewasundari and Parvathi complete an appreciative and supportive family circle.

Jean Arasanayagam read English, Latin and History for her Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Ceylon, and went on to take a postgraduate Diploma in Education from the same University. An M.Litt. degree in literary linguistics from the University of Strathclyde, Glasgow, and a summer school course in English Literature Teaching at Nottingham University followed. She has won national awards for her books *Apocalypse '83, Bhairawa: A Childhood in Navaly* and *Women, All Women*, and has held writing fellowships at the Universities of Iowa and Exeter, and in Washington, Seattle. She was a guest speaker at the Sixth International Feminist Book Fair in Melbourne in 1994. Travel is today 'a very important part' of her writing life, influencing her poetry and fiction especially. An artist with paint-brush as well as with needle, Jean Arasanayagam's paintings, batik designs and embroidery are closely linked in theme and technique with her poetry.

In an article published in 1993, Jean Arasanayagam paid tribute to the women teachers who had guided her reading of literature: Phyllis Oorloff (who 'choreographed childhood as if it were a ballet'); Gladys Vanderstraaten, who read Walter de la Mare to her classes and 'asked us to write our own poems on animals and birds'; Miss Simithraarachchi, 'a perfectionist ... [and] one of the most dedicated and able teachers of that era'; Florence Paranagama and Mrs Weerasiri, who introduced Sinhala classical poetry and contemporary lyrics to their students; and above all the British missionary principals Elsie Shire and Ruth Allen, two 'exceptional and indomitable women' who

> taught their lessons more through their own example than anything else, [guided] by the firm conviction that they had a mission, and part of that mission was to impart an education based on [Christian] religious values, taught in an alien language, that 'other tongue'. We were completely immured in England, its history, its language, its literature, so much so that when we started writing poetry ourselves as students, the natural forms of expression for us were the forms of English poetry.

Among fellow writers in Sri Lanka and elsewhere who have, she says, encouraged and influenced her work in various ways, Jean Arasanayagam lists Neloufer de Mel, Yasmine Gooneratne, Chelva Kanaganayakam, Anna Rutherford, Regi Siriwardena, Anders Sjobohm, and Rajiva Wijesinha. She has, in her turn, written critiques and reviews of books by the Sri Lankan writers Khulsum Edirisinghe, Carl Muller, Eva Ranaweera and Lakdasa Wikkramasinha.

In 'The Sanctuary - Kumana' (a poem in her 1973 collection *Kindura*), Jean Arasanayagam writes, as many Sri Lankan poets do, of birds and animals, but with a distinct difference:

> In this seared landscape
> Burned into whiteness of salt and sand
> Where dead trees bare their bones
> Stark elemental structure,
> The heat confuses, scorches wits,

Yet, the eye separates each bird
Each plant, each leaf
For individual introspection.

Hers is a painterly eye, and she brings to her poetry a sensuous awareness of her surroundings. It is immediately obvious that modern European painting and the older arts of Asia are a major source of her inspiration. The frescoes of the Bodhisattva at Ajanta, Japanese origami, the art of Marc Chagall and George Keyt have each their poems; and in the artistic representation of the mythical *kindura* -

Feathers slice off your waist,
Tail plumes splay the air,
Claws grasp earth,
Fingers touch flute,
Music twitters from those human lips.
Your imperturbable profile
Does not suggest
Discrepancy or disembodiment,
Yet your folded wings
Unruffled feathers
Suggest an immobility
Of flight arrested ...

the poet seeks, and finds, her own self-image. Poems such as 'Afternoon Pictures' brim with visual colour:

Honeysuckers puncture green-bronze berries,
Parakeets' red beaks split globules
of golden juice clustering on branches,
Butterflies' pollened wings
Shafting in flight among crimson
Canna lilies, green chameleons ...

Their air is 'sun-flecked, pointillist', seas are 'turquoise bright with morning sun', the poet's body in frenzy is 'striped like a tiger lily', in dream 'silver ... in moon-cold light'. The general effect of such writing is refreshing and exhilarating, not only because the pictures it paints are fresh and original, but because it is not only to the visual sense that they appeal. An ability to translate feeling effectively into physical sensation produces poems such as 'Catharsis' -

To free your limbs
From the embrace of your lover
And feel waterfalls of loneliness
Engulf you
In their coldness.

And 'Afterwards' -

Serpents of light coil round
Your sleeping face and your
Immobile lips are at peace
Stung into silence
With the honeyed venom of kisses.

The recurrent themes of Jean Arasanayagam's poetry, apart from her constant delight in capturing in words the sensuous impressions yielded by rock and sea, tree and bird, temple and street, here appear to be those of different kinds of love in separation and in fulfilment ('Retrospection', 'La Mort', 'Mithuna', 'Afterwards', 'The Moment Ceased to Live', and 'Death of a Mother'); various aspects of childhood ('Lonely Child', 'Children's Park'); the transience of youth ('Time's Ambush', 'Collaborationist', 'The Ripening Sun'); alienation ('Journey into Exile', 'Ruined Gopuram', 'Exile') and explorations of her own personality in a variety of moods and moments. Some of her poems are experimental and imagist; among these are 'Masks', 'Catharsis', 'Afterwards', 'Tattoo', 'Matrix', 'Woman and Waterfall', 'The Idiom of Fear', 'Cobwebs', 'A Desert Sun' and 'Earthquake'. In the best of these she achieves an effect very like the complex shock transmitted by one of her own arresting paintings.

'A Missionary Lady', a poem inspired by the poet's recollection of Ruth Allen, principal of the Girls' High School, Kandy, stands out among Jean

Arasanayagam's early verse because it voices social comment of an incisive kind that does not mesh with what seem to have been her main concerns up to this point:

You made us puritans
You preached a stern morality
And yet you wept, lonely
Over an exile's letters,
The hot sun left your skin dry, mottled,
Your patterned silk gowns
Clung with time, more closely, to your angular limbs,
Your fine-boned hands, sensitive as butterflies,
Yet so impersonal.

Enclosed within a safe garden
Among the lazy tortoises and purple lilac,
It took us centuries to break away
From that alien pattern of living,
nor can I weep over, or regret,
Its final disruption.

'That alien pattern of living' is a phrase which indicates that the poet speaks for her generation, and the poem as a whole rejects a colonial intrusion which masqueraded as religion. Yet the sum of the poem is more than this, with its detached, yet compassionate observation of a human character.

Social comment was not within Jean Arasanayagam's field of interest during the 1970s. Like most of the other poets of her generation, she had been moved to write verse by the youth insurgency of April 1971; yet, even in a poem that engages with the pity and the terror of that period, her characteristic interests emerge in the way the debris left by the insurrection is made part of a painter's composition:

On the other side of the mountain
thick blood flows from the jungle,
On the trampled grasses lie

Scattered bodies like fallen trees,
Fear and death stalk among
Laced branches and foetid caves ...
Sun and rain fall n festering eyerim,
Ants creep in trails
On shattered bodies ...
Blue foliage trembles in the pelting rain,
Trees disappear in thick mists,
Now there are no mountains
Only falling rain
And bloated bodies
Casually drifting downriver.
('April 1971')

Few Sri Lankan poets write verse that bares a poetic personality with so much honesty to the reader. 'Painting a Picture' could have been alternatively titled 'Writing a Poem': here she describes the experience, to her simultaneously intimate, painful yet irreplaceable, of creating a work of art -

You become in this act
Of solitary gestation,
The mother of all earth,
Peopling the world with beings
Whose eyes swivelling out of darkness
Into the light of first creation
Tear apart your life,

Peeling off the green membraneous sheath
To reveal the nacreous stalk.

Jean Arasanayagam's poetry and fiction up to 1983 reflect her interest in the fine arts and the 'divided inheritance' she acquired by birth and marriage, both of which are major themes in her early writing. Her early verse and fiction recorded painterly impressions of Sri Lankan life and landscape (especially of the mountain country of Kandy, her birthplace and permanent home), as well as a thoughtful and deeply emotional response to

the Hindu inheritance she had acquired by marriage. The tranquil surface of her writing changed dramatically, following the Government-inspired, anti-Tamil pogrom of July 1983. Since this writer, with her husband and their two daughters, were forced to seek shelter in a refugee camp, her writing has taken up themes relating to exile and human intolerance. Of Arasanayagam's reaction to this national crisis, as a poet caught between two cultures, Norman Simms has commented:

> If Wordsworth wanted poetry to be emotions recollected in tranquillity, the poet in a land where civil war prevails is denied this luxury. For where otherwise civilized communities find themselves lurching into acts of madness as the earthquake of modernization turns the firm basis of their beliefs into a seething mystery beneath them, only the outsider, though no less a potential victim, can find even a precarious ledge to crawl on to. Jean Arasanayagam is such an outsider ... at once historically and ... superficially outside and yet emotionally and physically within the space of danger. She has eyes and can see, ears and can hear, a heart and can feel; and above all, she has a poet's imagination and can, even as the madness impinges on her own life and that of those she loves most dearly, transform the suffering of Sri Lanka into a poetry which gives to her homeland - to Tamil and Sinhalese, to Buddhist and Hindu alike - the very dignity the violence denies.

Of her volume of verses, *Trial by Terror* (1987), Arasanayagam herself has written:

> These poems record the history of violence in my country, Sri Lanka, a personal involvement and a statement of despair. The poems from the refugee camp of 1983 record an authentic experience, the beginning of alienation, and the polarization and purgation of pity. You can never be merely an observer in this context. Art and literature are documentations of the crisis of violence and despair. The serious poet is committed to recording the truth as it happens to everyone and everywhere.

She has, as a result of her poems on the themes of 'violence and despair', become very well known outside her homeland, and has attracted reviews and critiques from, among others, Ruth Carrington (USA), Chelva Kanaganayakam (Canada), Alka Nigam (India), Le Roy Robinson (Japan), Anna Rutherford (Denmark), Norman Simms (New Zealand), and Anders Sjobohm (Sweden). The last, interestingly, perceives in her writing an attempt to give expression to the enigma of existence, the presence of God ... 'In this sense, [she] seems to say, the old religions have to be defended against a new age of brutality, ethnic division and spiritual death.'

Alka Nigam, in a review of *Women, All Women* in which she compared Jean Arasanayagam favourably with the American poet Sylvia Plath - '[Unlike Plath, who] represents western consciousness that feels drowned in the quicksand of emptiness, [Jean Arasanayagam] still has enough vitality to face the larger truths of life' - found that the best poems in this collection were those in which the reader accompanies the poet on a journey of self-discovery. *Women, All Women,* concluded Dr Nigam,

> is a saga of that eternal pain and suffering which is the common lot of women all over the world in all times handed over (sic) from mothers to ... daughters. Suffering changes its modes but it goes nonetheless to the heart.

Within Sri Lanka, too, Jean Arasanayagam's poetry has won appreciative notice from established critics, among them Neloufer de Mel, Regi Siriwardena, and Rajiva Wijesinha.

Most adverse reactions to Arasanayagam's writing have been based on its perceived lack of intellectual content. Certainly, Arasanayagam's fiction has not been as well received, at home or abroad as her poetry. Ira Singh, reviewing *All is Burning* in *The Hindu* in 1996, found this collection of stories 'a mishmash of barely developed ideas', linked to the work of Sri Lanka-born Michael Ondaatje (who had, she thought, given Arasanayagam 'hardly justified' praise) by a feature common to both writers which she characterized as a 'vague and hazy humanist agenda used to explore political and historical situations'. While observing that 'Arasanayagam's insights into South Asian

mores strike a chord in the Indian woman reader', Singh's objections to the Ondaatje/Arasanayagam 'hazy humanist agenda' are very clearly set out:

> Several of the stories have incipient feminist themes; specially concentrating on the way in which marriage becomes the goal towards which all women must aim ... There is an implicit critique of the institution [in 'From Distant Ophir'], which is coupled with the satirising of "professional" men: chartered accountants, lawyers who "settle abroad" and require suitable brides ... However, Arasanayagam cannot develop an incisive critique of patriarchy in most of the other stories about women, though the conditions of that criticism are present in several of these. Significantly, [her] engagement with class issues does not go beyond the depiction of the horror of poverty and the plight of the under-privileged.

Singh singled out 'Time the Destroyer', on the other hand, for special mention of a positive kind. Perceiving the story as being 'significantly, not about an overtly 'political' issue', and, presumably for that reason, as more effective than those that are, she adds:

> It attempts to chart colonial histories through the personal history of one family, and sees the colonial encounter, with all its ramifications, enacted within that family ... The characters are caught in the past that colonization had inscribed on them: maintaining the crumbling heritage becomes important. The effort to remember and to recount becomes a main concern.

In an interview with *Voice of Women* given in 2000, Jean Arasanayagam revealed some of the profound changes that had taken place in her outlook since her marriage, and her experiences during the racial outburst of 1983:

> I had to take a stance about who I was, in short my identity, especially as I found myself put into ethnic slots ... I am now much [more] my own person through writing, and have grown a thicker skin in the face of conflict, opposition, and rejection - I'll continue writing to the very end.

Her range, says Arasanayagam, has broadened tremendously since 1983, and she is disappointed and puzzled that this is missed by the critics and readers who stereotype her in terms of ethnic identity:

> I write about everything - people, relationships, travel, myself in relation to the world I inhabit. I write about emotion; and after 1983, I possess a very deep political awareness. People think I write about only one ethnic group because of my experience through marriage with the im peratives and concerns of that group. They are oblivious of the fact that I've written much in my poetry, fiction and plays about the radical movement of 1989/91. It's all there, but no reference has been made to that part of my writing. I wonder why.

Some of her chief poetic concerns today relate to 'women, gender and the exploration of the self', others to her identity as a Sri Lankan with intimate experience of two distinct cultures:

> I explore hierarchies through marriage into a different culture, rejection and alienation within closely structured societies which refuse to accept me. I am deeply, indeed, profoundly aware of my own colonial inheritance. The hybridity adds multifarious dimensions to my view of life - say rather, my vision of life. Being Sri Lankan is an important part of my identity, belonging to the Dutch Burgher lineage is very important to me.

Still others focus on what she perceives as 'almost visionary experience':

> I find that there is an element of prediction in many of my poems, like 'Shipwreck', a poem that foretold the death of Richard de Zoysa; or 'Ruined Gopuram' and 'Nallur', which are also predictive of the political events in the [Jaffna] Peninsula.

Still others take up the subject of the civil war that has in recent years cast a dark pall over the landscape that inspired her earlier poetry:

> Why pretend that things have not changed
> when they have, planting flowers and exotics
> in pretty gardens, the magnolias in full bloom
> golden carp in pools to make poems with -
> excavate the lawns and you'll find weeds
> springing out of skulls and the birds in the trees
> that sang at dawn grasp the light
> with taloned claws dragging nets and setting
> snares over the sun; now darkness covers the land ...
> (From 'A Country at War')

Of a recent collection of short fiction, *In the Garden Secretly & Other Stories* (2000), the distinguished Indian critic Meenakshi Mukherjee noted that Arasanayagam's

> seven spell-binding stories, written in crystalline prose, evoke with lyricism and precision [the] brooding atmosphere of suspense and dread, waiting and suspicion, which corrodes the lives of ... ordinary citizens in Sri Lanka today, whether they are Buddhists or Hindus, Muslims or Christians. These stories do not glorify heroism or martyrdom; they focus on the doubts and indecisions of ... common people trying to get on with their lives, keep their average dreams and small aspirations alive.

In the Garden Secretly & Other Stories received an award in the State Literary Festival sponsored by the Department of Cultural Affairs in September 2001.

Jean Arasanayagam is equally 'happy' writing prose or verse. In fact, the genres are so frequently blurred or the distinctions between them actually collapsed in her more recent writing that, as the list of publications below indicates, it is sometimes impossible to classify them. She regards herself as being, above all, 'a committed writer'. The fact that she is a woman, and writes chiefly from a female point of view is of 'tremendous importance' to her: 'Women from all walks of life are the chief protagonists of my work'.

In *The Outsider*, a work published in 2000 that is categorised as fiction, but is made up of a collection of sketches which appear to be essentially non-fictional, Jean Arasanayagam brings these experiences together in a volume that seems to be a first step towards writing a novel. The basic story is that of a young Burgher woman who marries into a high-caste Jaffna Tamil family, and attempts to understand and identify with its beliefs, its rituals, and its way of life, all of which are completely different from those with which she has grown up. The reader observes the downfall of a rich and arrogant family which has attached all its energies and beliefs to accumulating wealth and property, and loses everything when it is caught up in the Sinhala/Tamil conflict. The work contains a graphic description of a refugee camp at Nallur temple which is striking in the way that it encapsulates the fall in the family's fortunes. At the end of the book, it is the Burgher daughter-in-law whom her mother-in-law had scorned to even meet who is left to rescue her years later when, deserted by her own daughter and other close relatives, she is compelled to seek refuge with the son who was virtually disinherited on his marriage. By the conclusion of the 'story', it is the mother-in-law who is the 'outsider', with the whole framework of her former existence in tatters. The author/narrator finds meaning in looking after her, and recognizing that they are now simply two women on an equal footing.

Shelagh Goonewardene, with whom I have had the opportunity of discussing this book, and who brings to her reading of it experiences close to Arasanayagam's (of descent from a Sri Lankan Dutch Burgher family and marriage into a different Sri Lankan ethnic community, the Sinhalese) finds Arasanayagam's descriptions of high-caste Tamil life in Jaffna 'compelling reading'. It is our joint view that *The Outsider* would make an excellent memoir if it were re-designed and written with that possibility in mind. In its present form, however, it is a work of unequal quality and generic inconsistency, a novel (or a memoir) in the making rather than a finished work in either genre.

The writer who started out by reflecting visual and tactile impressions of her surroundings in her poetry has developed an impressive range of themes and a sense of social purpose that resonates in everything she writes today:

> I want the world to hear my voice. I want my country to hear

my voice and not turn aside or ignore its echoes and reverberations. My voice as I hear it should be/is/will be an influential voice ...

Changing ideologies, political and social awareness, war and violence, identity, women and their needs and concerns, victims/victimiser, the colonised and the coloniser all play a role in the limitless universe of my psyche and consciousness.

Arasanayagam's collection of poems, *Colonizer/Colonized,* won an award in the State Literary Festival sponsored by the Department of Cultural Affairs in September 2001. She is today, together with Alfreda de Silva and Anne Ranasinghe, one of Sri Lanka's few internationally honoured poets.

Her poetry and fiction have been published in *Ariel* (Canada), *Ariel* (Illinois), *Channels* (Sri Lanka), *Falleden and Gylendal* (Denmark), *Hemisphere* (Australia), *Indian & Foreign Review* (Delhi), *Kenyon Review* (USA), *Kunapipi* (Denmark), *Lanka* (Sweden), *Literary Half-Yearly* (Mysore), *New Ceylon Writing* (Sri Lanka and Australia), *Navasilu* (Sri Lanka), *New Lanka Review* (Sri Lanka), *Pandora's Box* (Japan), *Phoenix* (Sri Lanka) *Sydasien* (Sweden), *Times of Ceylon Annual* (Sri Lanka), *Var Losen* (Sweden).

Arasanayagam's work has also appeared in the following anthologies: R. Wijesinha, ed., *An Anthology of Contemporary Sri Lankan Poetry in English,* English Association of Sri Lanka; *Crosscurrents* (New Zealand); S. Jena, ed., *Dhaskat* (UK); L. Wikkramasinha, ed., *Homage to Justin Deraniyagala; I debba vudu varks* (Sweden); A. Rutherford, L. Jensen, S. Chew, ed., *Into the Nineties: Post-Colonial Women's Writing* (Dangaroo Press, Denmark; Y. Gooneratne, ed., *Poems from India, Sri Lanka, Malaysia and Singapore* (Heinemann, Hong Kong); J. Thieme, ed., *The Arnold Anthology of Post-Colonial Literatures in English* (UK); *The Keith Wright Memorial Poetry Collection* (Scotland); D.C.R.A. Goonetilleke, ed., *Penguin New Writing in Sri Lanka* (India); R.R. Kerns, ed., *Women's Voices from South Asia, the Middle East and Africa: Conflict and War* (USA)

Anders Sjobohm's translations into Swedish of his introductions to

Jean Arasanayagam's books have been published in *Sydasien* in 1989, and in *Var Losen* in 1991. His translation into Swedish of a chapter from *The Outsider* ('Nallur') was published in *Lanka* 3 (September 1989), pp. 29 - 43; and of three poems in *Var Losen* in 1991.

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Parvathi Arasanayagam

Teacher and editor Parvathi Arasanayagam was born in Kandy, Sri Lanka. Her parents, Jean (Solomons) Arasanayagam and Thiagarajah Arasanayagam, are both writers and teachers, and are resident in Kandy. Parvathi Arasanayagam was educated at St Anthony's Convent, Katugastota, and at Good Shepherd Convent, Kandy, and attended the University of Peradeniya, where she held the post of Secretary of the University's English Literary Association from 1987 to 1988, and graduated with a BA degree in 1991. She holds a postgraduate Diploma (External) in the Teaching of English for Special Purposes (TESP) from the University of Manchester, obtained in 1994, and is presently working as a part-time teacher and editor while completing studies towards a Master of Arts degree.

A member of the Young Writers Workshop (established in 1989 to promote creative writing among young people in Sri Lanka), Parvathi Arasanayagam's stories have been published in the *SLFUW Journal*, and her poems in the *YWCA Poetry Newsletter* (both in 2001). She was awarded the Ediriwira Sarachchandra Challenge Cup for Drama in 1986, and an Oratorical Prize (National).

She is a member of the Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies (Sri Lanka branch), the Sri Lanka Federation of University Women, and the Young Women's Christian Association.

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Devika Brendon

Devika Brendon, poet and fiction-writer, was born Devika Gooneratne in Kandy, Sri Lanka, in 1967. She grew up in a family devoted to books and writing, and has been writing creatively since the age of seven. In 1982 she was awarded a Merit Certificate in the Harold Kestevan Poetry Competition (Queensland), a Spontaneous Writing Competition Prize awarded by the Fellowship of Australian Writers, Parramatta Branch, a Short Story Prize awarded in the Australia-Sri Lanka Fellowship Short Story Competition of that year, and the Gussie Fox Award in Communication Arts for the winning essay on the topic "Australia: Its Hopes and Dreams" in the essay competition sponsored by the Lions' Club International, New York (Mount Kisco Branch).

The following year took her briefly to college in India; the next (1984) saw the publication of a first book of poems, *Mirrorwork*, a collection written in India, where she studied, travelled and wrote during 1983.

The months Devika Brendon spent at College in Kerala were part of a crucial year for her homeland. Proximity to Sri Lanka, news reports of the carnage taking place in the peaceful country she had known as a child, and first-hand knowledge of the traumatic effects upon her Tamil classmates of the race-driven killings in Sri Lanka inspired a poem which she later included in her first volume of poetry:

The Shere Khan Age

If you're so sensitive,
why do you kill?
There is blood: indelible,
the crimson death of hopes
on your hands.

New tigers stalk
through concrete jungles
still burning bright
through terrible nights
Death-lists and
clenched fists
guns in backs, to faces and hearts.
And when I look
into your eyes
I see so much screaming
naked horror and pain
it seems as if the clouds
can't contain your tears
any more.
Filtration is no longer possible.

Delicacy and refinement
were hacked with axes
and I wish I could tear up the reports
and retire into infinity ...
chanting

'It didn't happen,
it didn't' ... (like a practice demonstration for
the actual, side-splitting
riotous block-buster)
until I believed it ...
Take your potent casks
and your devil masks
and exorcise us.
Tear us apart:
cut our lives and dreams into
bite-sized pieces
and marinade them in
sweet, red blood.
I can feel tension

closing like a net
on refugees trapped
on the edges of
sanity;
Caught in the clutches
of man's inhumanity.
Those unborn babies,
murdered by proxy -
by sharp, painful blades
drowned
in a red sea
of oblivion
inside the protective wall
of a motherhood
which has itself been
slain in public: on that stage
of terror; to the bitterly cruel
disgusting applause of a full house.

Darkness, come and hide
this scene from me - I cannot
see it any more
I can feel my mind tearing,
the heart I had given to another
country, breaking for my treachery.
End this agony, please ...

Where there were memories
now ruins - a charred body,
and scavengers come to kill
each other for the pieces of
a dying nation.
Bloodstained, O island of gentle
welcomes and temple flowers,
your red sands are now more
red. Tear-shaped, you are

now also fear-swept.
Tourists give way in frantic
surrender
to another invasion
and,

maybe, another pure
new, clear day,
radiant white-hot
flowers will blossom on
your earth
watered by black rain
and fed on revenge.
Will you make them into
garlands
to encircle your neck
like a chain
or a noose?

Trivandrum, South India
22 August 1983

This poem, awarded one of *New Ceylon Writing*'s six Poetry Prizes for 1984 on the recommendation of Mark Macleod, Poetry Editor of the Australian literary magazine *Meanjin*, was published in *New Ceylon Writing 5* in 1984.

Following her early education at Tara Church of England Girls' School, Sydney, and All Saints' Women's College, Kerala, Devika Brendon entered the University of Sydney in 1984, where, with the encouragement of outstanding teachers including Professor William Maidment, Dr Catherine Runcie, and Dr Ivor Indyk, she continued to write creatively, composing a long poem ('Phoenix') for a friend whose possessions were destroyed by fire at Women's College, Sydney, in February 1989, and winning several prizes for poetry and short prose, including a University of Sydney Union Poetry Prize for her long poem, 'The Hero in My Head', which was published in *The Union Recorder* in 1988. The Rare Book Library of Sydney University holds manuscript copies of two of her 1989 compositions: her long poem

'Iphigenia: Another Political Outrage', which was awarded the Henry Lawson Memorial Prize for Poetry (1989), and her short story, 'The Judas Kiss: An Urban Pastoral' (1989), which won her the Adrian Consett Stephen Memorial Prize for Prose (1989).

Graduating with First Class Honours from Sydney University in 1990, Devika Brendon began postgraduate studies in English Literature at Monash University in Melbourne. While resident at Farrer Hall, she edited the Farrer Hall fortnightly journal, *The Moan*, in 1990, contributed to *Cedric*, the Farrer hall Annual, and continued to write poetry, fiction and occasional reviews. A poem, 'A Modern Marriage Song', was published in *Lot's Wife* in early 1994; her short story, 'Magnetic North', was awarded a Merit Certificate in the Auswrite Short Story Competition of 1996; and a novel, *Vaudeville*, was shortlisted for both the National Book Council Award for a first novel in 1994 and (in an altered and amended version) the Harper Collins Fiction Award in 1996.

Devika Brendon began postgraduate studies in English literature at Monash University, where she held an Australian Postgraduate Research Award from 1990 to 1993. She completed her doctoral thesis, on Jonathan Swift's development and use of the epistolary form as a political instrument, in 1996. She has since then divided her time between law studies at Sydney University, the part-time teaching of English literature, and writing creatively. A radio play set in Australia, 'The Trap', was commissioned by ABC Radio Drama in 1997. During a two-week stay at Pemberley House, Haputale, in early 2001, she wrote a volume of short stories for children as comprehension exercises for the primary school. Three volumes of graded lessons for English-language students, interpreting the new English syllabus for Grades 7 to 12 in the Australian secondary school system, and commissioned by an Australian coaching college, were completed in September 2001. A poem, 'Easter Uprising', and 'Packing Heat', a short story, were published in Indian journals in 2001.

Music, both classical and modern, is important to Devika, who counts song-writers among the strongest influences in her creative life. Creative writers, both within her family and among her close friends, have encouraged her over a number of years. Appreciative support has come from her mother, father and brother; from Professors W.M. Maidment, Christopher Pollnitz, K. Ayyappa Paniker, and Meenakshi Mukherjee, and from Drs. Catherine Runcie and Ivor Indyk; from her Sydney University classmate Jillian Kearney and her family; and from Jakob Asgeirsson, Arjun Chhabra, Diana Giese, Shelagh Goonewardene, Roger Inwood and Duncan O'Neill.

She is currently working on the final draft of a novel set in Sydney and Melbourne; and a romance, *Hard to Love*, set in Australia and Iceland.

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Jeannette Cabraal

Born in Kelaniya in 1935, Jeannette Felicia (George) Cabraal is a poet and short-story writer who was educated at St Paul's Girls' English School, Kelaniya, and at Good Shepherd Convent in Colombo. She was first encouraged to write by her father, by Sister Mary Joseph (Principal of St Paul's), Mother St Canice and Mother St Francis of the Order of the Good Shepherd, and by Horace Perera (teacher of Ceylon and Indian history). After teaching for some years at both her old schools, Jeannette married Aloysius Douglas Reginald Cabraal, and joined the English Language Teaching Unit of the University of Kelaniya, where she worked continuously for 22 years. She remembers with gratitude the encouragement given her by her husband and her daughter, and by Lakshmi de Silva, translator, critic and University of Kelaniya academic whose influence 're-awakened' an interest in writing that 'had lapsed for a long time'.

In 1967 Jeannette Cabraal received the English Specialist Trained Teachers' Certificate from the Training College, Maharagama, in 1981 graduated from the University of Kelaniya with a Special Degree in English, and in 1984 earned Colombo University's Postgraduate Diploma in the Teaching of English as a Second Language (TESL). Now retired from active teaching, she is a member of the English Literary Association of Sri Lanka, the Sri Lanka branch of the Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies (SLACLALS), and the Sri Lanka English Language Teachers' Association (SLELTA).

Jeannette Cabraal has won several literary awards between 1990 and 1999. Her story 'No Greater Love' took third place in an All-Island short story competition connected with the State Literary Festival for the Short Story in 1990, and was published by the Cultural Affairs Ministry in *Short Stories - 1990*. Her story 'The Jak Tree' won first place in the Kelaniya Division for the same competition in 1994. Her story 'Hope Springs Eternal' took third place in an

All-Island competition on the subject of "Sustainable Ethnic Harmony" conducted by the Ministry of Ethnic Affairs in 1998, and 'The Jak Tree' was fourth runner-up for the SAARC Women's Colombo Chapter Women Writers' Award in 1999.

Her stories and poems have been published in *The Island*, the *Catholic Messenger*, the *Ceylon Daily News*, the *Observer*, and *The Sunday Times*. She contributed 'The Oracle', a short story, to *Channels* in 1995, and has published two books, both privately printed and distributed: *Namo Matha* (poems) 1998, and *Under a Tropic Sky* (short stories) 1995; reprinted 2000.

Under a Tropic Sky is a collection of sixteen short stories set in modern Sri Lanka. As Lakshmi de Silva states in her preface, they

> faithfully mirror the texture of daily life, urban or rural, and the writer's use of detailed description regarding the daily activities of the background from which her characters spring gives concreteness to the stories.

What Lakshmi de Silva calls the 'underlying sense of social consciousness [that] pervades her work' is the engine that drives stories such as 'The Future (about a factory worker who can see no future for herself in her place of employment) and 'The Last Crumb' (about abject poverty in a city slum); and her concern is also engaged by incidents drawn from Sri Lanka's ethnic hostilities ('Samsara', 'Love's Labour Lost', 'The Return', 'I'll be home for Christmas', and one of her most effective stories, as yet unpublished, titled 'Hope Springs Eternal')) and from hostilities nearer home as University students vent upon one another their resentments and the prejudices engendered in them by hallowed family 'traditions' ('The Fresher', 'The Vicious Cycle', 'Just another Campus Tale'). 'Of Relations' observes with irony the electric effect upon people of the smell of money, as family members descend with gifts of curd and honey upon a sel dom-visited relative who is believed to have won forty lakhs of rupees in a lottery.

K. S. Sivakumaran gave this volume qualified praise. While noting that 'I'll be home for Christmas' is a 'beautifully-written story', with the capacity to move the reader, and that the author of 'A Quirk of Fate' deserves

praise for its 'deft' description and its well-managed irony, he found 'Refuge in the Sangha' and 'The Return' much less satisfactory: the first because its portrait of a virtuous, Dhamma-focused Buddhist monk did not reflect 'present-day circumstances', the second, which recounts atrocities performed upon Sinhalese bus commuters by 'Tamil persons in army uniforms' because it seemed to him to mirror attitudes to the Tamil people that are a staple of 'some sections of the Sinhala press'. As 'a reader who knows the other side of [such] happenings', wrote Sivakumaran, he found the story 'unappealing'.

Namo Matha is a volume of poems that appropriately matches, in the number of the poems it contains (50) and its overriding theme of patriotism, the 50th anniversary of Sri Lanka's independence with which its publication was designed to coincide. It includes poems very relevant to the present time: of conflict and peace, hope and lamentation, prayer and invocation. Some of the poems also celebrate the tranquil environment and traditions that Jeannette Cabraal regards as 'the essential spirit of Sri Lanka'.

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Publications

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Under a Tropic Sky. Privately published. Colombo 1995; reprinted 2000. Short stories

References

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Sivakumaran, K.S. 'Collection of Short Stories', review of *Under a Tropic Sky* (1995), in *Daily News*, 15 May 1996

Weerakoon, Hema Foreword to *Namo Matha* (1998) p. v.

Michelle de Kretser

Born in Colombo in 1957, and resident today in Australia, Michelle de Kretser is a novelist and literary editor. The daughter of Oswald de Kretser, Judge of the Supreme Court of Sri Lanka, and of his wife Sonia de Kretser, she was educated at Methodist College, Colombo. Following her family's settlement in Australia, she entered Elwood High School in Victoria, before graduating with the degree of BA (Hons) in French from the University of Melbourne in 1979. In 1984 she received the degree of Maitrise-es-Lettres from the Universite de Paris III.

In 1999 Michelle de Kretser won the Short Story Award presented by Melbourne's newspaper *The Age*, and awarded annually for an unpublished story of not more than 3000 words. There were about 1200 entries for the Award in the year that Michelle de Kretser won it. Her prize-winning story, 'Life with Sea Views', described by one of the judges, Peter Craven, as 'a haunting piece of writing, part prose poem, that evokes a world of post-colonial unease, and sensuality and expectation', was published in *The Age* in 2000. Although the location of this story is not specified, it would strike most Sri Lankan readers as a seaside locality in Sri Lanka.

The Rose Grower, Michelle de Kretser's first novel, was published by Random House Australia, Chatto & Windus UK, and Canon & Graf USA in 1999. (Spanish and German editions are forthcoming.) Unlike her near-contemporary and fellow diasporan writer Karen Roberts, whose two novels have focused on different periods of recent Sri Lankan history, Michelle de Kretser has elected to move into another area altogether: *The Rose Grower* is set in pre-Revolutionary France, and concerns a French provincial family which is drawn, almost against its will, into the social turbulence of that period. The ease and confidence with which she acquits herself in writing about a place and period so far removed from her own childhood background is refreshing evidence of what becomes possible when a well-educated and imaginative writer bases her fiction on study and reliable research.

Publications

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The Rose Grower. Random House Australia, Chatto & Windus UK, Canon & Graf USA. 1999. Novel

References

Brolnowski, Alison 'Australia, South Asia and Self-inflicted Otherness'. In C. Lokuge, ed., *CRNLE Journal 2000* (Adelaide 2000), pp. 164 - 170; includes brief analysis of *The Rose Grower*

Prescott, Nick 'Evocative and gently haunting'. Review of *The Rose Grower*, in C.Lokuge, ed. *CRNLE Journal 2000* (Adelaide 2000) pp. 96 - 97

Gertrude de Livera

Born in Mount Lavinia in 1931, Gertrude Hemawathie (Seneviratne) de Livera attended the University of Ceylon, Peradeniya from 1953 to 1955, graduating with a BA degree (General), and later qualified for a career as a teacher by securing a postgraduate Diploma in Education from the University of Colombo in 1983.

Gertrude de Livera is a short story writer and a poet whose efforts in both genres are frequently published in Sri Lankan newspapers; she also works as a free lance journalist. Her first story to be published was 'His Own Heart': it appeared in *Thunapaha*, Sanghamitta Hall's student magazine, **circa** 1955. Her stories have won prizes in local competitions, 'After His Death' in the English Section of the Cultural Affairs Short Story Competition (1990), 'A Disappointing Love' in the "Now" Short Story Competition (1996), and 'One Month's Extra Pay' in *Channels*, the English Writers' Co-operative Magazine Vol.8, No. 1. Seven of her best stories were published under the title *Some Middle Class Sri Lankans* in 1989.

Gertrude de Livera's stories invariably focus on characters and incidents that are part of middle-class Sri Lankan life. They are remarkable for their economy and restraint. Her characters, as Lakshmi de Silva has noted,

> do not ask for too much from life; their requests are modest, and they are realistic enough to make sacrifices to gain their ends.

Both the requests and the sacrifices are attuned to the realities of Sri Lankan life, a feature that causes most of the stories to end on a note of pessimism until the reader pauses to consider the fact that the circumstances of the characters are such that only a superficial mind could propose a

conveniently happy ending to their dilemmas. What can a person do when his financial hopes are defeated by inflation and a child's ingratitude?('Great Aspirations'); when his social ambitions are ruined by the fact that each of his guests is working to a private agenda? ('When the Party Was Over'); when his wife ignores her traditional duties and goes her own way? ('Not a Coward'); when an employer turns exploitative? ('The Difference').

Gertrude de Livera's 'middle class Sri Lankans' are, with very few exceptions, an unattractive lot, their minds fixed on little more than their own social or economic advancement, their ultimate goal that of entering what passes for 'high society' in a city which worships wealth and ostentation. J.P. Wickremanayake, a father with social ambitions for his daughter, places a priceless antique porcelain vase in the porch of his house where

> it would not fail to strike the eye. For even in the dark, the headlights of cars driving up would flash directly on to it. If he did not show off his house, his furniture and his priceless show-piece, there would be no point in having the party. How else would Gloria make a good impression? ('When the Party was Over', p. 12)

Inevitably, the vase is accidentally broken. Less predictably, J.P.'s daughter fails to impress a visiting 'aristocrat' at her party: he gets engaged instead to her friend Dalrene. Such disappointments are the substance of *Some Middle Class Sri Lankans*, captured in fiction by a remarkably observant eye. 'Solid and credible, her characters with their passionate drive towards self-fulfilment within their small spheres, become recognisable as Everyman, and our critical amusement or enjoyment of the poise with which the author works is merged in a sharpened awareness of the human condition'. (Lakshmi de Silva, Foreword).

While this author's take on Sri Lankan life is consistently alert to its social inequalities, her views on marriage do not appear to be equally consistent. In one of her stories ('The Peacock's Cry') she handles two themes that have been explored by several of her contemporaries, notably Punyakante Wijenaike and Chandani Lokuge, the 'arranged marriage' and the tradition

according to which bloodstains on the sheets of the marriage bed are treated as proofs incontrovertible of a bride's virginity at the time of her wedding. The bride's dowry of 25 acres of prime coconut land is the factor that clinches the arranged marriage of Bertram and Brenda in 'The Peacock's Cry', a point stressed ironically by the author. When, however, the second theme comes into play as the newly married Bertram is confronted on his wedding night by a bride whose body will not admit him and whose virginity he therefore cannot prove, irony vanishes and the mercenary Bertram shows an unexpected sensitivity. Instead of treating his tearful bride with suspicion and distrust, or attempting to rape her (as does Manthri's husband in Lokuge's novel *If the Moon Smiled*), Bertram actually proposes a means of keeping her 'secret' safe from his inquisitive relatives:

> "Don't worry," he said, "things will be O.K. I'll take you to a doctor. I am sure an operation will set you right. Don't cry. Your mother should have done it long ago. It's not your fault ... Now look, Brenda ... I like you too much to expose you to ridicule. Further, I want to stop these ridiculous marriage customs. I shall tell my aunt that we did not use the sheet, that's all."

An exemplary husband, indeed! No wonder Brenda is 'ready to fall on her knees and worship Bertram'.

Gertrude de Livera has written nearly fifty poems, most of which are short, and many of which have been published. They resemble snapshots, being essentially poetic notes in free verse on current affairs and contemporary incidents that have come under her observation, embodying an ironic view of society when they are not celebrating the Buddhistic themes that are clearly an important part of her thinking. A poem with the provocative title 'A Housewife's Decision to Cut Down on Entertainment' was published - appropriately - in the *Housewives' Association Magazine* in 1960; 'A Middle Class Sri Lankan Male' in *The Sun* in 1984; 'The Brown Sahibs' in *The Island* in 1992. 'The Walauwa Hamuduruwo', which voices the thoughts of a feudal Sinhalese dowager as she prepares to celebrate the New Year in her household, was published in 1987, and expresses the social awareness that resonates throughout Gertrude de Livera's fiction and her poetry.

The Walauwe Hamuduruwo

Living in my husband's mansion
How could I know the travails of the poor?
How my servant would be destitute
When I sacked her as I did.
Before the New Year I sent her.
I could always get someone and I did.
How to stand her cheek, trying to dress like me
And stealing an egg from the fridge,
It was nothing but right that I should teach
Such a lesson as I had never taught
My pupils at the school.
To be without a job and a place to go
Quite suddenly, for a small fault!
And perhaps I who sent her
Had done the bigger crime, who knows?
Who bothers, and why should I?
I am going to celebrate the "Avurudha"
With kiribath and kavun and kokis
And of course my new "Manika"
Who will not know her predecessor.

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Publications

'A Compelling Need'. In *The Sun* (date of publication unavailable) Poem

'A Disappointing Love'.in *Sunday Leader* 1 December 1996. Short story.

'A Flood of Revenge'. In *The Island* 24 June 1992. Poem

'A Housewife's decision to cut down on entertainment'. In *The Housewives' Association Magazine*, June 1960 Poem.

'A Land of Knaves'. October 1984 (Place of publication unavailable) Poem.

'A Middle Class Sri Lankan Male'. In *The Sun* 21 September 1984. Poem

'A Misfit in Life'. In *Weekend* 1984. (Exact date uncertain) Short story.

'A Prayer for a Friend'. In *Daily News* 21 May 1983. Poem.

'Appreciation of Mrs Clara Motwani'. September 1983. (Place of publication unavailable) Poem.

'A Price for Love'. In *Daily News*, 16 June 1961. Short story.

'A Price to Pay'. In *The Island* 28 April 1992. Poem.

'A Trip to the Unknown'. In *Weekend* 13 December 1987. Short story.

'A Question of Money'. In *Channels*, 1, 4, pp. 25 - 28; first published in *Sunday Island* 26 February 1995. Short story

'Awakening in the Country'. In *The Island* 8 August 1990. Poem.

'A Wish for Tomorrow'. 18 November 1987. (Place of publication unavailable) Poem

'Bad Temper'. In *The Island* 8 February 1990. Poem.

'Bonds & Chords'. In *Lanka Woman*, 1996 (exact date of publication unavailable) Poem.

'Changing Times'. In *The Sun* 18 January 1990. Poem.

'Death brought the Answer'. In *Daily News* 24 August 1961. Short story.

'Discarded Leaves'. In *Sunday Island* 11 December 1983. Short story.

'English for All'. In *Sunday Observer* August 1982. Poem.

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'Life's Journey'. 24 May 1991. (Place of publication unavailable) Poem.

'Modern Civilization'. In *The Island* (date of publication unavailable) Poem.

'New Year's Eve'. 10 January 1990. (Place of publication unavailable) Poem.

'New Year's Eve 1991'. (Date and place of publication unavailable) Poem

'No Man should See'. In *Daily News* 21 August 1962. Short story.

'Old Simon's Vision'. *The Island* 27 January 1987. Poem.

'One Colours Night'. In *Teachers Travel Club Newsletter* No. 7 (1982) Poem.

'One Month's extra Pay'. In *Channels*, 8, 1. English Writers Cooperative, Sri Lanka. Short story.

'On seeing *The Bridge on the River Kwai*'. 17 November 1987 (Place of publication unavailable) Poem.

'Seeing you again'. In *The Island* 2 December 1989. Poem.

Some Middle Class Sri Lankans. Lake House Investments Ltd. (1989) 35pp. Short stories

'Still Sri Lankan'. In *The Island* 24 April 1987. Poem.

'That Vesak Moon'. In *The Island* 17 July 1991. Poem.

'The Brown Sahibs'. In *The Island* 2 June 1992. Poem.

'The Daily Round'. In *House Wife*, March 1961. Poem.

'The Destructors'. In *The Island* 24 November 1987. Poem.

'The Fear of Tax'.*The Sun* November 1984. Poem.

'The Force of Friendship'. In Rajiva Wijesinha, ed. *New Lankan Review* 1984 (exact date unavailable) Short story.

'The Monday Rush'. In *Sunday Observer* 24 October 1982. Poem.

'The Setting Sun'. In *The Sun* 25 January 1990. Poem.

'The Sinhala New Year'. April 1990. (Place of publication unavailable) Poem.

'The Walauwa Hamuduruwo'. In *The Sun*, 10 April 1987. Poem.

'The Yes Men'. In *The Island* 20 November 1988. Poem.

'Thoughts of an Undergrad'. In *The Island* December 1989. Poem.

'Tiger'. In *Channels* 8, 7. Poem.

'To a Martyred Youth (Richard de Zoysa)'. 1990 (place of publication unavailable) Poem.

'To the Critic'. 21 February 1990 (Place of publication unavailable) Poem.

'Verdict of Society'. 25 June 1988. (Place of publication unavailable) Poem.

'When Death chastened Me'. In *Vesak Annual* 1962. Poem.

'When the Party was Over'.In *Sunday Island* 4 November 1986. Short story.

'Why do you fear that Writers Call?' *The Island* July 1984. Poem.

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Surani de Mel

Born in Colombo and educated at Bishop's College, Colombo, Surani de Mel has published one book of verse: *In the Deep Heart's Core*, a collection of 24 poems. Interestingly, the Devon publisher of this Sri Lankan poet (Arthur H. Stockwell) is presumably a son, or a kinsman, of the London publisher who brought out *Tragedy of a Mystery* in 1928, the first novel to be published by a Sri Lankan woman writer (see entry on **Rosalind Mendis**.)

Publications

In the Deep Heart's Core. Arthur H. Stockwell Ltd., Devon. 1966. Poems

Miriam de Saram

The only daughter of the distinguished historian Sir Paul E. Pieris and his wife Lady Hilda Obeyesekere Pieris, the late Miriam (Pieris) de Saram grew up in a family devoted to art and culture. (Her brother was a gifted painter, Justin Deraniyagala). Miriam studied dance in India when she was in her twenties, and scandalized the Sri Lanka of her day with a stage performance in the full panoply, complete with elaborate head-dress, of a male Kandyan dancer. She was part of the colourful literary and artistic group that surrounded the Sri Lankan poet M.J. Tambimuttu ('Thambi') and his circle in 1930s London, and made headlines in Sri Lanka when she appeared as a dancer in Sir Alexander Korda's film, *The Drum*. Always interested in literature, music and the arts, she shared her interests with her husband (Robert de Saram) and their children, and appeared on the local stage herself in *The Lower Depths*.

Obviously a woman well ahead of her time, Miriam de Saram was a practitioner of yoga long before an interest in Hindu culture and religion became fashionable. During her later years, she became deeply interested in Buddhist philosophy and meditation practice. The single volume she is known to have written arose from this interest. It is a book of poems, *Thought Flow*, which her son Skanda de Saram published on her behalf in 1993. Her other two sons, Rohan and Druvanand de Saram, have distinguished themselves as musicians, and her daughter Niloo as an artist.

Publications

Thought Flow. Privately published, Colombo 1993. Poems

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Gooneratne, Yasmine *Relative Merits. A Personal Memoir of the Bandaranaike Family of Sri Lanka*. C. Hurst & Co., London and New York 1986.

Sharadha de Saram

Media consultant and television script writer Sharadha (Muthukrishna) de Saram was born in Colombo in 1949. She was chiefly influenced as a writer, and in her choice of a career, by the example of her maternal grandfather Lawrie Muthu Krishna, who had served on the staff of Lloyd's Press as a young man, risen to the position of newspaper editor, and later founded the Ceylon Polytechnic.

Deloraine Brohier writes in her *History of the Colombo Chetties*, that

> when the typewriter was introduced to Ceylon the general preference for typed matter, compared with the old-style method of hand-writing, created a keen demand in the local and commercial world for a copying establishment. An office where such work would be undertaken and executed with all necessary precision and rapidity was a decidedly new advantage.

The Polytechnic answered that need. 'The typewriter,' writes Sharadha de Saram, 'became a focal point for my grandfather. He used it often to put down on paper his thoughts of varied interests. This was perhaps why he later took up writing for journals and newspapers.' Lawrie Muthukrishna's daughter Mano followed in her distinguished father's footsteps, becoming an educationist and a journalist, and later editing the Women's Page of *The Sun* newspaper.

Sharadha de Saram was educated and trained at the School for Film and Photography (Berlin) and at the University of Colombo. She has earned diplomas in Film and Television in Germany, in Journalism in Sri Lanka, and in Development Communication in Malaysia, and her work as a workshop trainer in television script writing/editing and radio has taken

her to Malaysia (the Asian Broadcasting Union), Jamaica (Social Development Commission, Kingston) and the Maldives.

Sharadha de Saram's international experience and her work as a child's rights activist have played an important part in inspiring the publication by which she is best known: *One Country and One People*, an illustrated story for children that was first published in 1993, and reprinted in 2000. Thoughtfully and perceptively written, attractively illustrated in colour, it explains in simple terms the many rich and colourful strands that have come together over many centuries to make up present-day Sri Lanka's multi-ethnic and multi-cultural society.

Her book expresses, says Sharadha de Saram,

> the everyday attitude of people I met in my country ... At a very early age I was interested in all manner of writings on philosophy and comparative religion. I was influenced by my maternal uncle. He encouraged me to analyse in particular the dual thinking of man and the societies in which we grew up. This led to my interest in the global perspective of multi-culturalism and its strengths.
>
> As a child, I could not understand how one people living in one nation could not see the advantages of ethnic, cultural and religious differences among our communities. My family in particular had friends from all three communities, and this interaction made our life very rich culturally. I found that outside my family, there were many who were prejudiced, most often unknowingly. The danger was that ... adults, knowingly or unknowingly, transferred their prejudices to their children.

When Sharadha de Saram returned to Sri Lanka in 1977, having spent some years living and working overseas, she found that this attitude had grown worse:

> Misunderstandings at different levels had increased. I was [determined to] bring up my children in the global spirit, so that they [would] never harbour ... prejudices which will prevent them from enjoying [the] world outside, the many communities and the many cultures of the lands I had visited. As I found my experiment working, I was convinced that I have to communicate these thoughts to other children as well. This is what made me write the book.

Whether she intended it or not, *One Country and One People* presents Sri Lanka's younger generation with an alternative to the divisive racist propaganda that is currently so evident in society and disseminated even through their school textbooks. It is a joy to look at, and - beautifully and lucidly written - a lasting pleasure to read.

Sharadha de Saram is the secretary of the South Asian Association for Women's Studies, and a member of both the International Association for Women in Radio and Television and the Women's Chamber of Industry and Commerce. Her contributions to the electronic media include over 50 documentaries made for National Television, documentaries made for UNICEF covering issues related to women, children and health, a CNN World Report, and numerous scripts on social issues for national and international non-government organizations. Her work has been honoured by the Arthur C. Clarke Award for TV Direction and Production, and the 'Woman of Achievement' Award presented by Zonta. She is presently working on two programs with UNICEF relating to the 'Global Movement for Children' and 'Children as Zones of Peace', implementing an integrated media plan to communicate the messages within the programs:

> "I am so happy dealing with this generation, rather than the adult one which is conflict-ridden!"

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Publications

One Country and One People. A Story for Children. Illustrated. Creative Circle, Colombo 1993; reprinted 2000. Story

References

Brohier, Deloraine *History of the Colombo Chetties*

Alfreda de Silva

Poet and media personality Rachel Lilian Alfreda (Perera) de Silva was born in Nugegoda, Sri Lanka in 1920, and spent her early childhood in the company of a beloved grandmother, living in 'a large, rambling old house in which I knew a good deal of loneliness'. She was educated first at St John's College, Nugegoda, and later at Girton School, Nugegoda, which she describes as 'a theatre school in which creativity flourished, and all lessons centred on a theatre project'. Here a group of outstanding teachers, guided by the gifted Constance Blacker, made a great impression on her and influenced both her outlook on life and the path she was to take as a writer: 'There was great freedom to wander into art, music or reading rooms during periods of individual work'.

Alfreda de Silva qualified 1st Class as a teacher at the Government Training College, Colombo (1940/1941), studied at the Yale Experimental Theatre and Drama School for a year (1953) on a grant from the Ford Foundation, became a Fellow of the Trinity College of London in Speech and Drama in 1956, and was awarded a diploma in French by the Alliance Francaise in 1976. She married Ernest Kingsley de Silva in 1943, and has a daughter and a grand-daughter. Family members and others who encouraged or influenced her as a writer include her grandmother, Rachel Wijesinghe; her teachers at Girton School, Cora Abraham (English), Mary Winter (Latin and Literature), Marjorie Sample (Dancing), Irene Sample (Speech and Drama), Mrs R. A. Spencer-Sheppard (Singing), and Effie Taylor; and the editor of the *Daily News* "Young Writers' Page", Betty Hunsworth.

> With great insight and an understanding of the young, which was at least fifty years ahead of her time, Mrs Blacker made her school a place where children learned through enjoyment. (Foreword to *The Peacock Tree*)

Alfreda de Silva, for whom writing has been a lifelong passion and pursuit, began sending contributions to the *Sunday Observer*'s "Wendy Hut" at the age of five, and later won many awards as a teenager for her contributions to the *Daily News* "Blue Page" edited by Betty Hunsworth and to the *Sunday Times* "Young Timers Page". Between 1953 and 1970 she wrote a regular weekly column in the *Times of Ceylon* (occasionally using the fanciful pseudonym of `Will O' the Wisp'), and has for fifty years been a regular contributor to the National and Overseas Services of Rupavahini (formerly the Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation), compiling and presenting a variety of programs including "Arts Magazine", "Literary Quarter", "Poetry for Pleasure", "The Music of Words" and poetry for "The Children's Hour". She has also worked as Alumni Officer of the United States Educational Foundation in Sri Lanka.

Alfreda de Silva's special interests are in poetry (she lists Blake, Coleridge, Yeats, Auden and D. H. Lawrence among the poets she most admires), and in talks, short stories, and programs of interest to women and children. Her verses for children, noted Lakshmi de Silva in the course of reviewing three of her books written specifically for children, possess the empathy that helps a writer to

> recapture the feelings of a child's freshness of response, with a vision unblunted by decades of familiarity. Alfreda de Silva, for all the maturity and comprehensiveness of perception that permeate such poems as 'Penelope' and 'The End of Something', and the seemingly objective, yet moving 'Crows and Children', can communicate directly with children, without archness ... Poetry for the young must make the reader look both outward and inward. Alfreda de Silva's poetry does just this.

'Penelope', the poem to which Lakshmi de Silva refers in the review quoted above, is certainly mature in the way it deals with adult experiences of love and longing, and comprehensive in its demonstration of this poet's remarkable ability to enter imaginatively into the inner life of a classical heroine while at the same time making it her own:

Penelope

I watch you leave.
Your ship, now borne by wind,
flies, skims and dips
like a hawk
on the sky's rim.
A vast tumult
or a great emptiness,
I don't know which,
hurtles me back
to the loom of everyday:
the unswept hearth,
the hooded grain on the stone,
the bones of the roof
needing repair,
our son waiting for laughter,
and the recurring grief and rage
shrouding the celibate bed.

Oh the enormous waste of years!
The moon that drags the tides
Of sea and womb
has drunk me dry,
Now, there will never be fruit
when you, returning,
bring me the seed.

Like 'Mirrors', a poem that treats with human understanding and wry humour the power of memory to soothe, if not to alleviate, the ravages of age, it is an example of Alfreda de Silva's verse at its very best:

Mirrors

There's a woman looking at herself
in mirrors,
disgusted by their present distortion
remembering
their past flattery.
She sees a man
standing in sunlight
shading his eyes with his hands
and looking at her.
Through the trees
a thin drizzle falls.

He is saying something,
saying something
and moving towards her.

Their forms merge
in the misted glass,
become elemental - fire, air, water,
the whole sky bends over them
like a dome.

She has put this day by
like a squirrel's winter hoard,
knowing what harsh hungers rage
in the unpredictable blood
in a lean season.

Very different in tone and atmosphere is *Pagoda House*, a book Alfreda de Silva published in 1990, which gives permanent form to a series of delightful prose sketches that first appeared in local newspapers. In these delicate autobiographical vignettes, the mature writer relives her childhood years, returning in memory to the 'large, rambling old house' in which she lived between the ages of four and eight. Her reader gains privileged entrance into a vanished rural world of the 1920s, and to the characters who inhabited her grandmother's home and the quiet village of which it was an integral part.

We meet the chatelaine of "Pagoda House", the writer's grandmother who was forced to abandon her studies to marry at fourteen, but grew up to become a translator of Sinhala classical texts, a dispenser of herbal cures, and a woman of character who even a child could recognize as being `no ordinary person'. We meet the inhabitants of Grandmother's ordered domain: Aggie, the `gentle domestic' whose job it is to keep a wayward six-year-old in check; Kuttan the sedate rickshaw puller who can transform himself into a drunken bull to make a little girl laugh; white-bearded Dr Raux, the family physician, who `never fails to give a child a piece of jaggery after a dose of something unpleasant'. We see, through the eyes of a highly imaginative child the `wasp-waisted' brides in the `gallery of photographs' that deck Grandmother's drawing-room walls; a family wedding-cake that `rises up from the floor to the ceiling'; and Mr Loos, the harmless eccentric who lives in Mirihana, and turns into a modern-day prophet Elisha when the neighbourhood boys make fun of him -

> With surprising speed he swirls his walking stick and comes bearing down on them screaming: "Ar'll sm-a-ash y'orll".
>
> The boys run helter skelter. One of them falls into an evil-smelling gully in front of the Thamby kade and is rescued by someone. Soon not a boy is within sight [and] Prophet Loos shuffles along in the direction of the Mirihana Jubilee Post, rolling his eyes heavenwards and muttering to himself.

Alfreda de Silva recalls, in terms that appeal to all of the reader's five senses, the Sundays of childhood, marked by church-going and the reading of Bible verses; buggy-rides with Palis on visiting days; secret visits to the *kadanguwa,* that 'delightful kingdom' heavy with the fragrance of spice, ripe fruit and honey; and Grandmother's 'At Homes', when the kitchen of "Pagoda House" becomes the setting for 'a frenzy of currying and roasting, basting and baking, frying, pickling, salad-ing and sambol-ing' that makes a child's mouth water.

Although it employs the deceptive simplicity of a child's point of view in telling its tales, *Pagoda House* is no simple indulgence in nostalgia. Social snobbery threatens the integrity of the village idyll when a memorable character, 'Mrs Strange New Person', attends one of Grandmother's sewing classes for disadvantaged village women beautifully dressed in a blue saree with a string of gold beads around her neck, and takes it upon herself to tell Grandmother that she has no business mixing with the 'very common people' who attend the classes. Stories abound: a bride, left waiting at the church by a callous groom, survives the experience to live happily ever after with someone else; a favourite doll's ash-blonde hair is dyed black (with dis astrous results); and the faces of two 'white' missionary ladies turn out first to be blue (and not white) and then, inexplicably, turn from blue to pink under a child's eyes as Miss Topper and Miss Ewing unwind from their topees the blue chiffon motoring veils which are part of their travelling gear, and partake of an especially festive tea. This incident is especially interesting, in its revelation of the unknown terrors that edge the mannered, orderly rituals of 'civilised' life:

> As I drowse off I wonder whether the white ladies who covered their faces with blue veils to keep out the sun will now do so to keep out the dark - the frightening dark in which I sometimes lie awake listening to the distant boom, boom of tom-toms and jackals baying at the moon beyond the fields.

Like many memoirs of childhood days, *Pagoda House* has links with other works, composed at different points of its author's life. One such link may be perceived in Alfreda de Silva's poem 'Family Photographs', written in 1983, with its pictures of the 'wasp-waisted' brides of the past:

> The tiny bride here
> is Grandma in
> her wedding gown.
> Beside her, Grandpa
> looks too large.
> They are Sinhalese -
> their Victorian nuptial trappings are
> fashions borrowed from
> that old colonial time.

Encountering the poet for the first time in Sri Lanka, Alya Henry, a visitor from Australia, was struck by her 'range of skills', and set down with rare insight her impressions of her as a literary personality, writer and educationist:

> On the one hand she can tirelessly *adlib* at a breakfast talk-show, on the other hand she can give an erudite talk on 'The Place of Poetry in the Teaching of English' ... During our discussion, Alfreda brought out poetic samples from her vast memory bank, and illustrated talking-points with a stanza here, a poem there ... jingles or nursery rhymes ...

As a teacher, Henry noted, Alfreda had developed a method of presentation based on her thorough education in English and a supreme love for poetry:

> She is devoted to her craft and, believing in the importance of poetry in language teaching, she advocates its incorporation into various areas of the school curriculum... [Her] passion for literature and poetry evolved into a lifelong philosophy of life and education.

Alfreda de Silva's poetry, which has been published in several collections, has also appeared in the *Ceylon Daily News*, the *Times of Ceylon*, the *Ceylon Observer*, the *Times* and *Observer* Annuals, *New Ceylon Writing*, *The New Lankan Review*, *Hemisphere* (Australia), the *Ladies' Home Journal* (USA), *Channels*, *Waves*, *Navasilu*, and in numerous American, British, Indian and Yugoslavian journals. Her English translation of S. Jayaweera's *The Giant*, a story for children, was published in 1971, and her poems have appeared in French translation in *Bonsoir Magazine*. Her poems have received twelve poetry awards in eleven different categories from Triton College School of Arts and Science, USA, including one titled "Salute the Arts", which aims at 'an international sharing of personal triumphs and tragedies, which are part of the human experience'. They have appeared in several anthologies,

including *Poems from India, Sri Lanka, Malaysia and Singapore* (ed. Yasmine Gooneratne, Heinemann Hong Kong 1979), in *English Everyday* (a textbook for Sri Lankan schools published by the Department of Education's Curriculum Development Centre), and a text book for use in Sri Lankan schools published by the British Council, Colombo. They have attracted praise from some of Sri Lanka's foremost critics, including Regi Siriwardhana, who singled out her poem `Penelope' for special mention in his review of *Navasilu*, the journal in which it appeared.

Alfreda de Silva is listed in the *Oxford Companion to Twentieth Century Literature*. Her services to literature in Sri Lanka include mem bership of the Literary Panel of the Arts Council of Sri Lanka and of the Public Performances Board from 1980 to 1988. Interested in encouraging creativity, originality and imagination in writers, poets and dramatists, she has served as an Examiner for the Trinity College of London local speech examinations, has given readings of her own poetry in schools and universities, and is an active member of several book clubs, literary associations, and writers' workshops. She received Zonta International's 'Woman of Achievement Award' in 1993.

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Lakshmi de Silva

Born in Colombo, educated at Visakha Vidyalaya, Colombo, and at the University of Ceylon, Peradeniya, Lakshmi de Silva retained her family name unaltered on her marriage to Walter de Silva, District Judge. A translator, poet and critic, she is a true bi-lingual, and stands today in the front rank of Sri Lanka's contemporary translators, equally at home with classical and contemporary Sinhala poetry.

Lakshmi de Silva's innate feeling for language and her training at Peradeniya (where she read English for an Honours degree) have united to give her understanding and control of the possibilities of the English medium that are unrivalled among Sri Lankan translators. A love of literature which began at home, where her parents, Maduwage Peter de Silva and Clara de Silva, 'nurtured my love of Sinhala and English poetry', was encouraged at school by an outstanding teacher (Marian Abeysuriya, who warned her 'to avoid lushness and rhetoric'), and was continued at the University of Ceylon in Peradeniya. There, in addition to her literary studies under the direction of Cuthbert Amerasinghe in Western Classics, and Doric de Souza, Hector Passe, and Robin Mayhead in English literature, she became an active member of the Dramatic Society and directed plays from the Western classical repertoire, especially Greek drama. Her interest in theatre survived her graduation, and it seems particularly appropriate that it was a play, the translation into English of Henry Jayasena's drama *Kuveni*, which made her a joint winner (with Jayasena himself and the playwright Ruwanthie de Chickera) of the Gratiaen Prize in 2000. The excellence of this translation was additionally recognised and rewarded at national level in September 2001 with a State Literary Festival award sponsored by the Department of Cultural Affairs.

Lakshmi de Silva writes poetry in both English and Sinhala. Her English poems, though not numerous, explore a wide range of themes and moods, from 'Addition and Subtraction' (1979) with its meditation on 'two kinds of failures' expressed through subtle bird-imagery, to 'Peradeniya 1956: History Notes', a poem which 'captures in a handful of lines the traumatic history of the universities in Sri Lanka' (Aditha Dissanayake, 2000). 'Addition and Subtraction' which was published in *New Ceylon Writing* in 1979, conveys a good idea of Lakshmi de Silva's distinctive combination of concentrated intellectual power and deep feeling, and her ability to keep a complex image in play throughout a perfectly phrased and regulated piece of rhymed verse:

Addition and Subtraction

There are two kinds of failures; those that press
The high wind down, keep unregretful calm
And these the wind rides - proud and violent men
Whose minds are helium-driven. Those suppress
The wind and reap sound profit. These shall reap
The force that whirls the irised manyshape
Of cloud and brilliant vapour. Those escape
The cry of wind within the drumming breast
The restless urgency that longs for roads
To lead to tasks sufficient for its strength
While they accomplish only what the length
Of reason and good sense can measure well.
But these, unfortunate winged creatures, swell
The surge's cry and breast the clamorous dark
And beat the thick-glassed wire-protected panes
They call and call to the unanswering light
Nested beyond them. Born to their unease
They cry its anger and its fierce delight.

Her memorial poem for Dr Upali Amarasinghe, whose unexpected death in Malaysia in 1959 cut short a brilliant academic career which, it had been hoped, would culminate in a return as Professor of English to the Peradeniya campus where he had been an outstanding teacher of English literature, blends memory of a beloved teacher's elegant and witty academic style with images drawn from the background in western classical tragedy that student and teacher had had in common:

In Memoriam
Upali Amarasinghe - 1959

'Remember me when I am gone away
Gone far away into that silent land -'
Your reading that in mockery, today
I remember, your lengthened vowels, the vibration
Too-mournfully tolled on 'gone'; now you are gone
And 'that silent land' no longer 'Victorian evasion'
But simply and dreadfully real. Like Patrocles, alone
You have reached the house of Hades, where there is no wisdom or laughter
Only a silence fit for a duller head
Than that I remember (hair ploughed by an elegant hand)
Wit surely poised as a scalpel or fountain; and after
Only after - again, the silence of the dead.

Although, as the examples above show, Lakshmi de Silva's poetry has the power to capture the imagination and move the heart, her major contribution to Sri Lankan letters has been, up to date, in translation from Sinhala prose and verse. It remains her constant preoccupation:

> Translation, as I now do it, with full responsibility and keeping strict faith with the Sinhala writer and reader is a very satisfying activity, and I want to spend the bit of time I can spare from domestic and social demands on that.

In a brief note to her prize-winning translation of *Kuveni*, she conveyed something of the spirit in which she approaches the task of translation:

> Between the aims of a translator and the achievement there will be a gap. To capture the full impact of "Kuveni" as I saw it during the State Drama Festival of 1963 I would need, not only to transcend my own limitations and those imposed by the act of translation, but the difference between stage and page. The tingle of excitement down the spine which instinctively acknowledges the recognition of something truly great in art, the startling effectiveness of the rendering through performance of the blending of poignant pathos with intellectual toughness in the text, the visual effect of Manel Jayasena as Kuveni ... a chorus whose voices and movements projected the meaningful lyrics with stunning force and cohesiveness - these cannot be caught by merely interpreting the text into English ... Only the translator, totally familiar with every word, every syllable of the original text which she appreciates so intensely is fully aware of sins of omission and commission.

Making the aim of her literary life the closing of the 'gap' she perceives between aim and achievement, Lakshmi de Silva manages to retain the modest unobtrusiveness with which she goes about the task, indispensable to world letters, and especially important to our linguistically divided society, of making cultures accessible to one another. Noting that texts of such significance as Jayasena's play 'should be made accessible to those who do not read Sinhala, even if the attempt entails aesthetic loss', she adds:

> It is not the cup that matters, but the wine.

As she had observed earlier (in her preface to her English version of Martin Wickramasinghe's *Ape Gama* as *Lay Bare the Roots* in 1968), 'translation from one language to another can often mean dilution; that is why the work selected must have the strength to survive it.'

Besides *Kuveni* and *Ape Gama*, Lakshmi de Silva's major efforts have included translations (undertaken, like her translation of Wickramasinghe's *Ape Gama*, at the author's request) of Ediriwira Sarachchandra's ground-breaking poetic dramas *Maname* and *Sinhabahu*.

Sinhabahu poses a major challenge to the brave person who undertakes its translation. In an essay titled 'The Drama of E. R. Sarachchandra' which C. R. Hensman published in *Ceylonese Writing: Some Perspectives* Part 2, 1963, Regi Siriwardhana noted that 'the drama of *Sinhabahu* is primarily in [its] words and [its] music'; he had enjoyed it most, he added, when he heard it over the air, 'free of the distractions of the stage'. Lakshmi de Silva's English translation (which made this important play accessible for the first time in its history to non-Sinhala speakers in the island and outside it) has to create its effects and do justice to the dramatist's art without the assistance of melody: at least until a composer adds to her words the musical elements that would make possible a fully dramatic presentation of *Sinhabahu* in the English-language theatre.

Where a less courageous and accomplished translator might have resorted to a free verse line, she has chosen to wrestle with the restrictions and compulsions of rhymed verse. It is inevitable, therefore, that the language of her poetic English translation, although lacking as yet the extension of melody possessed by the Sinhala original, has to bear comparison with the flexibility and grace of Sarachchandra's play. This cannot be helped; and a compensatory factor may well be found in the fact that her English translation has helped to bring out elements in the play that the language barrier existing in Sri Lanka tends to obscure in the original.

For the reader of *Sinhabahu* who comes to it with no knowledge of Sinhala or of the *nadagama* tradition that inspires a good many of the play's essential elements, her translation makes certain other, equally valuable, connections: with the traditions of Greek tragic drama, for example, recalling the protagonist of *Oedipus Rex* who, strong in his towering self-confidence and in his dedication to the welfare of the people of his city, sets out on a path of retribution that ends in the discovery that he, and no other, is his father's murderer. Lakshmi de Silva's deliberate borrowing of Shakespeare's 'Cribb'd, (cabin'd) and confined' for the rebellious young hero Sinhabahu's rejection of his cave-life, and such lines as

I will besiege the universe,
Unsphere the earth

remind the reader of certain other figures of dramatic power: of Caliban writhing under the tyranny of Prospero's magic (as Sinhabahu struggles under the restrictions imposed upon him by his own inexperience of life and by the Lion's suffocating love), and of Lear discovering the sharpness of filial ingratitude.

Not that Sarachchandra's play requires such resonances either to establish its dramatic stature or to increase the pity and the terror it inspires in the play-goer. But the sophistication of the playwright and the complex origins of his play (which, as Siriwardhana notes in his essay, go far beyond the simplicities of *nadagama*) deserve to be recognized for what they are. While retaining the *nadagam* elements essential to the form of *Sinhabahu*, Lakshmi de Silva's translation reminds the reader of other traditions of both East and West which further extend the dramatic significance of the play.

Buddhist themes, subtly re-worked, have always been at the heart of Sarachchandra's plays. *Sinhabahu*, at one level a story of warring generations, at another an exploration of the contrasts of savage and civilised life, is also a poetic celebration of love and loving-kindness. This theme receives its first statement in the Princess's opening aria in Act One:

The world's harsh blows incessant strike
The body and the mind alike:
There is no salve nor healing art
Swifter than love to ease the hurt

and is developed at various levels in the course of the play. Answering in Act Two the questions of her children, the Princess sings of the 'power' and 'strangeness' of lovers' feelings for each other, which

like heaven's gem that can fulfil
Each wish made by the mind,
... proffer(s) every joy that men
Can ever seek to find.

Variations on the theme of the power of love to heal and comfort are heard when young Sinhasivali sings in Act Two of her concern for her father's safety in the forest and his loneliness in the cave; when Sinhabahu heroically affirms in Act Four the self-sacrificing love he feels as a Prince for his people; and finally, most movingly, later in the same Act when the enraged Lion

... wild with pain
Of love in severance
Saw his son's face like the moon
Over the dark trees rising
And his mind like white night-blooms flowered
In radiance.

Regi Siriwardhana noted in 1963 that *Sinhabahu* reflected 'the experience of our generation'. Lakshmi de Silva's superb translation captures the mood of a nation proudly rediscovering its cultural identity; and nowhere more powerfully than in the vigorous aria she gives the Lion, as with tossing mane he paces the circle of the stage upon his first entrance:

Of every quarter I am Lord
King of the beasts; all own my sway.
None dare challenge my strength and power;
Mine to command: theirs to obey.
As conquerors all subjects bring
Under a sole Imperial flag
Triumphant reigns the Lion-King.

But the 'contemporary significance' to which Regi Siriwardhana referred in 1963 is also in the play in a darker form. Readers of this play in 2001 must inevitably come to it with memories of July 1983 and the protracted sorrows brought upon Sri Lanka by eighteen years of civil strife. They may well find

here an ominous forewarning of these events in the island's history as the Lion, whose loving nature had protected him through two of his son's attempts on his life, allows anger at last to 'defile' and 'taint' his mind - and hurtles headlong to his own destruction.

More recently, Lakshmi de Silva translated Dayananda Gunewardene's *Gajaman Puvatha* into English as *The Gajaman Story*. Some of the difficulties faced by the translator of Sinhala classical poetry into English were discussed by this gifted translator in 1979, in an article which contained eight examples of her own work:

> Until the twentieth century, the major tradition of Sinhala poetry totally lacked any personal element. Hence there is little that is original to convey; it is in the manner of saying it, rather than in the idea itself, that poetic power resides. The peasants sang of their own love or loss; the sight-seers at Sigiriya scribbled epigrams on the mirror-wall, recording their spontaneous reactions to the beauty of the famous frescoes; but the masters kept to traditional themes. The greatest English poets expressed themselves through their lines; the greatest Sinhala poets concealed themselves behind theirs. They eulogised, narrated, described and moralised, dispensing brilliance and euphony, and displaying like their contemporaries, the Elizabethans, an ingenuous delight in their own ingenuity.

'There is nothing,' Lakshmi de Silva has said, 'to rival the peace and contentment of that moment in which an author's approval sets the seal on a translator's labours'. (1979)

Her insightful and poetic translations frequently enrich the work of her contemporaries. A recent example of her translations from nineteenth century Sri Lankan literature may be seen in the translation of verses from James D'Alwis's Sinhala poem 'A Journey from Colombo to Matara', which ends Yasmine Gooneratne's *Relative Merits* (1986).

An adaptation of her detailed literal translation of Gajaman Nona's famous verse petition to Sir John D'Oyly, one verse of which is printed here, has been published as an appendix to Brendon and Yasmine Gooneratne's *This Inscrutable Englishman* (1999), a biography of D'Oyly:

> Like Eros himself, handsome above all others, are
> you O noble John D'Oyly, Lord of this District,
>
> Like the Moon itself, you light up a whole city with the
> gentle radiance of your virtues,
>
> Like Lord Ganeshvara himself in the range and depth of
> your wit, you grasp the intricate meanings of
> poets' linked verses and phrases,
>
> And like the Divine Tree itself your shining right
> hand rewards with gifts their hopes and desires.

Gajaman pays a high compliment to D'Oyly's literary skills in the third line of this stanza, when she compares him to Lord Ganeshvara in the range and depth of his wit, and his ability to grasp 'the intricate meanings' of the linked verses and phrases of poetic language. (Lord Ganeshvara, the Hindu God of Wisdom, officiated as scribe when the poet Vyasa composed the Indian epic *Mahabharata*).

The compositions of Cornelia Isabella Perumal (Gajaman Nona), an erudite and witty poet of the nineteenth century, are especially challenging to a would-be translator because Gajaman makes full and frequent use of the metaphorical possibilities of the multiple meanings of words and sounds in the Sinhala language. Translating her verse appears to have given Lakshmi de Silva undiluted aesthetic and in tellectual pleasure. In a note supplied with her translation, she noted that Gajaman Nona frequently displayed her erudition in her Sinhala verse, on one notable occasion employing a phrase that is capable of thirty-one different interpretations.

Encouraged as a writer by her two elder brothers and two elder sisters, Lakshmi de Silva had intended at first to pursue a career in journalism. Changing direction soon after taking her Honours degree at Peradeniya in 1959, she found herself teaching English Literature at the University of Ceylon with great enjoyment in the 1960s. Later, from 1981 onwards, she moved to the University of Kelaniya, retiring in 1999 as Senior Lecturer in English. During her years as a University teacher, she became a significant force in the development of English letters in Sri Lanka, translating several major Sinhala works into English, and encouraging her students not only towards closer reading and deeper appreciation of English texts, but inspiring many of them, and several colleagues, to write poetry and fiction themselves.

While at Kelaniya, she obtained a doctoral degree (PhD) in 1987 for a dissertation on 'Form, function and fidelity: A study of their relationship in relation to the translation of poetry, with special reference to Sinhala poetry'.

A member of the English Association of Sri Lanka and of the Sri Lanka branch of the international Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies, Lakshmi de Silva held the position of Secretary and Vice-Chair of ACLALS from 1992 to 1995. Although she retired from active teaching in 1999, she has never retired from her fascination with literature and the theatre, or from reviewing the work in both genres of her contemporaries, a task that she clearly regards as both a duty and a pleasure.

Exceptionally well-read in the modern literature of East and West, generous in giving her time to the assistance of other critics and scholars, and possessed of a background in Western classical studies that matches her knowledge of classical Sinhala literature, she has proved herself indispensable on many occasions to the literary initiatives of her contemporaries. Many of the individual entries in the present study carry Lakshmi de Silva's name in the bibliographies that follow their lists of publications. In the texts of the entries themselves she frequently figures as the author of reviews in whi[ch] time and again demonstrated her matchless ability to 'grasp the in[tricate] meanings of [authors'] linked verses and phrases'.

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Manel de Silva

On the Way to Randenigala (1995) is the single volume of verse that **Manel** (Meegama) **de Silva** published before her death in 2000, but it is one that must surely bring pleasure for many years to come to the general reader as well, most especially, to the school children and other young people whom its simple language and style were intended to attract to the study of English.

Manel de Silva was educated at Visakha Vidyalaya, in Colombo, and subsequently at C. M. S. Ladies' College, Colombo, and the University of Ceylon, Peradeniya. At Peradeniya, E. F. C. Ludowyk, Hector Passe and Doric de Souza were her principal teachers. Following her graduation with a BA Honours degree in English in 1955, she returned briefly to Visakha as a teacher.

Most of her married life was passed in Sri Lanka's tea-growing hill-country, where her husband Ubhaya de Silva managed a succession of famous tea plantations; and although she later moved to Colombo, it is the beauty and tranquillity of rural Sri Lanka that is overwhelmingly the subject of her poetry.

For some years Manel de Silva contributed her skills as a reader and teacher of English-language literature to the work of the English language teaching unit of the University of Colombo, and her poems show her understanding of the needs of the Sinhala- and Tamil-educated student to whom English is an unfamiliar language. Reviewing *On the Way to Randenigala* in 1995, Gamini Punchihewa described it as 'a travelogue in poetry', embodying 48 poems drawn from 'idyllic village vignettes'.

Manel de Silva's poems focus with simplicity on the plants, flowers, birds and animals to be encountered in rural Sri Lanka, indicating through their effectiveness in doing so the usefulness to Sri Lankan writers of English as a means of recording and interpreting the beauty of a familiar world.

A second book, which was in the press at the time of Manel de Silva's death, was published posthumously in 2001.

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Rathi Dhanapala

As a child in Colombo, Rathi Dhanapala had a habit of 'scribbling' on walls, which her house-proud mother did not like at all. An uncle who lived in the household gave the little girl permission to scribble on the walls of his room, and after she had used up every available space to which she could reach, suggested that she could stand on his bed to continue her creative efforts. A sculptor today, as well as an artist of reputation, Rathi Dhanapala has never ceased to be grateful to this sympathetic elder who encouraged her creative efforts so long ago, adding:

> Though we have not met for quite some time,
> We have watched each other's progress all the time.
> Uncle dear, believe me this is true,
> All these years I have remembered to pray for you.
> ('Maama')

After studying at the School of Arts and Crafts, Madras, Rathi Dhanapala had the privilege of continuing her creative work at Shantiniketan during the lifetime of Dr Rabindranath Tagore, later studying arts and crafts at leading institutions in Japan. Following a short spell teaching sculpture at the Government School of Arts in Sri Lanka, she began work at the Government Training College at Maharagama, where she headed the Arts and Crafts department of the College for seventeen years. She retired at the end of 1970 to devote time to the care of her husband, who was not in 'very good health'.

That husband (the late D. B. Dhanapala, a leading figure in Sri Lankan journalism) was, according to the poet, the writer who most influenced and 'enriched' her life. She describes him in her book as 'a lover of Art and Sinhala culture, and the author of many books on Art besides other subjects'. (These

included, besides illustrated books about Sinhalese art and architecture, *Among Those Present*, one of the best and most interesting commentaries on contemporary Sri Lanka to be published during the period under review.)

No claims are made for her skills as a poet by Rathi Dhanapala. In a brief verse foreword to her first collection of poems, *Bon Voyage & Other Poems* (1971), the author tells her reader:

> I don't pretend it is good prose or poetry,
> I make no claims to be literary.

The book, published in the year following D. B. Dhanapala's death, is essentially an expression of love and longing for her lost husband and a celebration of the thirty three years of their happy married life. 'Attachment' is a piece that conveys very well the essential quality of the poet's feelings for her subject:

> I am glad you will never read these lines - for in my mind I can see you frown. This attachment is Thanha - let it go by, you will say.
>
> Please give me time and I shall surely try, and may be time will dull my pain and the pictures in my memory book will fade with the years, and this attachment will loosen the bonds that bind me to you - and I may perhaps recall all memory's pictures again without the need to wipe my eyes or see you frown in my mind - for then may be I would have conquered Thanha of a kind.

The poems are sincere in their tone, unpretentious in their style, but very attractive in the artless picture they present of a tranquil and happy family life.

Publications

Bon Voyage and Other Poems, 53 pp. Privately published, Colombo 1971. Poems

The Kandy Esala Perahera. Privately published. Colombo, 1977. Non-Fiction

Treasures of Lanka. Privately published, Colombo (n. d.) Poems

Erika Dias

Author of 12 published books, seven of which are poetry, and others writings on spiritual themes, Fraulein Erika (Ramawickrema) Dias (formerly a sociologist attached to the University of Colombo, and working today as poet and author and spiritual mind healer) was born in Weligama, Sri Lanka. She attended several schools, most of them convents. Her longest stay was in St Thomas's Girls' High School, Matara. The last school she attended was Castle Street Balika Vidyalaya, where she spent a year (1957 - 1958) before entering the University of Ceylon in 1958.

Her university career in Sri Lanka was interrupted in 1959 when, soon after qualifying to pursue a General Arts course, she married Dr Hiran Dias (then a young Lecturer in the Geography department of the University of Ceylon) and left Peradeniya with him for Britain, where he was about to begin postgraduate studies at St Catherine's College, Cambridge. She resumed her academic career in 1961, attending first the University of Hull, and then Fitchburgh State College, USA (as a transfer student from Hull), finishing in 1972 with a Bachelor of Arts degree *cum laude* in Social Sciences.

Erika Dias's sojourn in Cambridge, Hull, and the USA was the beginning of travel in many parts of the world, including Australia and Europe. She has spent extended periods of time in Myanmar and Thailand, experiences that have influenced and shaped her writing and her outlook on life: 'I was Buddhist at birth, but now my mind is universal, no fences', she wrote in 2001. In a poem that she contributed to *Postbag* (a Bangkok publication) she acknowledged the influence that the 18 years she spent in Thailand have had on her thinking:

I Learnt from the Thais

I learnt from the Thais
not to be afraid of work
I learnt from the Thais
not to keep it for another
I learnt from the Thais
that when fearlessly
my hand is in my work
however menial and
cumbersome the task

I gain self-confidence
my mind is not weakened
my body becomes strong
I become independent, self-reliant
I learnt from the Thais
the joy of sharing their work
I learnt from them also
the joy of sharing my food
I learnt from the Thais
the joy of communing together ...

Best known today for her poetry and for her work as a spiritual healer, Erika Dias was formerly on the lecturing staff of the University of Colombo, teaching sociology and demography. She made a significant academic contribution in the field of the social sciences between 1976 and 1982, researching and publishing papers that focused on family life in Sri Lanka, slums and shanties in the city of Colombo, and rehabilitation of low-income families in new housing schemes. Her publications in this area include a co-authored book that presented an original, 'human' approach to data collection in social research. (A selection of titles from her work in the social sciences is given below, together with her creative publications.) She later served as a consultant in UN ESCAP in Bangkok.

Erika Dias is a founder-member of The Group, an informal group of writers, artists and spiritual seekers based in Bangkok, which traces its beginnings to discussions that took place in 1985 between the poet and Dr Thynn-Thynn, a Burmese Buddhist teacher. The Group, which is not attached to any religion or sect, and is open to all earnest seekers, without discrimin ation on the basis of religious belief, education, nationality, race, sex or age, functions as a circle and is therefore leaderless. It does not stress any formal practice and rituals, but engages for the most part in discussion, analysis of personal experience, friendly relationships and 'a search for the truth in a spirit of openness and creativity'. The Group designs and publishes the 'Wisdom Gift' series of books and booklets in which much of Erika Dias's poetry has been published. Dr Hiran Dias, the poet affirms, is a source of constant encouragement to her work as 'consultant, poet and author, and mind healer'. Since 1995, Erika Dias has lived in Sri Lanka.

Between 1988 and 1992, Erika Dias was a member of the World Congress of Poets. In 1991 she received an honorary doctorate in Literature from the World Academy of Arts and Culture in California, and was awarded the Australia Poetry Day Medal. In 1992 she received awards from Assumption University, Bangkok, and from the royal family of Thailand for an 'Inter-Poetic Celebration of Queen Sirikit's 60th Birthday Anniverary'; and a poem ('Doomed to Die') on elephants received a 'Best of the Best' award from *Visions '96* in Massachusetts, USA, in 1996.

Her interest in the environment has resulted in several unpublished collections of poems for children on nature themes, in a poem ('Turtles') published in *The Island* on 28 January 1992, and in several English poems for children (with 'adaptations' in Sinhala and Tamil alongside the English text) contributed to a novel "Environ mental Educational Calendar" for April 1991 to March 1992 published by the Worldview International Foundation. Here Erika Dias meditates on a variety of environmental and conservation topics, among them 'The Greenhouse Effect', which she foreshadows in terms of

These warming up trends
of atmosphere
have frightening consequences
see the glaciers melting
elevating sea levels
floods and hurricanes
heat waves
droughts and famines
crops destroyed
forests wilting
heavenly green pastures
scorched and brown ...

In an insightful and sympathetic review of *Oneness in Duality*, a book published in 1993 in the Wisdom Gift Series that combines poems by Erika Dias with paintings by Pierre Wittmann, Manel Tampoe notes that

> Erika's poems have different degrees of depth. [Occasionally] she uses direct statement to offer advice as when she advocates that treatment of subordinates should on no account demean them -
>
> Never ever order them
> Do this, do that
> To constantly remind them
> They are your slaves,
> In your coat pocket
> If you must have them
> Thoroughly train them
> And leave them, to just be
> It is merciful to fire them
> But not to demean them.

Several others are random insights, communicated with a clean conciseness reminiscent of *haiku*:

Happiness

when you capture happiness
thinking has stopped
when thinking starts
happiness has left

Sometimes she employs [an] effective image, as when the image of the Buddha's flowing robes is used to suggest that non-acquisitiveness is an essentially gracious quality:

Pockets

Lord Buddha's robes
flow gracefully
and so freely
there are no pockets
to hold or cling

Other poems deal with recurring themes in her vision: one of these is the fundamental difference between Intellect and her concept of Mind. The intellect is seen as arid and leading to ceaseless fruitless activity. It should be made to serve utilitarian purposes:

The Intellect is only a can-opener

intellect properly used
is your friendly servant
but learn to discard it
like a can-opener
as soon as you use it ...

Generally, [Erika] uses a flexible, free verse where the rhythm depends on line length to make statements. Her verse has a simple, spontaneous, free-flowing movement which is very much in the spirit of her work. But the best

of her poems depend on metaphor for communicating her intuitive perceptions of a higher plane of reality:

At Liberation

At liberation
silky white cosmic clouds
will envelop you
cosmic wings of pink, blue
silver hues
will flutter around you
both the cosmic clouds
and the cosmic wings
will shower you
with blessing vibrations of peace
of no more birth, death
and birth again

Manel Tampoe concludes her review of *Oneness in Duality* and her comments on the poetry of Erika Dias by observing the significance of both book and poet for Sri Lanka in the last decade of the twentieth century:

> This book advocates ... a change in fundamental human attitudes [according to the Buddha's teaching], and has special relevance to us in Sri Lanka where religion seems to be promoting hatred and intolerance. It is therefore good to know that at least outside the country the spiritual resources of Buddhism are being tapped to augment a world movement for a better way of life, and that a Sri Lankan is deeply involved in it.

In Elmo Fernando of the University of Kelaniya, too, Erika Dias found a critic who approached her unusual *oeuvre* with understanding and respect. Dr Fernando concludes his review of her poetry with the opinion that

'Negative and Positive', 'The Kammike Link', 'Death and Re-Birth', 'Greed', 'The Strong and the Weak', 'Bureaucracy', 'This Life and the Next' and 'Growing Up' are pieces that will hold their own with any work of the poets, say, like Martin Booth, Roger Garfitt, Sean O'Brien, John Haynes and others of the New Poetry school of the West, the only difference being that some of these poets are more secular in outlook.

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Publications

'A Human Problem: Selection and Rehabilitation of Low-income Families in New Housing Schemes'. In *Proceedings* of the International Conference on Housing Poblems in Developing Countries. Dhahran, International Association for Housing Science (IAHS) Vol. 2, 1978 Non-Fiction

'A New Vision in Housing'. In *Proceedings* of the International Congress on Housing - The Impact of Economy and Technology, Vienna, 1981. Non-Fiction

'A Realistic Approach to the Slum and Shanty Problem in the City of Colombo'. In *Proceedings* of the International Conference on Low-income Housing - Technology and Policy Vol. 1. Asian Institute of Technology, Bangkok, June 1977. Non-Fiction

A Study of Slums and Shanties in the City of Colombo'. In *Population Problems of Sri Lanka*. Demographic Training and Research Unit, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka 2976. Non-Fiction

A Technique to Improve the Data Collection Process in Social research: A Human Approach (with Padmal de Silva). Dyna Print, Bangkok 1982. Non-Fiction

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Blissful Emptiness. Poems by Erika Dias. 29 pp. Wisdom Gift Series, Bangkok 1999. Poems

'Children in Shanty Environments and Realistic Solutions to their Problems'. A report prepared for UNICEF in Colombo, 1978. Non-Fiction

Environment: An Environmental Educational Calendar '91 April - '92 March. Poems for children by Erika Dias. Adapted to Sinhalese and Tamil by Lal Hewapathirana and John Regis. The Worldview International Foundation, Colombo 1991. Poems.

'Family Life and Adjustment to Changes by Young Persons in Sri Lanka', in *Proceedings* of the regional Workshop on Non-traditional Forms of Education in the Third World. World University Service, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka 1976. Non-Fiction

'King of Kings', poem published in the *Newsletter* of the Standing Committee of Women, Vol. 2, No. 3 (September - December, B.E. 2543/2000, p. 1. Poem.

On Liberty. Poems by Erika Dias. 96 pp. Privately published, Bangkok 1991. Poems

Oneness in Duality. Poems by Erika Dias, Paintings by Pierre Wittmann. 55 pp. Wisdom Gift Series, Bangkok 1993. Poems

*On Nature's Divine Science. Poems by Erika Dias.*58 pp. Privately published, Bangkok 1988. Poems

On Thoughts, No Thoughts, Experiences and Reflections. Poems by Erika Dias. 44 pp. Privately published, Bangkok 1988. Poems

'Our Lovely Queen Sirikit'. Poem published in the *Newsletter* of the Standing Committee of Women, Vol. 2, No. 2 (May - August, B.E. 2543/2000, p. 1. Poem

'The City of Colombo, Sri Lanka: The Integration of Squatters into the Mainstream of Urban Life' (with S.W.P. Bulankulame and M.E. Joachim). In *The Role of Housing in Promoting Social Integration.* Dept of Economic and Social Affairs, UN/ST/ESA/72, New York 1978. Non-Fiction

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Gunasekera, Leel review of *Oneness in Duality*, in *Daily News*, 1 February 1995, pp. 22-3

Hewapathirana, Lal Director Worldview, Sri Lanka, 'Towards a more sustainable environment', in *Sunday Observer* 4 June 2000, p. 34: quotes a poem ('A Prayer by Mother Earth') by Erika Dias.

'Lankan poet lauds Queen Sirikit', *Ceylon Daily News*, 9 January 1993. Account of the inter-poetic celebrations in Bangkok that marked the occasion of the 60th birthday anniversary of Queen Sirikit of Thailand; includes 'Offering' and 'The Coins', two poems read on this occasion by Erika Dias

'Novel environmental calendar from Worldview', in *Daily News* 6 June 1991

Ruangskul, Prasert 'Message from a Budhist poet', review of *Poems on Thoughts, No Thoughts, Experiences and Reflections.* In *Bangkok Post*, 10 July 1988

Tampoe, Manel 'Another Wisdom Gift - Oneness in Duality', review of a book by Erika Dias and Pierre Wittmann in the 'Wisdom Gift' series. *The Island*, 15 February 1994, p.III

—— 'A Wisdom Gift', review of *A Wisdom Gift. Poems by Erika Dias, Paintings by Pierre Wittmann* in the 'Wisdom gift' series. *The Island*, 8 September 1992, p. vi.

—— review of *The Environmental Educational Calendar Book*, in *The Island*, 17 July 1990.

Aditha Dissanayake

Short story writer Aditha Udayangi Dissanayake was born in Galle in 1973, and attended Sacred Heart Convent, Galle, St Anthony's Balika Maha Vidyalaya, Colombo 3, and Devi Balika Vidyalaya, Colombo 8 before entering university. She is an English Honours graduate of the University of Kelaniya, and works today as a journalist on the *Daily News*, sometimes using the pseudonym of "Paperclip". She has been encouraged as a writer by her father (Daya Dissanayake, General Manager of Nawakrama (Pvt) Ltd) and himself a writer, her mother (Indrani Pathirana, a teacher) and her husband (Nishantha Abeysinghe, who `believes I can write well, even when I don't').

Aditha Dissanayake acknowledges with gratitude the help of Lakshmi de Silva, D. C. R. A. Goonetilleke, Manique Gunasekera, Maithree Wickramasinghe, and Eisha Hewabowela, all five of whom were among her teachers at Kelaniya; and Lyn Ockersz, Associate Editor of the *Daily News* who invited her to work with him at the paper's Features Desk, and introduced her to the art of feature writing.

Aditha Dissanayake has published her stories in the literary journals *Channels* and *Satyn*. One of them, 'White Men', is written from the point of view of an intelligent young working girl who attempts to make sense of her attraction to a young Britisher in her office. In another, 'Petals on a Wet Black Bough', Dissanayake takes up a socio-cultural issue that has attracted the interest of other women writers cited in this survey (see entries on Lokuge and Wijenaike) of a young girl's attainment of age:

> Her mother was too liberal minded to keep [Akeshi] secluded the way her cousins had been imprisoned in their bedrooms when they had come of age ... When her father was told of the news he ruffled Akeshi's short hair affectionately, turned towards her mother and said, "You can bathe her on the day you like and let her go out afterwards."

Such 'liberal minded' parental behaviour is certainly very different from that of earlier, more traditional (or superstitious) generations as described by Lokuge and Wijenaike; and in that difference may perhaps be discerned a change in attitudes over the period under survey. It is behaviour to which Akeshi's grandmother predictably reacts with 'shock' and 'scoldings'.

Dissanayake's main concern in this story is not, however, with a particular socio-cultural agenda, but with a human situation as reflected in the feelings of a young and naive little girl. Although protected by her parents from her grandmother's disapproval, Akeshi cannot escape the changes wrought in her by nature: she, who 'hated change', finds her emotions in turmoil as her cousin Mahela seems to turn without warning 'into someone else all of a sudden':

> [She] noticed for the first time how lean and tall Mahela was. How black his short cropped hair, how broad his shoulders... She felt the blood rushing to her cheeks ... She was angry with herself.

Aditha Dissanaike's story, unlike Chandani Lokuge's novel, has a happy ending, as the young man (from whom Akeshi has fled away in her dismay and self-consciousness) calls after her:

> "Hey, don't run. I know about it. I think it's something wonderful."

Aditha Dissanayake's interest in women's issues and in the work of her contemporaries has emerged in a short but perceptive essay on Anne Ranasinghe that was published by *Voice of Women* in 2000, and in 'Respect for Mice, but not for Men', a review of Malathi de Alwis's study of Sri Lankan women activists, *Casting Pearls*, published in the *Daily News* in 2001.

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Publications

'Alice's Wonderland'. In *Satyn*, Vol. 2, No. 8 (August 2000) Short story

'A Wonderful Secret'. In *Satyn*, Vol. 2, No. 5 (April 2000) Short story

'Big Apple'. In *Satyn*, Vol. 2, No. 9 (September 2000) Short story

'Call me Thaththa'. In *Satyn*, Vol. 2, No. 6 (June 2000) Short story

'Calls of Nature'. In *Satyn*, Vol. 2, No. 8 (August 2000) Short story

'Fired and Jobless'. In *Satyn*, Vol. 2, No. 7 (July 2000) Short story

'Forbidden Emotions'. In *Satyn*, Vol. 2, No. 6 (May 2000) Short story

'Gravel'. In *Channels* Vol. 9, No. 1. Short story

'He Knows Her, He Knows Her not'. In *Satyn*, Vol. 2, No. 6 (June 2000) Short story

'In her poem she speaks of what she thinks'. In *Voice of Women*, Vol. 5, No. 6 (October 2000). Non-Fiction

'Job Hunting'. In *Satyn*, Vol. 2, No. 6 (May 2000) Short story

'Men and Stuff'. In *Satyn*, Vol. 2, No. 10 (October 2000) Short story

'Not Love but Something Else'. In *Satyn*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (February 2000) Short story

'Petals on a Wet Black Bough'. In *Satyn*, Vol. 2, No. 5 (April 2000) Short story.

'Respect for Mice, but not for Men'. Review of Malathi de Alwis and Kumari Jayawardena, *Casting Pearls* (Social Scientists' Association, Colombo, 2001) in *Daily News*, 3 August 2001, p. 14. Non-Fiction

'The Dentist and the Beautician'. In *Satyn*, Vol. 2, No. 10 (October 2000) Short story

'The Grass is Greener'. In *Satyn*, Vol. 2, No. 8 (August 2000) Short story

'What Happened You Guys?'. In *Satyn*, Vol. 2, No. 7 (July 2000) Short story

'What is Success?'. In *Satyn*, Vol. 2, No. 10 (October 2000) Short story

'White Men'. In *Channels*, Vol. 9, No. 2, pp. 43 - 6; also published in *Satyn*, Vol. 2, No. 8 (August 2000). Short story.

Khulsum Edirisinghe

Khulsum (Gunasekera) Edirisinghe is currently Head of the Department of Value Education at the Asian International School in Colombo. Two eminent educationists, her grandmother Clara Motwani and her mother Goolbai Gunesekera, were part of this poet's early childhood. They were important influences in her formative years, writes Alfreda de Silva (herself a poet of distinction) of the author of *The Moonchild and Other Poems*, a volume of verse written between the ages of 17 and 22, which was published in Colombo in 2001.

College life in India was followed by the completion of graduate studies in English and Dance at the University of North Carolina in the United States. On her return to Sri Lanka, Khulsum ran a ballet school in Colombo. She married Janaka Edirisinghe when she was 20, and has two children, a daughter and a son.

The Moonchild & Other Poems reveals an active fancy and a gift for creating atmosphere. The poet's involvement with the arts is evident in such poems as 'Improvisation' and 'Auditions', and, as Alfreda de Silva notes, a sharply critical eye observes 'the hollowness' with which people celebrate the holy festival of Easter:

> You rained the heavens to soothe their sores ...
> But in forgetfulness we go about our days.
> And Easter eggs in mocha shells
> Resuscitate the waning appetite of our day.

Jean Arasanayagam, also a well-known poet, found that the complexity of Khulsum's poems

did not make for easy reading. One [has] to embark on several journeys, many of them surreal, into a personalized landscape, sharing in the often psychological and emotional experiences of the poet. ... This is very much a woman's landscape, 'woman poetry', sensitive, delicate yet strong and resilient. There is a remarkable control of language, each poem spare and taut, the emotion held within bounds without excess or overstatement, the imagery and metaphor closely related to the theme of each poem...

These are poems of exploration and discovery and the reader travels with the writer through a terrain which continually yields new twists and turns. It is very much an interior journey, in which the poet has to find routes and destinations. These are all beginnings and the traveller has to go far, far beyond the usual well-trodden pathways and well thumbed maps.

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Publications

'Their Crafty, Sullen Art'. In *Channels*, 1, 3, p. 34. Poem
The Moonchild and Other Poems. Privately published. Colombo, 2000.

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de Silva, Alfreda 'Dance and verse move in poetic expression', review of *The Moonchild and Other Poems*, in *The Sunday Times*, 8 April 2001, p. 4

Gooneratne, Yasmine Foreword to *The Moonchild and Other Poems*

Padma Edirisinghe

Padma (Wijesinghe) Edirisinghe was born in Veyangoda in 1936. She was educated at Holy Cross College, Gampaha up to 1945, at Ave Maria Convent, Negombo from 1945 - 1954, and at Veyangoda Central College in 1955, entering the Arts Faculty of the University of Ceylon at Peradeniya in 1955. Graduating in 1958 with a Bachelor of Arts (General) degree, she earned a Diploma in Education in 1961, and qualified for a Master's degree in the same field in 1985. The daughter of two educationists, influenced as a writer by Sumana Saparamadu and J. E. Jayasuriya, she has made education in Sri Lanka her life's work and her own primary field of interest. She retired recently as Director of the Department of Education.

Padma Edirisinghe describes herself as 'a short story writer cum novelist cum translator cum social historian'. She was the editor of a children's magazine for the Education Mnistry from 1985 - 1988, a member of the Cultural Ministry's Western Literary Panel from 1988 - 1999, and acted as the panel's Chair in 2000. She is the President of the International Board on Books for Young Children (IBBY), and has acted as secretary of the Sri Lanka Institute of Translators while free-lancing for Associated Newspapers of Sri Lanka from 1975 to the present day.

A prolific and seemingly indefatigable writer, Padma Edirisinghe's productions fall into so many genres that they are difficult to categorize. A dozen articles published in the travel magazine *Explore Sri Lanka* between April 1990 and February 1998 introduce topics with a historical interest such as 'A Journey into Olde Colombo', 'Saga of the Colombo-Kandy Road', 'The Buried kingdom of Kotte', 'Walawwas', 'Colombo's Nawan Perahera' and 'On Lanka's Freedom Won'. Her interest in education has produced 'Our Folk literature - A Treasure Trove', 'The Role of the Buddhist Education Movement', 'Print Media and Children's Issues', 'English writings in and on

Sri Lanka', and 'Rights of Children'. A strong interest in feminist issues and religious and cultural themes informs all her work, emerging most clearly in her non-fiction (see titles of her publications listed below), but also in her novel *The Curse*.

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Publications

A. Original Works

'An event unique in world religious history'. In *Dinamina Vesak Annual*, Lake House 1999, pp. 17 - 20. Non-Fiction

'Arranged marriages drive Sri Lankan women to suicide'. Article in *Depthnews Women's International*, Philippines, May 1982; pagination uncertain Non-Fiction

'Buddhism on the Internet'. Article in *Buddhist Cultural Writings*, Cultural Ministry, pp. 163 - 171; date uncertain. Non-Fiction

Can books help the child? IBBY publication, Nehru House, New Delhi 1998, pp. 30-39. (Text and illustrations by Padma Edirisinghe).Non-Fiction

Child and the Earth. Privately published. New Lanka Printers, Rajagiriya 1990. Novel

'Christian martyrs of Buddhist rights'. Article in *Impact*. Lake House, July 1998. Non-Fiction

Coping in a violent world. IBBY publication, Nehru House, New Delhi 1998, pp. 68 - 77. Non-Fiction

'Deceptive ads mislead women'. Article in *Depthnews Women's International*, Philippines; reproduced in *Ceylon Daily News*. (Both dates of publication uncertain) Non-Fiction

'Deepaduttaramaya'. Article in *Dinamina Vesak Annual*, pp. 43 - 48; date uncertain. Non-Fiction

'English writings in and on Sri Lanka'. Article in *Kala Magazine*, Cultural Ministry, April 2000, pp. 17 - 20 Non-Fiction

From a Woman's Diary. Privately published. Kandy 1975. Novel

'Jathaka Story: the story, message and role', in *Buddhist Cultural Writings*, Cultural Ministry 1999, pp. 240 - 249. Non-Fiction

'Little Rome of Sri Lanka', in *Observer Pictorial* (date and pagination uncertain). Non-Fiction

Long Ago in Lanka: Cameos of the Past. A collection of historical articles previously published in *Sunday Observer*. Privately published. New Lanka Printers, Rajagiriya 1985. Non-Fiction

'Myth of Race in Sri Lanka'. Article in *Eastern Review*, Sistova Road, London. September 1988, pp. 193 - 6. Non-Fiction

'New deal for Sri Lankan Women'. Article in *Depthnews Women's International*, Philippines, date uncertain; also published in *Hitavada*, Nagpur, India, February 1982. Non-Fiction

Nodanna Aththo (The One who Knows Nothing). Privately published. Colombo 1985. Short stories

'Our folk religion - A Treasure Trove'. Article in *Adyapana Chinthana*, Education Ministry, pp. 123 - 125; date uncertain. Non-Fiction

'Print Media and Children's Issues'. Article in *Impact*. Lake House, May 1998, pp. 18 - 19. Non-Fiction

'Rights of Children'. Article in Open University Publication 1998. Open University, Nawala, pp. 203 - 221. Non-Fiction

'Schoolboy essays of the President', contribution to *J.R. Jayewardena Felicitation Volume*, J.R. Jayewardene Centre, Colombo (date uncertain). Non-Fiction

'Sri Lanka's Poor Women get Livelihood Training'. Article in *Depthnews Women's International*, Philippines, January 1982. Non-Fiction

The Curse. Privately published. Seedevi Printers, Dehiwela 1998; a chapter from this novel has been published in *Indo-Asian Literature Quarterly*. Academy of Indo-Asian Literature, Saraswathi Vihar, October 1998/March 1999, pp. 36 - 38. Novel

'The famous writer who avoided women', in *Impact*. Lake House, September 1999, pp. 22-23. Non-Fiction

'The mini Portuguese colony in Sri Lanka's heartland'. In *Banker's Journal*, Institute of Bankers, Borella, June 2000, pp. 33 - 36. Non-Fiction

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'The role of the Buddhist Education Movement'. Article in *Sri Lankan Journal of Education Research*, National Institute of Education, Maharagama, pp. 25 - 38; date uncertain. Non-Fiction

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Truth Hurts. A collection of educational articles that first appeared in *Sunday Observer, The Sun* and *The Weekend*. Privately published. New Lanka Printers, Rajagiriya 1989. Non-Fiction

'What makes a woman criminal in Sri Lanka'. Feature article In *Depthnews Women's International*, Philippines, September 1981. Non-Fiction

B. Translations

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Bitterhearts (Ajith Perera). Privately published; date and genre uncertain

Footprints of a Heritage (UNESCO); date uncertain. Non-Fiction

Legacy of Asia (UNESCO); date uncertain. Non-Fiction

Play of the Elephant (Tilak Navaratne); date and genre uncertain

Social Ideology of Martin Wickramasinghe (R.Abeywickreme); date uncertain. Non-Fiction

The Changing Face of Colombo (R.L. Brohier). Visidunu Publishers, Boralesgamuwa; date uncertain. Non-Fiction

The Greatest Human (W.N. Karunaratne); date uncertain

Usha Ekanayake

Usha (Wickremasinghe) Ekanayake was born in Mount Lavinia, Sri Lanka, in 1935, and attended Girls High School, Mount Lavinia and Methodist College, Colombo, before entering the University of Ceylon at Peradeniya in 1953. A daughter of the novelist Martin Wickramasinghe and his wife Prema, she was brought up in southern Sri Lanka, 'in an atmosphere of books', and began scribbling little stories when she was a school girl.

Usha Ekanayake graduated with a BA degree from the University of Peradeniya in 1957, later qualifying for a postgraduate Diploma in Education (1976) that started her off in a teaching career. She was encouraged to write by her husband Abey Ekanayake and by her Peradeniya contemporary and friend Kamini de Abrew. Now retired from teaching, she regards her writing as a hobby, and in order to pursue it in good company, has become a member of the English Writers Workshop of Sri Lanka, the active writing group based in Colombo.

Usha Ekanayake enjoys travelling, and the stories in her first collection, *Snapshots*, are evidence of the observant eye and thoughtful mind she has brought to her experience of life in Nepal and Australia, as well as in her own homeland.

In the first story in the collection, a little girl from a Nepali village is sold into prostitution in the city, and is betrayed twice over by the men she loves and trusts, first by her uncle, and then by her weak-willed lover, a pimp named Ganapath. This story is told in a manner that is economical and deceptively simple:

It was on the third day that Ganapath approached her.

"I know you are an unspoilt girl, but the nature of the work [you are here to do] involves some spoiling. Tomorrow I want you to do different work."

As Ganapath looked into her innocent eyes he felt a pang of remorse. Kanchana looked at him with trust and said

"You are my uncle's friend. I will do my best."

Ganapath went away, but all the girls heard Madam's voice.

"Ganapath, do not spoil this one also, she will be the most desired girl here. It is you who will go if you interfere."

Late that night Ganapath came up and spoke to Kanchana.

"Tomorrow a rich man will come to spend the night with you, please him, and he will pay us handsomely."

Ganapath thrust a bag of sweets into her hand and almost tumbled down the stairs. A great shadow crossed Kanchana's eyes and a tight pain smote her heart. So this is my job. She recalled the whispered stories other young girls had told each other. "They use us, but our men, our uncles and fathers, do not care."

Changed by her experience into a 'dry-eyed, hard-faced little girl', Kanchana escapes from the brothel and, selling a gold pendant that had been given her by her first 'client', she buys her bus ticket 'home', to Vengari village.

From a different pen, this account of the callous exploitation of a helpless juvenile by males whom she regards as her protectors, and of a type of 'work' that indeed 'involves some spoiling', could have been a feminist tract. Usha Ekanayake, however, approaches her characters from a humane point of view: she writes with a mature understanding of the process by which Kanchana

achieves her hard-won strength of mind, but also with compassion for Ganapath's weakness.

Her talent for applying a technique of quiet understatement to large themes is well displayed, too, in the other eleven pieces that make up this collection. Two 'snapshots' from Australian life, both set in the high plains of the Snowy Mountains, and involving characters who are convincingly Australian in speech and behaviour, help to illustrate the range of mood and subject of which she is capable. In complete contrast to these are the pieces with a Sri Lankan/Asian theme or setting: 'Running Away', in which two Sinhalese children in a remote village escape from Tamil terrorists, and find an unexpected companion in a Tamil boy who has paid with his life for harbouring the same idea; 'The Seeker', a poem in which 'Sigiriya's king' Kassapa, re-born as an 'abitthaya' or server in a temple, reflects on the ironies of his journey through *samsara*; 'The Blind Ego' and 'Life is Strange', stories of middle class people dealing with life's situations; and 'Yasodhara's Song', in which the Bodhisattva's deserted wife, the Princess Yasodhara, prays that her husband will be successful in his mission

To teach man the nature of this world so binding
And guide us to a world without greed.

If *Snapshots* is anything to go by, creative writing for Usha Ekanayake is a hobby that is developing rapidly into a craft of some distinction.

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Publications

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Chitra Fernando (1935 - 1998)

Chitra Elaine Fernando was born in Kalutara, in Sri Lanka, and educated at Visakha Vidyalaya, Bandarawela, at Balika Maha Vidyalaya, Kalutara, and at the University of Ceylon, Peradeniya, which she entered with an Exhibition in History. Delighting in literature, she showed from the first a special aptitude for linguistics; and of the two branches of English studies, it was the second that was to become her major professional interest. At Peradeniya, where Hector Passe, Doric de Souza, and Robin Mayhead were her principal teachers, she continued two private pleasures she had developed as a child: reading classic European literature, much of it ranging far beyond the texts set for study; and the writing of short stories. She published some of her stories (anonymously) in *Thunapaha*, a students' magazine in which she had a hand as co-editor.

Although she deliberately kept herself aloof from student politics at Peradeniya, events on campus must have interested her enough to make a considerable impact upon her developing sensibilities: the result may be seen in *Cousins*, her first and only novel, parts of which are set in Peradeniya in the 1950s. An extract from her developing manuscript, which she sent for publication to *Channels* (where she knew it would be seen and read by Sri Lankans resident in the island) carries the following author's note: *'The events depicted below occurred in 1959, and portray the power relations holding between two groups of different social status'*:

> Laura Abeyweera took out her handkerchief and used it as a fan, then unfolding it wiped her face. Amitha, glancing at her grandmother, was struck by her clear-cut profile, so different from her Kalutara grandmother's round, plump face. How pretty her mother still was! She caught a glimpse of her own face in the driver's mirror. I'm beautiful, flashed across her mind,

giving her a little shock of pleasure. She turned to look at the bunches of king-coconuts heaped on the ground outside [the roadside stall] and the pineapples in a shallow cane basket. The man behind the makeshift counter stared at her. The directness of his gaze was disconcerting.

"A thambili or a piece of pine?" asked her Uncle Upali.

She shook her head, saying "I'm not thirsty," though only a moment before she'd been thinking how nice it would be to bite into a slice of that pineapple right on top of the pile in the basket.

Laura Abeyweera was saying she wanted to wash her hands and wipe her face with a wet hanky. A young woman carrying a bucket came out of the house behind the stall with a child on her hip, and walked towards the pump a few yards away. Laura Abeyweera leaned out of the car window: "Here! Here! Aney, can you get me a little water to wash my hands and face?"

The young woman walked on, unhurried, leisurely.

Laura Abeyweera raised her voice: "I want to wash my hands and face, I want a bit of water."

The young woman turned her head slightly: "You want some water? You have two hands and two legs, no? Get it yourself."

At the pump she placed the bucket under the spout, crooning to the child on her hip while it filled, then picking it up she sauntered back towards the house without a glance at the occupants of the car. The stall-keeper's eyes followed the movements of his wife, his glance rested for a moment on her hips and buttocks outlined beneath her tight cloth, then turning away, he opened a newspaper and began to read.

Laura Abeyweera looked bewildered. She appealed to the stall-keeper: "I just want some water. To wash my hands."

He continued to read.

"Use a hanky, Laura. Here, have mine." Charles Abeyweera passed his handkerchief to his wife, started up the car, and drove off.

"That - that woman - she - she was so rude! I asked her very politely for some water - would it have killed her to get it for me? She was going to the pump, no?"

"These days, Laura Naenda, you have to be very careful," said Upali Herath. "Nowadays people are very sensitive about even a hint of inequality. Now they're saying things like, we all have eyes, ears, mouths, noses, arms, legs - so what's the difference? Money is the only difference."

"We're all equally human, so to resent people behaving naturally is unreasonable. A cat may look at a king, one person can stare at another."

"I don't know about cats and kings and stares but that woman's behaviour, now that was not educated behaviour," said her grandmother.

"People like her and - that - that man - they resent us because we speak English all the time."

"I'm very glad I do," said her grandfather, "it's the language of Shakespeare."

"And have servants, big houses, cars - that kind of thing," continued Amitha. "That woman - maybe she thought you were treating her like a servant. Archi, if she had asked you to get her some water if you'd been going to the pump, would you have?"

"Now see what's happened to this child! That Hector de Souza's talk has filled her head with all kinds of dangerous ideas. Why should I be going to a roadside pump with a bucket in my hand? Just tell me why?"

This is a scene with which every Sri Lankan reader of *Channels* would be familiar: the roadside fruit-stall set up in front of a village home, the water pump, the car with its affluent holiday-makers, who stop by the stall for refreshment. But the 'ordinary' scene turns into something quite extraordinary, an arena for a battle of wills in which victory goes to the under-privileged. Twentyfive years earlier, the stall-keeper would never have raised his eyes to Amitha's, much less subjected a young girl of superior social status to his 'direct' gaze. His wife would have hospitably placed chairs in the shade of a tree for the visitors, and served them sliced pineapple on a plate, or pierced king-coconut, with no thought of payment; and the visitors, for their part, would have accepted such rural courtesy as part of the natural order of things. But 'nowadays', as Upali Herath warns, things have changed: 'dangerous' ideas are abroad, and the affluent must be 'very careful' in their behaviour to the poor. The details which Chitra Fernando packs into her description of the speech and behaviour of each participant in this 'ordinary' event - Amitha's pleasure in her own appearance, her refusal of refreshment immediately following the stall-keeper's 'disconcertng' stare, the unhurried gait of his wife, Laura Abeyweera's 'bewilderment', the elders' allusions to 'educated behaviour' and 'the language of Shakespeare' - effectively document that change at both the personal and the social level.

Chitra Fernando graduated from Peradeniya in 1959 with an Honours degree in English. From May 1958 to April 1960, she taught English at Visakha Vidyalaya, resigning in 1960 to join the staff of the University of Ceylon at Peradeniya as a Temporary Assistant Lecturer in the Literature department.

A scholarship took her to the University of Sydney in Australia in 1961, where she obtained an M. A. (Hons) degree in 1963 for a thesis titled: "A Constructive Study of English and Sinhala Grammar".

Having returned to Sri Lanka in 1964, she worked there in the Department of Education until 1968, when she returned to Australia to take up a Lectureship in Linguistics at Macquarie University. She began work on a doctoral thesis (on "The Nature and Function of Idiom") at Macquarie in 1972, which she completed in 1981. During this period she wrote and published five volumes of stories for Sri Lankan children in the `Taprobane Readers' series, using the pseudonym of `Chitralekha'; all the stories are set in Sri Lanka. She also published some articles: notably one on attitudes and language in Ceylonese creative writing, published in 1973, and another on `English and Sinhala Bilingualism in Sri Lanka', published in 1976. The first of these is outstanding, both in Sri Lankan literary criticism and in her own critical *oeuvre,* for its width and depth of range - she covers drama and poetry in it as well as fiction - and because she brings her extensive linguistic training to bear, for the first and last time, on the creative writing of her contemporaries: works by N. E. Weerasooria (`Fijjik'), Mark Bartholomeusz, Godfrey Gunatilleke, Suvimalee Karunaratna, Yasmine Gooneratne, Ernest Macintyre, James Goonawardena, Punyakante Wijenaike, and Peter Scharen are all brought under her discerning eye. *Three Women, Between Worlds* and four other pieces of short fiction, and a monograph on *Idiom* in collaboration with Roger Flavell (London University), also belong to this period. Her academic work at Macquarie in these years included courses and workshops in Creative Writing.

Chitra Fernando began the draft of a first novel, *Cousins,* in 1989, working at the same time on preparing her PhD thesis for publication. Her thesis was published in 1996 by Oxford University Press under the title *Idioms and Idiomacity,* and she succeeded in completing *Cousins* before her death in Sydney in 1998. This, her first and only novel, which she completed a few days before her death in Sydney in 1988, was published posthumously in 1999 in a limited edition that was paid for by her estate.

In April 1993, after Chitra Fernando was diagnosed as suffering from bone marrow cancer, she retired from Macquarie University on medical grounds after 25 years of teaching. In 1994, fully aware that she had a limited time to live, she returned to Sri Lanka, and her family home in Kalutara, where she observed everything around her, particularly the rural setting of her childhood home, and the birds and animals that were still a feature of that beloved environment, with the intensity and passion of one who knows that she is seeing them for the last time. A good deal of that intense observation, recorded in her journals, is incorporated into *Cousins,* the novel on which she was working, which was to be her last long work of fiction.

By living overseas for half her life, Chitra Fernando was able to pursue her craft 'as a free individual', liberated to a great extent from emotional involvement with Sri Lankan events, and from the 'labels' relating to caste and class that she believed to be inescapable in her homeland. It is not surprising that, looking back on her life a few years before her death, she observed: "Sri Lanka gave me my soul, but Australia gave me my freedom" and added: "Without that freedom my soul would have shrivelled".

All Chitra Fernando's writings, except for her PhD thesis and the children's stories that were published by Lake House Investments in the 'Taprobane Readers' series, and even those works that were brought out by The Writers Workshop, Calcutta, and Wordlink, Sydney, were published at her own expense. Shelagh Goonewardene, a friend who assisted her with advice on getting her writing into print, states that Chitra never explained to her why she chose to publish in the way she did, adding:

> It was a fairly intimate process with her and one she liked to share with people she knew. I think she also would not have wanted to work with editors who might have pressed for changes. Also there was her belief that hers were 'modest works'. She was not ambitious for a large reading public and the labels of famous publishing houses. She felt that her work would quietly make its way to people who really appreciated it, and in fact that I think is what has happened. (Personal communication, 25 March 2001)

From an early age, Chitra Fernando was a voracious reader and a prococious one. Four works which influenced her from her earliest years were *The Life of the Buddha*, the *Odyssey* (in English translation), Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, and the *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*. (" I see now in retrospective," she writes in her journal of 1996, "that all these works in one way or another reflect the tragic aspect of life.") Two works that set her off on her reading path were volumes inherited from her grandfather, through her mother (Mrs Olive Fernando). One, *The World's Greatest Short Stories*, introduced her to Chekhov's `The Kiss', W. Somerset Maugham's `Before the Party', and Katherine Mansfield's `Taking the Veil'. The second, *World Famous Books in Outline*, taught her that "literature meant more than English literature".

While studying for the Senior School Certificate at Balika Maha Vidyalaya, she read Leonard Woolf's 1913 novel *The Village in the Jungle* in its Sinhala translation by A.P. Gunaratne to improve her Sinhala, one of the three subjects in which a pass mark was required. "The jungle so fascinated me that I wrote a short piece about the book, commenting most on the jungle". This `short piece' was published in the "Under 21" column of the *Ceylon Daily News* in 1951.

By the time she entered University in 1954 at the age of nineteen, she had read twenty novels by Alexandre Dumas, and works by Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Turgenev, Gogol, Chekhov, Balzac, Stendhal, Maupassant and Flaubert. This early reading bore fruit later on: her fine story 'Missilin', for example, was influenced by Flaubert's 'The Simple Heart'. She was later to trace the early beginnings of her conception of her own social class ("the bourgeoisie - its moral coarseness") to de Maupassant's story 'Boule de Suif', to which she had been introduced at the age of fourteen by her uncle Lloyd de Silva (her mother's brother), "a key influence in my adolescence". Lloyd de Silva, a very widely-read individual who was himself later to become the author of an autobiography, *Echoes in the Memory*, was chiefly responsible for introducing his niece to the masters of the French and Russian novel. Chekhov's themes and techniques had a special fascination for her, and this Russian writer remained an inspiring influence in her own writing throughout her life. 'A Colombo Hamlet', written in the period 1950-195

was modelled on Chekhov's 'A Moscow Hamlet', and was published in the *Ceylon Daily News* under the pseudonym 'Paul'.

Also established through her early reading was Chitra's sense, expressed in her journals in 1997, that she possessed ("though to a much more modest degree") certain qualities that she perceived in three other writers: Leonard Woolf, Chekhov and Katherine Mansfield: the first, a strong sense of the tragic aspect of life; the second, "individuality ... the kind of distinctive, idiosyncratic personality necessary for a writer". Uniting her with these three writers, in her perception, was a third factor: that "in one way or another they were and I am something of an outsider in our respective milieux".

The reading experiences brought to her by her undergraduate years at Peradeniya that were important enough to her to be recalled in her last years included Christopher Marlowe (especially *Dr Faustus*), Shakespeare (*Macbeth*), Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, George Crabbe (*The Village*), Joseph Conrad (especially *Nostromo*) and the novels of D. H. Lawrence.

In her journal, Chitra noted the part that her reading had played in her development as a writer: "In Conrad, the theme of isolation as a testing situation fascinated me ... in later years I found that I stood up well to solitude". In Chaucer she discovered an author who was describing a society in which the majority of people were peasants, and in which "the [social] hierarchy was close to what I know in Sri Lanka".

Her story 'Nonchi Nona and Kotiya' was inspired by the opening lines of Chaucer's *The Nun's Priest's Tale*, in which the image of a poor widow living alone with her animals and fowls, particularly the cock Chanticleer, "struck a deep chord in me, especially in Sydney where I wrote 'Nonchi Nona and Kotiya', far away from the fields, streams and simple peasants of Sri Lanka in their 'narwe cotage(s)'". Crabbe's home-spun world reminded her "of Sri Lanka [and] her small provincial towns, like Kalutara, my home town". She was drawn to Lawrence because of his exploration of man-woman relationships, but Lawrence "doesn't belong to my literary maturity: my preoccupations now are socio-political and existential".

It is remarkable that this very widely-read author's commentaries in her journals on her on-going reading do not include her responses to the published work of her Sri Lankan contemporaries. It is possible that she avoided reading it after 1989: she had begun the first draft of *Cousins*, and she might have wished to keep her own literary path clear of distraction or unwanted influences. (Deliberate non-involvement in concerns that do not advance the devotee in his/her path towards enlightenment is a concept familiar to practising Buddhists: reluctance to read the work of contemporaries is, in any case, a characteristic of many contemporary writers in Sri Lanka.)

Another interesting phenomenon is the omission of Jane Austen from Chitra Fernando's list of the many authors whose influence assisted her own development as a writer. She had been exposed to Austen's *oeuvre* at Peradeniya, and a characteristically Austen-like irony is evident in her depiction of such characters as Caroline in 'The Grandfather', Mrs Ranasinghe in 'Missilin' or Loku Naenda (Big Auntie) in 'The Perfection of Giving', as well as in the observation, made in her journals, that a good deal of her life had been spent in flight from "the well-kept households of country aunts".

The short story 'Missilin', in particular, is one in which the deeply felt anger of Fernando the writer is cunningly (and almost undetectably) sheathed in the naive and unresentful thoughts and actions of an illiterate village woman. It is a remarkable *tour de force*, a striking example of the obliqueness characteristic of the best of Austen. Fernando replicates here, in a flawlessly authentic Sri Lankan context, that light, glancing touch upon matters that disturbed and distressed her which Jane Austen developed in order to express her feelings without tearing apart the fabric of her fiction. The remarkable absence of Jane Austen from Chitra Fernando's list of the authors she admired may perhaps be explained by the fact that she drew up that list only in 1997, the year before her death, by which time her social and political concerns had obscured earlier literary affections: the upperclass world of Austen's novels, in which ladies pay social calls and gentlemen manage their properties, had become one in which she had lost interest, since it had come to seem so far removed from the Sri Lankan middle-class world which dominates her thinking in her last works, *Between Worlds*, 'The Chasm', and *Cousins*. Her fiercely socialist stance certainly led Chitra to prefer Crabbe's writings about

peasants and provincial villagers to Jane Austen's novels about upper-class life in Regency England.

Chitra Fernando's first original piece was written at about the age of eleven, and was titled 'Nariya, the Jackal'. It was published in the Balika-Kalutara Vidyalaya School magazine in 1946. Encouraged by this, in the early 1950s she wrote 'vignettes' inspired both by Lawrence's essays and by short pieces by Chekhov. She continued writing short stories while at Peradeniya, one or two of which were printed with no author's name in *Thunapaha*, a magazine edited by students at Sanghamitta Hall where she was a student in residence from 1954 to 1958. ('Decision', a story of Chitra's which was published in *Thunapaha* Vol. 1, No. 2 in 1956 but of which she never claimed authorship, is an interesting attempt to explore the shifting moods of a Peradeniya undergraduate as he attempts to discipline his romantic feelings for a female classmate.)

At Peradeniya Chitra once again encountered old favourites in the classroom, in particular the stories of Katherine Mansfield, inspiringly taught by Robin Mayhead. Following her graduation from Peradeniya, she wrote several books of stories for children under the pseudonym of "Chitralekha", which were published by Lake House Investments Ltd., Colombo. Many of these retold stories from the *Jataka Tales* (the birth stories of the Buddha) in terms of everyday life in contemporary Sri Lanka.

Chitra Fernando's short story 'Missilin' (the first piece of fiction to appear under her own name) was first published in the Australian journal *Hemisphere*, and subsequently reprinted in the anthology *Stories from Sri Lanka* (Heinemann Educational Books) in 1979. She co-edited (with Ranjani Obeyesekere) *An Anthology of Modern Writing in Sri Lanka* (University of Arizona Press) in 1984. *Three Women*, her first book of adult fiction, containing the stories 'Of Bread and Power' and 'Action and Reaction' and reprinting 'Missilin', was published in Sri Lanka (and subsequently by Writers Workshop, Calcutta) in 1984. Her stories have been read on the Overseas Service of the BBC, and published in *Short Story International* and *Hemisphere*. A collection of children's stories ('Kundalini', 'The Golden Goose', 'Nonchi Nona and Kotiya, the Cat', 'The Grandfather', 'The

Kataragama Adventure' and 'Two Friends") was published under the title of *Kundalini and Other Stories* by Writers Workshop in 1986, and *The Golden Bird* (a short play and stories) in 1987. *Between Worlds*, a volume containing a novella of that title and two stories ('Making Connections' and 'The Bird of Paradise'), was published in 1988: all three explore the author's Sri Lankan and Australian experience through fiction.

Cousins, written with her own imminent death in view as an inescapable reality and set entirely in Sri Lanka, is an ambitious work. Here she attempted to depict what Dinali Fernando defined in her article 'Chitra Fernando - In Retrospect' (2000), as 'the social and political upheavals of independent Sri Lanka - the changes from the early fifties and the two JVP uprisings of 1971 and the late eighties'. This novel became Fernando's final testament, its central character, Amitha, a projection of her most personal hopes and ideals. Viewed as literature, *Cousins* is a flawed and patchy work: inevitably, given the circumstances in which it was written. Nevertheless it contains some of its creator's best writing, a good example of which may be seen in the passage relating to a 'comfort stop' at a wayside fruit-stall quoted at the beginning of this entry.

Here, then, is a writer who spent most of her adult life in Australia, yet did not allow the land of her adoption to enter her fiction until her last years; who focused her thoughts and her writing on the small-town life of Sri Lanka, yet strove always to escape from what she called in her journals 'the well-kept households of country aunts'. Two aspects of her life and her writing that do not yield such perplexing ambiguities and paradoxes are, however, her attachment to Buddhist ideals and her dedication to the life of writing. In her writing as in her life, Chitra Fernando's thinking was shaped and influenced by Buddhist ideals:

> "Justice, mercy, tolerance, compassion and generosity are at the very heart of Buddha's teaching. Buddha generally addresses the individual, and if individuals behave as they ought then a civilised society is the result". (Journal)

On the most personal and intimate level, the life and teachings of the Buddha were the single most powerful influence in her life and in her writing. Besides

the guidance they provided as regards day-to-day living, they provided her with the "explanation necessary to counter and control the overwhelming apprehension of death". It is not surprising that her best work in fiction - stories such as `The Grandfather', `Missilin', `Kundalini' and `The Perfection of Giving' - turns on Buddhist themes.

When personal experience proved to her that Sri Lanka, a nation that had been moulded for centuries by Buddhist thinking, had betrayed those high ideals and slipped into racism and violence, Chitra Fernando was greatly distressed. She expressed her feelings in her fiction, affirming in her journals that her story 'Kundalini' was inspired by the "general ethnic intolerance prevalent [in Sri Lanka] since 1958". Similarly, 'The Chasm' was inspired by her experience of the 1983 ethnic riots in Sri Lanka. While the selection and grouping of the characters in 'The Chasm' was inspired by Guy de Maupassant's great story 'Boule de Suif', Chitra replaces Maupassant's social hierarchy with her own perception of "our ethnic grouping in a migrant situation", her own characterisation, and the setting of Standley Chasm in Alice Springs.

Looking for persons more mundane than the Buddha to identify with in matters of day-to day life, Chitra found them in the former principal of her old school, Miss Caroline Silva, and in the Russian writer Anton Chekhov, "the one person I've ever wanted to be like". A close family friend, Miss Silva provided her with a role model based on Buddhist principles: she was, Chitra affirmed in her journal,

> a woman of great strength and integrity drawn from Buddhist tradition ... though her outlook had been broadened by contact with Western culture,[Miss Silva was] a living example of Buddhist philosophy as demonstrated in the daily life of a lay woman.

Chekhov appears to have been a major influence throughout her life. She went to the Soviet Union with the express intention of visiting his grave, an intention she duly carried out. A shared experience seemed to her to link Chekhov's life with hers:

> The fact that Chekhov was battling with TB was crucial for him ... death shaped his life in almost the way it did mine - it was central... Without being guilty of conceit, I think I could say that in the matter of the acceptance of my illness, which is terminal as his was, I am not unlike him.

There were other important literary influences: Alfreda de Silva notes interestingly, in a review of *The Golden Bird* written in 1988, that the author claimed to have been influenced by 'the great Russian writer Nikolai Gogol's method of presenting evil in a comic form'.

Although many of her stories explore themes and situations related to the intimate relationships that characterise Sri Lankan family life, and although she was herself linked by close bonds of affection to her family in Sri Lanka, Chitra Fernando's attitude to the family as expressed in her fiction is ironic and ambivalent. Her father's death in 1938, when Chitra was three years old, "determined the tenor of my life both subjectively and objectively". Despite the affectionate presence of a large family of aunts, uncles and cousins, she had been subjected at an early age to the experiences of isolation and alienation, and later chose them for herself because, as she grew older and more mature, she found that they suited her temperament as an individual and as a writer. Paradoxically, her life of seeming `exile' as an immigrant in Australia, like her unmarried status, set her free to live as she pleased.

Chitra Fernando constantly returned to, and reworked her early writing. Her aim was always to produce writing that satisfied her own standards: she was uninterested in achieving international recognition, and she was aware that the effects she worked so hard to achieve were often beyond the grasp of the majority of readers, in Sri Lanka and elsewhere:

> People have often made approving noises about my stories - 'I loved them', 'Most enjoyable', and so on - and you wonder how much they've taken in. Just as well that, like Chekhov and with acknowledgment to David Lodge, I haven't put all my ego in one basket. (Journal, 20 November 1996)

The last book she put together for publication was titled *Women There and Here: Six Stories*, and it was published by Wordlink in Sydney in 1994. It contains the 1988 story 'Bird of Paradise' (reworked); two new stories, 'The Chasm' (which has clear thematic links with *Cousins*) and 'The Road to Rome'; and the three stories in *Three Women* (1984), reworked, with 'Action and Reaction' retitled 'The Perfection of Giving'. She built on her novella *Between Worlds* in writing her novel *Cousins*, developing themes that she had put forward earlier in the shorter work.

Cousins was a long time in the writing (ten years, from 1989 to 1998), and the period during which it was conceived and written had been disrupted by illness: the result, despite its many shrewd insights into life and character, is a work disjointed in structure and flawed in literary quality, a tragic intimation of what might have been, rather than the achievement itself. The value of both *Between Worlds* and *Cousins* lies in their reflection of their creator's thoughts and ideals, rather than in their quality as art. D.C.R.A. Goonetilleke has observed (1986) that the significance of Chitra Fernando's stories 'is not limited to a single sex, but [while focusing on the plight of women, they] hold up a mirror to sections of contemporary Sri Lankan society and ironically assess their values'. It is my own opinion that Chitra Fernando's lasting contribution to literature may be found in her short stories, the best of which stand as testimony to her eminence as a writer.

Anthologies in which examples of her writing may be found include *Stories from Sri Lanka* (Heinemann Educational Books, Hong Kong 1979); *Differences: Writings by Women* (Waterloo Press, Sydney 1985); *Modern Sri Lankan Short Stories* (Sri Satguru, Delhi 1986); *Contemporary Sri Lankan Short Stories in English* (The English Association of Sri Lanka, 1990); *Short Story International*, New York, various from 1986 to 1989; *Beyond the Echo* (University of Queensland Press, Brisbane 1988); *The Penguin New Writing in Sri Lanka* (Penguin Books Delhi, 1992).

Journals and magazines which published her work include *New Ceylon Writing* (1971); *Channels* (English Writers Cooperative of Sri Lanka, Colombo, 1990); and *Span*, Journal of SPACLALS (the South Pacific branch of the Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies), 'Diaspora', Perth 1993.

Finally, a word on Chitra Fernando's journals. She is the only writer I know in Sri Lanka who has left behind her journals in which she had constantly analysed her thoughts and feelings about literature and life. In using these materials as a guide to her thoughts about writers and writing, I have constantly kept in mind the warning of W.H. Auden (one of her own favourite poets) that

> The critical opinions of a writer should always be taken with a large grain of salt. For the most part, they are manifestations of his (sic) debate with himself as to what he should do next and what he should avoid.

Self-analysis, as Auden suggests, is a literary activity as open as any other kind of writing to the human capacity for self-deception and wishful thinking. Chitra Fernando's analyses in her journals of herself and of Sri Lankan society do not always seem to me as satisfying, from the point of view of accuracy, as her fiction. For example, analysing her own position in regard to Sri Lanka's socio-cultural system, she writes:

> Contributing both to my individuality and independence was/ is my middle-class background and the lowly hereditary status (caste) of my ancestors about 200 years ago. These facts are known in Sri Lanka and one can't escape labels even in present-day Sri Lanka. The lowly status of my ancestors never troubles me.

Her conception of her own social origins as 'lowly' - whether such a conception was justified or not - appears to have constantly created problems for her as a writer, especially in the maintenance of an ironic tone. The journals provide some striking examples of this: for instance, on hearing of turmoil in a land-owning Sri Lankan family that had resulted in the alienation of a child from her mother and the separation of siblings, Chitra Fernando's reaction as recorded in her journal, is a startling one. This was a situation which the prose writers she most admired - Maria Edgeworth, Jane Austen, Swift, or Fielding, for instance - would have seized on with delight as a heaven-sent subject for satire: consider, for example, the marvellously comic scene in which Mrs Ferrars disinherits her son Edward on hearing (in *Sense and Sensibility*) of his engagement to Lucy Steele. It is also, of course, a

situation to which the 'traditional' or conventional response might have been sympathy, real or feigned, for those concerned in the disintegration of a family. Chitra Fernando responds to it in none of these ways. On the contrary, her reaction (as recorded in her journal) is profound relief that she is herself free, by virtue of her 'lowly hereditary status', from the emotional problems which persons of high status must (as she believes) inevitably undergo:

> I realised then that ... those clans stand for nothing but empty titles and worth. There's no vestige ... of any sense of social obligation or social conscience - only the drive to (batten? prey?)... on the peasantry or any other unfortunate victim. How many plums can we grab - that appears to be the intention and the modus operandi. *What a relief that I'm not saddled with pedigree and lineage - it's so much easier to be a free individual when not lumbered with such baggage.* (My italics)

These ideas are given fictional utterance in one of Chitra Fernando's 'Australian' stories, 'The Chasm', as Vijay, a Sri Lankan visiting Alice Springs who represents his creator's attitude to the pretensions of her fellow-immigrants, refutes 'with a thrill of ferocious pleasure' the claims of his Sinhalese hostess to elevated ancestry:

> "Do such things matter if you've got self-respect and dignity?" asked Vijay challengingly. "Chuck ancestry into a museum of antiquities. That's where it belongs - along with the battle-ax(sic) and chain mail armour."

The shrillness, even stridency, with which Vijay is made to utter these sentiments, in a tale written and published a mere four years before her death, disrupts the cool, ironic poise that Fernando had until that point maintained in her presentation of Sri Lankan expatriate behaviour in this story. Despite her statement in her journal, we would probably be mistaken to take at its face-value her assertion that 'the lowly status of my ancestors never troubles me'.

This same inability to shake off the sense of 'lowly status' appears to have profoundly affected the personal stance Chitra Fernando adopted

towards persons and events in her last years. Sri Lanka entered during this period into protracted political troubles which included (and still includes) an ethnic civil war. Identifying increasingly with the 'lowly' and disadvantaged, her first reactions to happenings 'at home' consistently derive from the socio-political stance she was developing, rather than from sentiment or sympathy. When Richard de Zoysa, a gifted journalist in his early thirties who had roused the ire of local politicians by his expose of human rights violations, was tortured and murdered, the circumstances of his death touched off anguished responses from many writers, whether they knew him personally or not: Jean Arasanayagam, Gertrude de Livera, and Rajiva Wijesinha were among the writers who responded in this way. Chitra Fernando's response, as recorded in her journals, is strikingly free of any sense of horror or emotional involvement in this tragedy:

> Richard's death roused protest - quite strong - from the middle classes. But what of all the 'Marios' who'd also been tortured and killed by the colonels? Who mourns them apart from their families in the villages? *That was my reaction when I first heard of Richard de Zoysa's death.* (My italics)

At another level, meditating on the factors that, in her opinion, linked her life and writing with those of Woolf, Chekhov and Mansfield, she is led in her journals to speculate as to whether 'some element of alienation' is essential to give a writer 'that distinctive, idiosyncratic personality necessary to be able to produce something significant'. In journals kept many years afterwards, she claims to have experienced in 1961 - 1964 the beginnings of an important personality development, moving during those three crucial years

> from being an ineffective aesthete and dreamer feeding on lines of romantic poetry or poetic moments to someone with greater socio-political awareness of her own society. I became fully conscious of what my own class was in socio-cultural terms only after my first visit to Australia as a postgraduate in the 1960s ... Class is very visible in Sri Lanka: clothes, food, housing, and above all a fluent command of English ... My perception of Sri Lankan society in general and the family in particular has been greatly sharpened by my leaving that society.

Tony Simoes da Silva made a recent observation (in 'Stories about Other People', an article published in *Westerly* 45, November 2000, p. 170) that is strikingly relevant to writers who, like Chitra Fernando, compulsively record their thoughts about themselves and their writing:

> Autobiography, life/self-writing, memoir, testimony, are some of the ways in which the self seeks to make sense of its place in the world ... In writing down one's recollections one engages in a process of memorialisation that is at once profoundly emancipatory and intrinsically flawed.

Chitra Fernando's journals, which teem with recollections of her life and her reading by means of which she obviously attempted to 'make sense' of her place in the world, would certainly seem to some readers to be 'at once profoundly emancipatory and intrinsically flawed'. Whether her theories relating to her own social status are regarded as sound or not, my own contention is that Chitra Fernando's journals are of value to a literary document such as this, first, because of the facts they provide in relation to the reading which contributed to the intellectual growth of an unusually gifted and sensitive woman of her time; second, because they record detailed observations of rural life in Kalutara which establish links between her writing and the events and circumstances of her life.

The Grandfather

Ostensibly a story for children, *The Grandfather* delivers in deceptively simple language a powerful message for the adult reader, ironically pointing out the ways in which the Buddha's principles of generosity are all too often subverted in practice, and the essence of his teaching misunderstood by his followers. Arnolis, a Sinhalese Buddhist with a young wife and a son, is presented with a problem: his elder sister, in whose household their aged father has been living for some time, writes to tell him and his wife Caroline that she can no longer look after the old man:

"My husband is ill. I have lots of work. I cook. I go to market. I look after the children. I have to look after my sick husband. How can I look after our old father too? I have only one pair of hands."

Caroline greets the news that her old father-in-law will arrive the following week to live permanently in her household with silence: though she says nothing, she expresses no pleasure at the prospect. On thinking the matter over, however, she perceives that generosity shown now could bring future rewards: "Our elder sister has looked after him for many years. Now it's our our turn. Then we'll gain a lot of merit and go to heaven in our next life." Arnolis, in complete agreement with her theory, accepts the burden of hospitality in view of its rewards, and is complimented by the village postmaster on the goodness of his nature, his keeping up of 'the old ways' by caring for an aged parent, and, most pleasing of all, the satisfactions that await him in a future existence: "You'll gain a lot of merit."

Arnolis and Caroline, happy in the conviction that their generosity guarantees them a straight path to heaven, prepare enthusiastically for the old man's arrival. An old bed is mended, new crockery is bought for his exclusive use, especially tasty food is to be made ready. Although husband and wife take equal pleasure in the private contemplation of their own extraordinary virtue in doing these things, Caroline has some misgivings: what if she is, by her generosity, becoming 'too good to live'?

Caroline felt a little frightened. She wanted to go to heaven but not at once. She did not want to die. She liked good food and pretty clothes. She wanted to live for a long time.

Their little son Sunil looks forward to his grandfather's visit, foreseeing a future supply of fascinating stories and frequent gifts of pocket-money.

When the old man arrives, it is soon clear that his visit will be a trial to some members of the household: to Sunil's delight he proves to be a wonderful storyteller, but his shaking hands cause him to spill his rice on Caroline's spotless floor, and his coughing keeps Arnolis and Caroline up all night. By the time he has been four months in the house, Caroline's patience has begun

to wear thin. It finally gives way when the old man accidentally breaks the new china cup she had bought for him. Her outburst appals her son, embarrasses her husband, and shames her elderly guest:

"If we buy him a new cup and saucer, he will break it again. How can we spend our money on cups and saucers? I have only four saris to wear. I have no gold chains or bangles. I have nothing ..."

She cleans a coconut shell, and gives her father-in-law his tea in the shell in lieu of a cup. Gradually, the old man's little pleasures and privileges - his seat on the front verandah of the house, his joining the family at dinner, an occasional cigar - are eroded. Although Arnolis is unhappy about the treatment his father is receiving in his house, he does not have the nerve to stand up to Caroline. Isolated and miserable, the grandfather feels that he has lived too long. He stops telling stories to Sunil, and hopes only that death will claim him soon.

Matters are in this unhappy state when Caroline, who is collecting provisions for her festive New Year cooking, sees Sunil putting coconut shells into an old tin box. She tells him to set the shells aside, so that she can use them for her cooking fires. Sunil's reply surprises and shames his parents:

"No, no, Mother," said Sunil, snatching the box from her hands. "I want these coconut shells. I am collecting these coconut shells for Father and you. Soon you'll be old. When you eat, your hands will shake. I'll need lots of coconut shells because you'll break all the cups and saucers in my house."

Chitra Fernando modelled *The Grandfather* on a Vietnamese folk tale, about a poor rural couple whose plan to carry their son's beloved grandfather in a basket to the edge of a forest, there to be eaten by wild animals, is similarly exposed by their son's insistence on following his father on his journey: "I want to know where you are going to leave my grandfather, so that I'll know where to go when it's time to carry you off in a basket." Chitra's version gives the story an authentic Sri Lankan small-town setting (complete with inquisitive postmaster!), and by timing its *denouement* for the Sinhala *Aluth*

Avuruddha, a time of family reunion and celebration, delicately underlines Caroline's small-minded and selfish treatment of her father-in-law. It also gives the story a happy ending that turns upon Buddhist principles, reminding the reader/ listener that mistakes can be put right, and that from right understanding, right action can follow. Arnolis and Caroline take to heart the reproach embedded in their son's `spontaneous and (by his standards) entirely rational gesture [which] movingly, and yet unobtrusively reawakens in [them] an insight into filial piety' (T. Kandiah, 1997). They amend their attitude to the Grandfather, and restore him to his proper place, in the heart of the family:

> The grandfather was surprised but happy. Every day he sat smoking his cigars in the front verandah. Caroline never grumbled again. She looked after the old man very well. Every evening Arnolis sat and talked to his old father. He told him all the village news. And every night the grandfather told Sunil a long story. Caroline and Arnolis listened too. And they liked the grandfather's stories almost as much as Sunil did.

Kundalini

He looked around. The crane had vanished and before him stood a silvery-haired, golden-eyed woman with a golden skin, the colour of wild honey. Muttu stared at her in wonder and fear.

"No ordinary person can change from a crane into a woman. Who are you? A goddess?" he asked, when he could speak.

"No, I'm not a goddess, Muttu. For over a thousand years men of my race haven't spoken to men of yours."

'Kundalini' is a tale that uses an ancient idea about the magical power of transformation, present in Homer's Circe and Sri Lanka's legend of Kuveni, to celebrate the transforming power of the artistic imagination. Very much distressed by the racial intolerance that had become a feature of life in her

homeland since 1958, Chitra Fernando made "the main point of the story" the Buddhist theme of tolerance.

'Kundalini', the mysterious and beautiful woman whom Muttu encounters in the forest in this story represents the imagination of Muttu, a young temple painter: equipped with the power of transformation, she is "the source" (as the writer avers in her journals)"of his artistic being". Their love story is a forest idyll, the joy and purity of which they guard with difficulty from destruction by other human beings. By transforming her lover and herself into a variety of animals and birds - rat-snakes, hawks, deer - Kundalini manages to escape with him time after time from enemies motivated by greed, envy and intolerance: "She's different and I don't like people who are different," says Kaluhamy, a temporary employer, on glimpsing Kundalini's unusual colouring for the first time. "I like everybody to be dark and plump like me."

Realising, during their wanderings, that ordinary human beings cannot tolerate her 'difference', Kundalini retreats at last to the forest from which she came. Muttu is desolate at first, but he finds relief and a renewed purpose in life when he is given shelter in his wanderings by some monks, is restored to health, and asked to repaint the faded walls of their temple. When, having decorated three walls of the temple with representations of *Jataka* tales, Muttu paints the story of Kundalini on the fourth wall, and is reported for doing so to the chief monk of the temple, he is not asked by the monk to remove the offending painting. Instead, the monk says:

> "The story of Kundalini isn't a Jataka story, but like them it teaches the wisdom of the Dhamma. We must be compassionate to all living beings even though they are different from us. Let the story of Kundalini remain."

Very much a recorder and interpreter of everyday life as she knew it in small-town Sri Lanka, Chitra Fernando does not generally admit flights of fancy into her fiction. She was open-minded, however, in granting its 'striking effects' in the writing of others. A poem by one of her contemporaries, in which 'the fabled heroic past of the Sinhalese presented through the powerful

image of princess and lion lover, merges with present images of futile violence that create nothing', she judged in 1973 to be 'the kind of experimentation we need if Ceylonese poetry in English is to ... develop on truly creative lines'. In "Kundalini" she ventures into such 'experimentation' herself, achieving an artistic triumph that is unique in her writing.

Missilin

"Missilin", the story with which Chitra Fernando first appeared as a fiction-writer using her own name, rather than a pseudonym, was first published in the Australian magazine *Hemisphere*, and then in the anthology *Stories from Sri Lanka* (1979); it has been reprinted many times since then in various anthologies. Inspired by a Flaubert story (`The Simple Heart'), it is adult fiction informed by Buddhist values, and is possibly exemplary of Chitra Fernando's writing at its best: embedded, certainly, in the narrative is the element of dry, satiric irony that marks her best work. The story follows the `progress' of an ignorant, plain, warm-hearted village girl who is exploited throughout her rather short life: by the village astrologer, who is more inclined to increase his own income than to give humane and timely advice; by her mother, whose good intentions towards her daughter wane with the advent of New Year festivities; by Mrs Ranasingha and her sister Leela, who make a drudge of her; and even by the monks, whom her death provides with an opportunity to feast, philosophize and flatter.

Missilin, a character whom her creator based on a real person, is an unlikely heroine. 'Physically unattractive, unlettered, even simple-minded in many ways' (Kandiah, 1997), she has no option but to leave her village for employment as a cook in an urban household, where she slaves until she dies in hospital, lonely and neglected, of tuberculosis. Dinali Fernando has noted that the story can be seen as 'thinly veiled farce: looming beneath it is the psychology of the bonded slave, deracinated from her natural milieu, the worker with no rights,the 'faithful servant woman' whose situation has conditioned and shaped even the most instinctive of her responses' (Dinali Fernando, 2000). Thiru Kandiah has pointed out how, despite her unpromising situation in life, Missilin's natural good-heartedness allows her to act spontaneously and naturally in ways that raise her 'not just above her usual self and circumstances, but also above all of the other people around her':

> Leela, Mrs Ranasinghe's superficial and selfish sister, tries with the aid of gifts and lies to persuade Missilin to steal away from her employers' house and to come across to her own house to help her with the work which is now increasingly wearing her down. It probably would not have been clear to the credulous Missilin that this would not in any way have improved her circumstances; but it *would* have given her a chance to get even with her employers. Yet, this is how Missilin responds:
>
> Missilin was silent for a few minutes. Then she said: "Don't be angry with me but how can I leave your sister like that? For nearly six years I have been there. I know I am foolish and plain. No man has looked at me. I have no one. But somehow your sister's house is like my home. My mother sent me there. Don't be angry with me, I am a stupid woman - I can't explain these things properly."

As Kandiah rightly says, Missilin's words 'in their utterly unmixed simplicity ... eloquently transform Missilin, her self-effacing avowals notwithstanding, into a remarkable figure who towers over the rest [due to] her instinctive sense of honour and her ability to see into the heart of the things which matter'. Through a series of subtle contrasts in which Missilin is positioned as the opposite of Mrs Ranasinghe's meanspiritedness and her sister Leela's slovenliness, Missilin's moral superiority to the people who consider themselves her social betters is firmly but unobtrusively established.

In this story Chitra Fernando successfully recreates in English the Sinhala vernacular that she herself described in 1973 as 'the speech that lives on the lips of ordinary men and women'. Such imaginative recreation was, in her opinion,'a creative task akin to translation though more challenging', and she perceived it as having been 'supremely well' executed by Leonard Woolf in *The Village in the Jungle*. Woolf's example is put to good use in Chitra's characterisations of Missilin and her employer, Mrs Ranasingha. Missilin's pithy expressions arise with the utmost naturalness from her homespun, village experience ("At the beginning men were ready to give their front teeth for you. Afterwards you weren't even worth a broken chatty

pot"), while Mrs Ranasingha's verbal crudities, hinting at the inelegance of her spoken Sinhala, lay bare the essential crudeness of her mind:

> "Aney, elder sister," she told the postmaster's sister, "now I can breathe again. All these days cooking, cooking from morning to night. No time to listen to a sermon, no time to go to temple. Only this morning I told him I can't be a cook-woman any longer; bring at least the dinner from the Buhari hotel."

Missilin herself is a living personality, beautifully captured by her creator through her thoughts and her speech. We see in her a loving, deprived heart that focuses on a cat, and can bestow respect and loyalty on even such a woman as Mrs Ranasingha; the fierce distrust of men that momentarily gives way to a romantic weakness for her sole admirer, Gomis, in defiance of fate in the shape of horoscopes and family pressure. Interwoven with these individual character-traits are those of the village mentality: Missilin's ignorant, unquestioning acceptance of the astrologer's predictions and the resultant fatalism they breed in her; her admiration of urban middle-class life styles (she is 'impressed' by Mrs Ranasingha's vulgarly furnished and gaudily decorated house); and her nostalgia for New Year celebrations at home. She is provided with a perfect foil in Mrs Ranasingha, whose 'piety' and brash insensitivity combine in a typical comment upon Missilin's grief and rage at the death of her cat -

> This is what came of being attached to the things of this world

and whose materialistic spirit, like that of Caroline in 'The Grandfather', is 'mildly alarmed' by the neighbours' praises of her generosity -

> What if she attained Nirvana in her very next life? Of course she wanted Nirvana. But she felt that to enjoy the worldly fruits of her meritorious deeds for her next two or three lives, at least, was only her due.

The Perfection of Giving

This superbly sustained story, which is set in Sri Lanka, was first titled 'Action and Reaction', and published in Fernando's 1983 collection, *Three Women* (1983). It has been reprinted under that title in D. C. R. A. Goonetilleke's anthology, *Modern Sri Lankan Stories* (1986). In this story, Chitra Fernando creates a tale that turns on a Buddhist theme, using a male narrator for the first time in her adult fiction.

Mahinda's is a realistic and convincing voice, and his down-to-earth, boyish view of the life around him is the ideal vehicle for the writer's ironic exploration of life in a Buddhist household in which the concept of *karma* is mistakenly regarded as a system of rewards and punishments: especially punishments. The focus of the story is a member of the family, Mahinda's pious 'Loku Naenda' or Big Auntie, a single woman of consequence and authority in her family and in the small rural township of Paiyagala, not only because of her wealth but because of her well-publicised piety, generosity and compassion. Mahinda, playful and fun-loving, finds the weight of her authority oppressive but, being a boy, he gets away with the occasional misdeed:

> Once Small Auntie caught Siripala and me sharing a cigarette in the back garden and the first thing she said was "How disappointed Big Auntie will be, Mahinda. You're only a boy, but you're already doing all these bad things!" Then she told Father about it. Father said, "I will not have smoking, I will not have drinking in this house." And then, he told Big Auntie about it.
>
> Big Auntie looked at me in silence. She said, "Mahinda, there's no need for me to tell you anything. Why should I say anything? Your own actions, your *karma* will deal with you. Smoke as much as you like. When you get lung cancer, you'll know all about it. This gratification of the senses brings only disease, death and *sansara*. Don't say I didn't warn you!"

Small Auntie, who was listening, nodded vigorously and said, "I hope you've taken all this in, Mahinda. No need to look the other way! We're advising you for your own good."

I often wished they were less concerned with my own good but I could say nothing. So I continued to look the other way.

When Mahinda's Big Auntie, intent on securing her place in heaven, embarks upon yet another meritorious deed, one which is thought likely to eclipse all the alms givings and ceremonies she has financed before, the family looks on, impressed. Big Auntie intends to adopt - not as a daughter, but as a domestic servant - the twelve-year-old daughter of a toddy-tapper from Matara.

Father said: "That girl must have done a lot of merit in her past lives. Just imagine! After living like an animal in that hut to come to a house like Big Sister's!"

"Must be like heaven to her!" was Mother's contribution.

"She's not bad looking, and with all the good food she'll be eating, she'll soon fill out. I hope she's not going to be greedy and steal. That must be firmly stopped. Right from the start." Small Auntie did her best to see that everyone observed the Second Precept of Buddhism.

Kusuma does well in Big Auntie's household. Supervised by Small Auntie (her benefactor's dependent younger sister), she grows up to be neat, clean and industrious, and except for a single incident of 'stealing' and eating an oil-cake, for which she is promptly punished by being confined to the house and prevented from educating herself, she proves herself a credit to Big Auntie. She contributes her artistic talent to Big Auntie's various meritorious initiatives, and becomes a beautiful young woman whose modest behaviour is everything Big Auntie could have hoped for. Her charms do

not go unnoticed. But a proposal of marriage that comes her way is angrily refused by Big Auntie, who sees her wish to marry as an instance of base ingratitude:

"Lust, lust, lust, they're all filled with lust. When I think of what I've done for that girl! She was like a wild animal, when she came to me. Covered with sores and lice! I cleaned her, fed her, clothed her, civilized her ... Piyadasa came to me and said he wanted to marry her ... said she was willing. I couldn't believe it ... to do this thing behind my back!"

At this point, the story turns back on itself. Big Auntie wields her considerable influence, and has Piyadasa sent away from Paiyagala. He eventually marries someone else. Denied the respectable marriage that would have provided an outlet for her natural desires, trained (according to her 'benefactor"s wishes) for no occupation but that of a domestic servant, Kusuma has no option but to remain in Big Auntie's household. Adopting Big Auntie's outlook on life as her own, she begins to outdo her in meritorious acts; and, as her benefactor ages and becomes infirm, assumes a terrifying authority over her. Kusuma becomes, in the end, Big Auntie's other self, resembling her in every possible way, including outward appearance. "Action" has certainly brought "reaction": in this case a terrible retribution, as Mahinda reflects at the end of his last visit to the two women at Paiyagala:

I said goodbye. [Big Auntie] clung to my hand and kissed it. "Come and see me again before you leave, *putha. Tun sarane Pihitai!*" And she said once again, "It's my *karma*". A commonplace, almost meaningless phrase mouthed by so many. And yet, as I looked back for one last wave, there seemed to be a truth in it - a truth reflected in that heavy, sullen woman standing in the doorway so like the other feebly waving a loose-skinned hand.

Minor characters, notably Small Auntie and Mala, Mahinda's shallow-thinking young sister, have their place in the 'The Perfection of Giving', contributing unconsciously to Big Auntie's inflexible treatment of the helpless child who has been placed in her care; but, though each is precisely conceived

and presented in speech and action, they are not allowed to distract attention from the inexorable progress of events that is the main focus of a story which, with 'Missilin', represents Chitra Fernando's fictional art at its best, and provides a good example, skilfully understated, of the author's 'tragic sense of life'.

The Chasm

'The Chasm' is a story about Sri Lankans in Australia that is strikingly different from the others among Fernando's Australian (or partly Australian) tales, both in tone and temper. For the first time in her stories of 'Women Here', she attains the satirical poise that was last achieved in 'Missilin', as she analyses, with a sharp eye for comedy and pathos, the behaviour of a group of Sri Lankans who have been thrown into one anothers' company in Australia by the fact that they all live in Alice Springs (the 'heartland' of Australia).

Differing from one another in race and religion, having nothing in common but their means, their English education, and their scorn of people they regard as their social inferiors, their social circles in Sri Lanka might never have intersected: in Australia, however, they are almost too close for comfort. Surrounded by new experiences and an unfamiliar landscape, they cling to one another for company, taking no interest in the country of their adoption, except in that it provides them with the makings of 'the sweet life'.

The principal characters in the story have been selected with an eye to ethnic diversity, and are positioned in a manner that owes much to Guy de Maupassant's masterpiece in the genre of the short story, 'Boule de Suif'. They include three married couples, one Muslim (Hussein and Razya Ahamed), one Sinhalese (Rudi and Geetha Mendis), and one Tamil (Dr Veeran Tampoe and his Sinhalese wife Nelun), all of them prosperous and highly competitive; and two unrelated Sinhalese individuals: Vijay, a visiting sociologist who is a friend of Veeran Tampoe's brother; and Manel, a nurse in the hospital at which Veeran works as a medical registrar. Manel is not a thorough-going member of the group, due to her low social status and

linguistic inadequacies (she speaks English with the accent of the village in which she was born and grew up: 'How Manel *pried the fotato balls* was a joke which gave [the group] a most pleasurable feeling of solidarity').

Although she is an outsider, Manel is often included in the group's social activities and tolerated because of her 'usefulness': she is an excellent cook, and willing to lend her talents to the Thampoes' entertaining, so that when Vijay Ranawaka comes to visit, and is taken by the group on his last afternoon in Alice Springs to see the mid-day sun lighting up Standley Chasm, Manel is invited by the Thampoes to join the picnic party.

Manel is as much an outsider in this group as de Maupassant's 'Ball of Fat' was an outsider in hers. Vijay, on the other hand, although he seems to be 'one of them', is suspected of being apostate. Chitra Fernando captures brilliantly the 'probings' with which the group seeks to ascertain the visitor's credentials:

> Was he by any chance related to Jagath Ranawaka, the former Director of Health Services? Surely he must have known Jeyaraj Rathnam and Maroof Cader if he'd been at Royal in the late fifties? Where had he read for his second degree? They conceded that Yale was almost as good as Oxford and Cambridge. He was one of them, they were satisfied on that point. Yet there was something about him that they were beginning to find disconcerting: the occasional expression suspiciously like amusement as they were talking about quite serious matters, his observations on men, manners and morals ... Where did his allegiance lie?

Vijaya, who lives his life in Sri Lanka, 'a society where ideologies and allegiances were being increasingly polarized', has, as a consequence, 'grown used to being in no-man's land', and become an acute observer of 'men, manners and morals'. He perceives, for instance, that his hosts in Alice Springs are divided in themselves, and that their Westernized sophistication and scorn of Manel, a social 'outsider', is one of the very few things that they have in common: like Missilin in Chitra Fernando's story of that name, Manel is good-natured and helpful by nature, ideal dogs-body material from the Tampoes'

point of view, and although the humour at her expense which is one of the factors that unite the members of the group goes, for the most part, over her head, it is not missed by the visitor. Vijay perceives that the group's lavish hospitality to him is a pretext for self-advertisement; and that their talk of 'home' covers a 'private panic' brought on by their isolation in a land they make no attempt to understand:

> They were often overcome by the starkness of their surroundings, so different from the land they'd left behind. A land of endless green expanses: paddy fields, palm-edged coasts, forests and jungles, tea-covered hill slopes, grassy plains; people everywhere, their houses, gardens and cattle. It was small, manageable and pretty. The vast bare plain surrounding the little enclave of Alice Springs overwhelmed them.

The fact that they can think of contemporary Sri Lanka, torn and brutalized as it is by civil war, as 'manageable' and 'pretty' leads the reader to suspect that they are living in a time-warp, and that their existence in their homeland had been as superficial as it is in Australia.

Standley Chasm is set in the midst of mountains so formidable that Vijay 'almost expected a great earth beast to lumber down the mountain slopes or a dark bat shape, webbed wings outspread, sombrely surveying him, as it slowly circled ready to swoop'. This unfamiliar territory, in which the picnic party feels isolated and uncomfortable, unexpectedly brings out the weaknesses in the fabric of their slick sophistication. An expedition undertaken for pleasure becomes a test of moral quality, a technique Chitra Fernando draws from the admired examples provided by a lifetime of reading: notably her careful study of Conrad and Jane Austen. What happens at Standley Chasm, as Manel is exposed by her hosts to dangers supposedly lurking in the district - two Australian jail escapees, armed and highly dangerous, are reported to have been seen in Alice Springs - brings about a crisis that rocks the world of Thampoes, Mendises and Ahameds. Manel, perceiving at last that she is not, and can never be, a real friend to any of them, leaves the picnic party to its own devices and finds her own way home. Before she does so, however, she voices her point of view in words that are calm and direct:

> "You asked me to your picnic. That was kind of you because I know we are very different people. You are rich and educated. So maybe you thought me a fool. Maybe I was a fool to think you liked me. I am a simple village woman. So, I think I'll leave your picnic now."

Although she is a 'village woman' like Missilin in the earlier story, Manel has proved herself to be by no means 'simple'. Her directness leaves the picnic party temporarily paralysed. But only for a while. Her departure brings on a crisis as Veeran Thampoe, furious at having been discarded by a woman he regards as his inferior, reveals to the party the fact that Manel has attracted the interest of Roger Moore, an Australian surgeon. The news comes as a 'bombshell' to Veeran's wife Nelun, who perceives that Manel as 'Mrs Roger Moore', the wife of a surgeon at her husband's hospital, may soon be in a position to take precedence over herself, the wife of a mere Registrar. Her reaction to this discovery is at once comic and pathetic: "My father was a Professor of Law and my grandfather was a Supreme Court Judge". Geetha thinks her remark irrelevant, but it is not: it reveals the archaic ideas on which Nelun's self-image is based, and indicates at the same time the chasm that separates the members of the group - Geetha and Nelun, for instance - from one another.

After that, there is nothing very much that can be done to retrieve the situation and the picnic comes to an end, the participants taking a stiff farewell of one another and of Vijay.

'The Chasm' resembles Chitra Fernando's other 'Australian' short stories, in that its themes, like those of 'Making Connections', 'The Bird of Paradise', and 'The Road to Rome', as also of her novella *Between Worlds*, explore the strains and stresses of immigrant life. It is expressive of its author's social and political consciousness in relation to the characters' Sri Lankan background. As it also indicates for the first time an imaginative appreciation of the Australian landscape, it could be regarded as providing a foretaste of what might have come had Chitra Fernando lived longer. It is notable, however, that unlike her other ' Australian' stories, in which the character who is the focus of authorial interest and attention decides that there is a

possibility of drawing on personal resources to make a creative success of life in a new country, 'The Chasm' does not end on a positive note.

Between Worlds ends with Mali, her loyalties hitherto divided between Sri Lanka and her adopted homeland, finding herself on a plane back to Sydney, 'relieved of an inner burden': 'A kind of triumph, heady and exhilarating, swept through her, then a sense of well-being, of calm assurance'. In 'Making Connections', Ananda Bandara, an unhappy Sri Lankan immigrant who feels that he is out of place in Australia, but is kept there by his affection for his wife and their daughters, decides to try his hand at painting his own backyard, 'and then maybe parts of the harbour and the gulls':

> Feeling the exhilaration of impending discoveries, he had, he remembered, hoped for something for himself in coming out, a widening of mental reaches. He knew where he was going to find it.

In 'The Bird of Paradise', although the 'shining bird' that represents Sri Lanka to Sri Lankan-Australian Rupa Gomez has flown out of her reach, she finds consolation in the thought of her Australian neighbour, Nora Pearson, 'who had absorbed herself so completely in the intricacies of the commonplace that ... [she had even] contrived to be happy without any special happiness'.

In 'The Road to Rome', a story in which, interestingly, no Sri Lankan characters are introduced at all, the author's persona, a Gosford librarian named Helen Spencer who is on her first group tour of Europe, decides to leave suburbia behind and 'go with the flow': "But Mary, what's me and what's you?" she says to her conventional cousin at the end of their tour o Italy, "We keep changing all the time. Who knows what I'll do next? From Europe to Easter Island, from Patagonia to Peru." It is evident that Helen is thinking of more than her next tour-destination, she is meditating a profound change in her way of life. No wonder Mary Johnson is astonished, then made uncomfortable by such ideas emerging from her hitherto predictable cousin. Helen herself has some misgivings: but 'then exultation took over. What was most important now was her chosen direction. Win or lose, she had to take it.'

The assurances of 'exhilaration', 'consolation' and 'exultation' on which these stories end are not entirely convincing in fictional terms. Nevertheless, they indicate a deliberate effort on the author's part to come to terms with aspects of her life-experience that she had hitherto locked out of her fiction; and the effort pays off, as Chitra Fernando writes (for example, in her description of Standley Chasm) with gradually increasing confidence of Australian landscape and life.

'The Chasm' ends with a paragraph in which the reader is told that the cracks that have opened up in the characters' relationships will eventually be covered over:

> [Vijay] knew that the self-repair system created by their painful need for one another would soon set itself in motion, would dispel the chill, the discreet distances now evident. After a while the round of dinners, lunches and picnics would begin again. And so it would go on.

There is no 'exhilarating' promise of 'impending discoveries' in this ending, only a forecast of deadly repetition. It would seem that in 'The Chasm', which is the best of her Australian stories (as 'Missilin' and 'The Perfection of Giving' are representative of the best of her Sri Lankan fictions), what Chitra Fernando called her 'strong sense of the tragic aspect of life' resisted the temptation to falsify or sentimentalise the immigrant experience that was hers for half her life.

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Kathleen Fernando

Journeys is a volume of short stories and poems published by the Sri Lanka-born author, Kathleen Fernando, in Indiana, USA Date of publication and details about the author are not available.

Siromi Fernando

Born in Colombo in 1943, Siromi (de Saram) Fernando is the younger daughter of 'Bucky' de Saram and Romi Ilangakoon. She was educated at Bishop's College, Colombo, where her intellectual talents were recognized early, and encouraged by three outstanding teachers: Pauline Hensman, Claudette Jayawardene (now Taylor), and Marina Wickramanayake (now Fernando). Her school career, which was studded with prizes for English and Mathematics, ended in 1962, when she entered the University of Ceylon at Peradeniya having won the Bishop's College Gold Medal and the Ilangakoon Memorial Prize for the Best University Entrance Results in 1962. (The Lady Grenier Memorial Prize for Senior English and the D. E. Weerakoon Memorial Prize for Senior Mathematics had been among her prizes in the previous year.)

Siromi Fernando graduated from the University of Ceylon with a First Class Honours degree in English in 1966, simultaneously winning both the Leigh Smith Memorial Prize for English and the University Arts Scholarship. 'The whole staff in the Department of English [at Peradeniya] indirectly influenced my writing,' says Siromi Fernando, and mentions Mr A. T. A. (Doric) de Souza as a teacher who 'discouraged me from writing (for some unknown reason) but influenced me greatly in all my writing, literary and non-literary'. It seems to me, having been one of Mr de Souza's students myself, and aware that he regarded 'Miss de Saram' in her first year as the most brilliant student of linguistics that he had ever encountered, that his 'unknown reason' for discouraging her creative writing might well have been that he believed that such writing might distract her attention from the study of language and linguistics, a field in which he saw her as his probable successor as Head of Linguistics.

If so, his hopes for her were certainly fulfilled. Siromi Fernando followed her brilliant career at Peradeniya with a doctoral degree of PhD. at the University of London in 1973, returning to Sri Lanka to teach at the University of Colombo, where she is now Professor of Linguistics.

Her creative interests were not, however, completely obscured by her academic eminence. It is not generally known that this outstanding teacher of language and linguistics is also a poet whose work has been published in Sri Lanka and abroad, and a writer of 'playlets', two of which have been produced on the stage. Her poetry arises from the life around her, as seen by an eye observant of detail, and meditated upon by a thoughtful, even religious sensibility. Three of her poems are presented below.

Barriers

Each time we drag ourselves
Out of home into the dizzy world outside,
We approximate the world to ourselves.
Building nesting-places inside institutions,
Warm mud and wattle
In concrete high-rise.
Other times, the world does not bend,
But doggedly dizzies deserts of impervious officialdom
Against the murmuring warmth of meekness.
Worse still, rubs other nesting-places,
Made by other men, in our noses.
They, impervious too, barely acknowledge
They bumped into something warm,
Let alone human.
Then depression dawns on horizons of endless c
Lightening in fearful neon all-night illumination,
The ever-wakefulness of existence
Without night.

Piliyandala Bus Depot

This tar, this glare, these scraps
And dirty paper wraps,
These swarms of people pushing body against body,
Arm against arm, thigh against thigh,
Minds pristinely apart.
With them, jostling, I, in body, rush
One bus to the other, one world to the other;
Stop, stepping out from comfort of home
To stretch of work
Zest of work to warmth of home.
Suspended, in this moment of physical realities,
Stripped of thought and emotion
In the sucking draw of actuality,
The tug of the clay on exhilaration of mind
And flush of passion is a steadying tide
Of tar and dirt and reality
Settling around those forces
That would hurl us
Too early, too unready, out of our clay,
Out of the here and now,
Into the heady destruction
Of a not yet permitted Eternity.

Changing Homes

We moved house again
And it meant changing bus stands.
I stood at a halt I used some years ago.
The bus reached a junction.
Memories awoke
And thoughts tangled.
Gazing down the dusty parting roads,
My eyes traced a homeward way down one;
I awoke to awareness as the bus slid down the other.

Staring down both roads I could hardly decide
Which road led home.
In the night I awoke,
And before my eyes gave shape to homely objects I wondered
wildly,
"Which way's the door? Which room is this? Which home?"
The image of dusty roads flashed back.
Before memory returned and sleep receded,
In the blanketing dark, confused, I asked,
"Lord, which way is home? I don't know where
the doors are any more."
In the dark, as sight returned,
The Lord replied, "That was what I wanted you to ask."

Professor Fernando was one of the first Sri Lankan academics to take the writing of Sri Lankan women seriously. With Dr Ryhana Raheem, her colleague at the University of Colombo, she contributed a groundbreaking article on the women writers of Sri Lanka to the American literary journal *World Literature Written in English* in 1978, which brought the writing of several contemporary writers to international attention. Her published poems and her critical articles relating to literature and creative writing are listed below.

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Vijita Fernando

Vijita Swarnamali Fernando has been writing fiction for three decades. She was born and spent the early years of her life in Hikkaduwa. Her father, a man who was clearly far ahead of his time in his thinking, gave equal encouragement to his sons and daughters in their pursuit of education. In an interview with Ransiri Menike Silva, she said:

> We were always encouraged to cultivate an aptitude for individual thinking and I remember how we used to argue with both parents on all sorts of topics, even slightly political issues. Though such terms were not known then, gender equality was the accepted norm, as well as freedom of thought and action. My parents never laid down rules and thereby they created a fertile environment where mutual trust and respect flourished.

Her mother read only in Sinhala, but books in both English and Sinhala were freely available, uncensored, to Vijita and her siblings. Her first experience of formal study was at the local village school, studying in Sinhala, and the second at a small English school, also local, for two years. At Standard Seven she was awarded a scholarship to Sri Sumangala Girls' School in Panadura, where she was encouraged to write in English by Hilda Kularatne, the school's English Principal, and where she remained until, at the age of eighteen, she gained entrance to the University of Ceylon.

At University in Colombo, Vijita Fernando chose an unusual combination of subjects for her degree in Arts: English, Sinhala and Economics. Sinhala was not at that time a fashionable subject for study among students from elite Colombo schools. A true bilingual, and now equipped with a degree, she took her talents into teaching but found it a 'frustrating exercise'. Advised by Carmen Ludowyk (sister of E. F. C. Ludowyk, then

Professor of English at the University of Ceylon) that Lake House was advertising vacancies for young journalists, Vijita applied for one and was successful. It became clear immediately that she had found her true metier in life. Her work as a reporter afforded her 'a glimpse into the real life of people'. From that point, it was a short step to the writing of fiction.

Engaged on an assignment that had her translating a good deal of Sinhala fiction into English for a weekly feature in the *Ceylon Daily News*, she found herself 'marvelling at the simplicity of those stories':

> It became a challenge to me to start writing in Sinhala - at this time my work as a journalist was only in English - and frustrated at not being able to write a story in Sinhala, I sat at a typewriter and wrote one in English!

Some of her stories have been born of journalistic assignments: 'Circle of Powder', for instance, the story of a ten-year-old drug addict, was written after she visited a drug rehabilitation program at Maharagama to write a story for the *Daily News*. Two of her stories have been broadcast on the BBC's World Service, and she has had two collections of short stories (*Eleven Short Stories*, 1985, and *Once on a Mountainside*, 1995), a book of case-studies of violence against women, (*Her Story*), and books for children in both Sinhala and English, published.

Translating from Sinhala into English is a favourite activity of this versatile author: she has translated a number of Sinhala novels into English. Her translations include *Hostage City*, *Madara*, *Friends*, Somaweera Senanayaka's *Yasoravaya*, Ediriwira Sarachchandra's *Malagiya Aththo*, and several hundreds of translated short stories published in the *Daily News* between 1960 and 1965. Vijita Fernando's most recent venture into translation is *Women Writing*, a collection of 25 stories originally written in Sinhala, and published in 2001. A review by Nanda Pethiyagoda of this book highlights the general approach of the translator to her subject:

> I believe these [stories] reflect the many aspects of the life of women in Sri Lanka in ways that interest and engage most

discerning readers. They are not overly political, or feminist. But one thing that stands clear in the stories is that the writers are wholly and inevitably on the side of women.

Vijita Fernando's work has been recognized by the award of first prize in the SAARC Women's Association Short Story Competition in 1999, and the President's Award for Excellence in Journalism in 2000. Her collection of stories translated from Sinhala, *Women Writing*, has been rewarded with a State Literary Festival Award, sponsored by the Department of Cultural Affairs, in September 2001. She is the Sri Lankan correspondent to an international feature agency for which she writes as many as six pieces a month. Her contact with women's affairs, with research organizations, with the United Nations and state agencies, and her wide reading of contemporary Sri Lankan fiction and poetry all provide her with source material for her own writing: an interesting example of this kind of literary cross-fertilisation is 'Menika', a short story contributed by Vijita Fernando to *Voice of Women* (October 2000), which combines an account of a domestic aide who worked in the author's household in the 1980s with elements of an English poem titled 'Menika' published by Yasmine Gooneratne in 1972.

Vijita Fernando's publications in the *Daily News* include reviews of the work of several Sri Lankan writers, among them Suvimalee Karunaratne, Maureen Seneviratne, Sybil Wettasinghe, and Punyakante Wijenaike. Journals and anthologies in English which she has reviewed include *Navasilu, Phoenix*, and *An Anthology of Modern Writing in Sri Lanka*, co-edited by Chitra Fernando and Ranjini Obeyesekere.

> All writing is creative, whether you are writing a feature for a newspaper or a work of fiction. They are parallel strands of the same creative medium and are inextricably woven together.

Vijita Fernando's husband of nearly forty years, the late Bonnie Fernando, was a fellow journalist at Lake House and a media consultant. She has three daughters (one of whom is the academic and literary critic Dinali Fernando), and lives in Rajagiriya.

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Yasmine Gooneratne

By Dr. Lakshmi de Silva

"One of Ceylon's most gifted and cultured daughters" - the phrase seems apt: the career of scholar, poet, critic, novelist, academic, Malini Yasmine (Dias Bandaranaike) Gooneratne, born in Colombo in 1935, educated at Bishop's College, Colombo, Visakha Vidyalaya, Bandarawela, and at the Universities of Ceylon and Cambridge, has not only been distinguished, it has been wide-reaching as well as many faceted.

However, this phrase was not coined for Yasmine Gooneratne, who left the island for Australia in 1972. It was bestowed by the *Ceylon Observer* of 12 April 1898 on her kinswoman Eliza Dias Bandaranaike, sister of Sir Solomon Dias Bandaranaike, who appears in *Relative Merits* (1986), doing the 'Grand Tour':

> Her travels had taken her to Cambridge ... The well-read Eliza, unconscious that she was by British standards a little out of date, could quote an earlier poet (Cowper).
>
> 'And while the bubbling and loud-hissing urn
> Throws up a steaming column ...
> So let us welcome peaceful evening in'.
>
> ... Having visited Girton College, she wrote home pityingly of the female dons and undergraduates she had encountered there, their complexions 'so sallow, poor dears, so pitifully "sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought".'(*Relative Merits*, p. 73)

This account sets the writer firmly in the context of 'a profoundly Anglicised family', long accustomed to wealth, social prominence and an

easy familiarity with English literature. It also gives evidence of two characteristics of her work as a novelist. One is the subtle yet incisive play of humour that places her characters with such precision through a nuanced depiction of their fallibility, so that their positions provide a multiplex view. For example, when Bharat Mangala-Davasinha adjusts to his new environment in Australia by changing his name to Barry Mundy in *A Change of Skies* (1991), we see how

> the several systems of nomenclature adopted in *A Change of Skies* offer an example of what might happen, for instance, when a text operates at the interface of two or more cultures ... Use of the medium of English makes the substance of *A Change of Skies* accessible where an Asian language would not; and as one Australian reviewer was quick to point out, the meaning of the word *mundi* in Latin indicates that their move from one culture to another and their adoption of the surname Mundy have made Bharat and Navaranjini citizens of the world. (Gooneratne, 'Constructing the characters ...', 1992)

'Barimundi', the author explained in a personal communication,

> is the name of one of the two best table fish in Australia - implying that he has ended up at the top of the tree; 'mundi', meaning in Sinhalese and Tamil the residue at the bottom of a coffee-pot, suggesting that it is often the fate of immigrants to end up at the bottom of the heap.

Bharat's new name and image appeal to Australian academia and media in terms of popular consumption; with protective colouring, as it were, he merges into his background and becomes a fast-selling commodity, until he finally reacts against his passive role and redeems himself by attending to the needs of fellow-immigrants.

The other characteristic of Yasmine Gooneratne's technique in this novel is her consistent strategy of involving the reader in a simultaneous awareness and evaluation of both past and present. Her sensitivity to the

power exerted by the past probably owes much to sharing thoughts and impressions with a husband (Dr Brendon Gooneratne) who finds history his avocation, but stemmed perhaps from the depth of her absorption in the research that occupied her as a postgraduate student at Cambridge: particularly the work of her great-grandfather James D'Alwis, which, as the moving poem below indicates, stimulated her emotions as well as her imagination:

Memoirs of James D'Alwis, Re-Read in Winter

With ninety years between us, every year
Changing a little all you saw and heard,
Too far away to put my hand in yours
I feel the warmth rise from your printed words

That lead, like footprints in a Yuletide snow,
To the bright glories of an earlier age
Than ours, and point the way we all must go
Who tread like you the path of pilgrimage.

The skills you laboured for, I love as life
The language that you loved I now re-learn.
Blown by the changing gusts of lingual strife,
The flame still beckons, fire with which you burned.
(From *Word Bird Motif: Poems*, 1971)

The fact that the current state of literary and academic activities have made it inevitable that Yasmine Gooneratne too must be judged, not as a daughter of Sri Lanka only but as a citizen of the world as far as her writing goes, is apparent from the tenor of the citation which accompanied the presentation to her of the 2001 Raja Rao Award and Trophy on 9 July 2001, the opening day of the ACLALS Triennial Conference in Canberra. The citation for this Award, instituted 'to honour and recognize writers (including scholars and critics) who have made an outstanding contribution to the literature of the South Asian diaspora', is useful as an objective assessment of Yasmine Gooneratne's work made beyond the confines of the island:

'One of Yasmine Gooneratne's early books is titled *Diverse Inheritance* (1980). It deals with literary texts from different regions of the world - but the title also happens to describe the rich plurality of traditions that have gone into her own making as a writer. A poet, a novelist, a literary critic and a social historian, Gooneratne combines in her work the intellectual and creative energies of a number of cultures that have shaped her, directly and indirectly. Born of a father who belonged to a distinguished Sri Lankan family and a mother who was a diasporic Indian from Trinidad, Yasmine was educated at the University of Ceylon as well as at the University of Cambridge.

After teaching for ten years at the University of Peradeniya she moved in 1972 to Australia, where she has lived since then. Her eighteen books - four volumes of poems, two novels, one immensely readable personal memoir of a family, one fascinating biography (written in collaboration with her husband) of a colourful Englishman - a diplomat and master-spy - who came to Ceylon in the nineteenth century, in addition to a number of critical works on individual authors like Jane Austen, Alexander Pope, Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, studies of the literature and culture of Sri Lanka, and essays on other Commonwealth and Postcolonial writing - testify to her wide range of interests.

Like all Sri Lankans of her generation who studied literature, Yasmine Gooneratne's formal education exposed her only to canonical texts from Britain. But when, after receiving a First Class Honours degree from the University of Ceylon, she went to Cambridge on a Ceylon Government scholarship in the late 1950s, she chose an area of research that was off the beaten track, and was not considered trendy at that time. Her thesis on Sri Lankan writing in English may well have been the first PhD. awarded by Cambridge University on a topic outside its Eurocentric orbit.

A pioneer in a field that was to gain academic viability much later, first as Commonwealth and then as Postcolonial Literature, Yasmine Gooneratne has since then gone on expanding her fields of inquiry, researching on the wofks of Indian, Australian and West Indian writers. Her fictional work dwells on notions of diaspora, hybridity and transcultural negotiation with humour and subtlety.

... After receiving her PhD. in 1962 when she came back to Sri Lanka to teach, she first concentrated on British literature, mainly to examine satire and irony, elements that have turned out to be important in her own critical and creative writing. Her two elegant and incisive books *Jane Austen* (1970) and *Alexander Pope* (1976), both published by Cambridge University Press, continue to be in print even today. Her study of Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, titled *Silence, Exile and Cunning* (1983) also foregrounds her fascination for irony as a narrative mode. She continues to be interested in satire, and recently won a prize awarded by an Australian journal for a satirical verse on an Australian politician well-known for her racist remarks.

In 1972 Yasmine Gooneratne moved to Sydney to join the English Department at Macquarie University, where she has stayed - teaching, reserching and writing - for almost three decades now. In 1981 Macquarie conferred on her its first ever higher doctoral degree of D.Litt., based on her research record and published work. In 1988 she became the Founder-Director of Macquarie's Centre for Postcolonial Studies, and in the early 1990s she was appointed to a Personal Chair in English. When she opted for early retirement in 1999, the university made her Professor Emeritus. She has spent nearly half her life in Australia, and in recognition of her distinguished service in the fields of literature and education she was honoured with the Order of Australia (AO) by the Government of Australia in 1990.

But her links with Sri Lanka, instead of weakening, have strengthened over the years. Even while teaching in Australia she continued for many years to edit an occasional journal called *New Ceylon Writing* which she had started in 1970 while living in Kandy.

In 1999 she became a Founder-Trustee of the Pemberley International Study Centre in Sri Lanka, a unique institution that offers residency to selected writers, scholars and other creative people. Since her retirement she has been able to spend more time in Sri Lanka than she could earlier, and apart from being busy with her third novel she is presently engaged in two literary projects: one, the preparation of the first scholarly edition of Leonard Woolf's novel set in Sri Lanka, *The Village in the Jungle*; the second, the documentation of women's creative writing in English in Sri Lanka from 1948 to 2000.

With Sydney as her home base, she has travelled extensively, lecturing, attending conferences, and being a Writer in Residence. She has been Visiting Professor at the Universities of Yale, Princeton and Michigan in the USA, Jawarharlal Nehru University in India and the University of the South Pacific in Fiji.

Yasmine Gooneratne belongs to the large and influential Dias Bandaranaike family which dominated the social and political life of Sri Lanka for several generations. She wrote an account of the elegant and westernized lifestyle of her ancestors with amusement and gentle irony in *Relative Merits* (1986), a book that cannot be categorized very easily. It has the meticulousness of a researched social history but also the charm and intimacy of personal reminiscences. Her gift for comedy that would make her two novels famous a few years later is already evident here in the delightful anecdotes that bring vividly to life an array of eccentric uncles remembered with humour and affection. The book ends with a nostalgic description of a harvest festival where the family shared an open-air feast with the farming community

that worked on their land. Such a festive occasion was never to be repeated because the country's legislation was soon to change the landlord-tenant relationship. At a conscious level the author does not regret the change because the new system would be more equitable, but an unspoken sense of loss pervades the chapter: "Return is impossible, denied us by our education, our interests, and the currents of social change. Except ... through literature, and the power of the written word". This book as well as some of Yasmine Gooneratne's poems are thus an attempt to salvage fragments of the past through the preservative magic of the written word.

Her poems are collected in four volumes, one of which, *The Lizard's Cry*, [includes a poem of the same title that] is written in the style of the traditional Sinhala *sandesaya* long poem. The other volumes, *Word, Bird, Motif, 6000 Foot Death Dive*, and *Celebrations and Departures*, capture not only memories but present experiences as well. By the time she comes to write her two novels by which she is most widely known today - *A Change of Skies* (1991) and *The Pleasures of Conquest* (1995), nostalgia is left behind. She is ready to take on the new postcolonial world of shifting cultures and migrant people with wit, sophistication and an analytical understanding. Both the novels have been short-listed for the Commonwealth Writers Prize, and the first one received the Marjorie Barnard Literary Award in 1992.

A Change of Skies is apparently the account of the relocation in Australia of a young Sri Lankan couple who had known that country so far only vaguely in a map: "a blank pink space shaped like the head of a Scotch terrier with its ears pricked up and its square nose permanently pointed westward, towards Britain". Despite its effervescent comedy and a hilarious description of how Navaranjini became Jean and Bharat became Barry - by the end the novel turns out to be a serious reflection on the deeper levels of change, identity and belonging. *The Pleasures of Conquest* is a more ambitious and more scathing venture - its satiric barbs aimed at different aspects of global academia, the

cultural, sexual and environmental politics of neo-colonialism and much else. The novel is set in a country called the Democratic Republic of Amnesia fifty years after its independence from British rule. At the heart of the novel is the famous New Imperial Hotel which might bring to mind the Galle Face Hotel to anyone familiar with Sri Lanka, but the author wryly describes the five-star hotel as " older than the Raffles ... grander than the Great Eastern ... more beautifully located even than the Galle Face in Colombo". This postcolonial tale of new buccaneers coming to reconquer the old colony in insidious ways is interwoven with that of an old colonial Englishman of a previous century whose passionate relationship with a local woman poet who wrote in Sinhala provides a core of mystery and a lyrical dimension to the novel.

The biography of Sir John D'Oyly (1774-1824) was to follow in 1999, the man who inspired her to create the fictional civil servant D'Esterey in *The Pleasures of Conquest*. The Sinhala poet who figured evocatively in the novel now appears as a real writer whose work survives to the present day. This biography was written in collaboration with Dr Brendon Gooneratne who, apart from being a physician, is a historian with other books to his credit, and an environmentalist. His rigour in factual research and her imaginative recreation of an ethos combine to make the book a vivid cross-cultural study of an individual as well as a period in the past.

There is a continuity in everything Yasmine Gooneratne has written so far, whatever be the genre. Fiction and history get woven together, poetry permeates her prose, and as a literary critic her attempts to explore histories of exile and expatriation, the effects of imperial domination, and its aftermath encapsulate the concerns of postcolonial experience. Born in Asia, partly educated in England, having settled in Australia, she can rightly claim: "The raw material for what writers of our time are presenting as fiction is, in fact, our life-experience, and the ` colonial' past they evoke is our family history".'

This citation, prepared by a member of the Jury of the Samvad India Foundation, serves as something more than an accolade or the record of a career which has earned its share of deserved triumph; it highlights not only the writer's achievements but the experiences and texture of the thoughts behind them. It also serves as a succinct introduction to the varied aspects of her work both literary and academic, and an excellent *point d'appui* for the more detailed examination of her work which follows.

Gender as an inhibiting factor evidently functions in different ways in different circles during the same era; while such scholars as Lorna Dewaraja and Sirima Kiribamune had earlier won recognition in their fields, it is startling, considering Yasmine Gooneratne's distinguished academic career as set out in the citation to the 2001 Raja Rao Award, to reflect that it was only the determination of her mother, Esther (nee Ramkeesoon) and her teacher Pauline Hensman's awareness of a gifted student's potential that triumphed over the patriarchal reluctance of the clan to expose her to the perils of a university.

> 'The bias in our clan against higher education for women continues to the present day in Sri Lanka, although young women from our own branch of the clan (notably Siromi de Saram and Serena Tennekoon) have won academic distinctions at home and abroad. On opinions such as [my father's], Uncle Ashmore's and Uncle Solomon's still depends the fate of those women of the clan who have no strong purpose (such as that generated by my mother's strong sense of insecurity, or by Aunt Sirimavo's sense of duty) to help them beat down the barriers thrown up by generations of family tradition. For it is not merely a question of social propriety that keeps the women of our families still tied down to domestic duties while life and their own talents whisper to them of a changing world outside the confines of clan "wisdom": it is a question of family honour and tradition.'
>
> (*Relative Merits*, p. 163)

> My mother soon found that the weight of opinion in the conservative family of which she had become a part was against the formal education of women. My father, like James D'Alwis before him, didn't consider schooling necessary for his daughters; they were, after all, only girls. He often discussed the problem with his cousin Ashmore Pieris ... Uncle Ashmore had developed decided views on the education of girls. They should not, he said, be given too much freedom; which meant, of course, that they should be brought up at home. Furthermore, it would be a shame "to trouble them with book-learning, Sammy. Girls must grow up naturally. Like flowers".
>
> (*Relative Merits*, p. 111)

We might recognize in the benevolently pontificating 'Uncle Ashmore' of *Relative Merits* some elements of a type we encountered earlier in *Word, Bird, Motif*, a family elder who exhorts 'little girlie' to avoid study of any kind: 'Paint, and sing, And learn to cook a little - *that's* the thing!'. With the help of the poem's title - 'The Pundit' is a term applied ironically in the island to signify presumption and fake knowledge - memory of an individual recollected with humorous affection is transformed into a Sri Lankan male type recognisable by every Sri Lankan woman. Both poem and memory, as much as the current interest in feminism (a creed Gooneratne appears to regard almost as often with detached humour as with sympathy), point forwards to the unlearned but delectable Navaranjini, 'Baba' to her patronising husband, who earns the awed respect of his academic colleagues for her acuteness in *A Change of Skies*. In *The Pleasures of Conquest*, however, where the accent falls on manipulation, dominance and power play, she employs the feminist standpoint as a basis for both irony and veiled indignation.

Yasmine Gooneratne had revealed her potential as a creative writer while still at Bishop's College, when she won the Senkadagala Memorial Prize for Original Verse, and as a scholar by winning the University of Ceylon Entrance Exhibition in English, in 1954. The years at Peradeniya, in the Department of English headed by dons of the calibre of E. F. C. Ludowyk, Doric de Souza, Hector Passe, Robin Mayhead and Upali Amarasinghe served to sharpen and enrich her natural gifts as well as her understanding of English literature. The

swift, incisive judgment, the grace and precision of style benefited from love and study of such writers as Chaucer and Swift, especially those with whom she found a close affinity, Pope and Jane Austen. She graduated with First Class Honours in English, simultaneously winning the Leigh Smith Memorial Prize for English as well as the Government of Ceylon University Arts Scholarship awarded for the best performance in the Final Examination of the Faculty of Arts.

The years from 1959 to 1962 were spent at Cambridge, engaged in research supported by funding from the Sir Richard Stapley Education Trust and Girton College in 1960, and the Government of Ceylon University Arts Scholarship. She was fortunate enough to have M. C. Bradbrook as her Director of Studies. Rather than choosing a familiar and appealing area in English literature, she chose to trace the roots of English writing in colonial Ceylon, examining the work of 19th century notables, both British and Ceylonese, such as Charles Lorenz, James D'Alwis, William Knighton, and Sir Samuel Baker. The substance of the dissertation which gained her the PhD. in 1962 appeared in the first book she published, *English Literature in Ceylon 1815 - 1878* (1968). Here she attempted

> to distinguish some of the most significant cultural influences Britain exported in the 19th century, and to study their activity within the framework of the Asian colonial situation. An analysis of this kind would seem to be essential to any adequate study of the literature of the Commonwealth countries. Ceylon has been selected for detailed study as a suitable test case. (p. viii)

The book is noteworthy, not only for its meticulous and painstaking research, but also for its canny choice of illuminating quotations. The alert interpretation of the relationship between the attitudes of various writers and colonial institutions, and the political pressures of the time is impressive as well as enlightening. Rooted though it is in the severe scholarly demands of a doctoral dissertation, the book reveals deep personal strands of feeling and cultural involvement that were to re-emerge in many shapes to assist her in her craft as a novelist; as when she criticises the florid romanticism of D'Alwis's language in his account of the murder of Kalidasa (p. 144), yet

finds the tale of the king, the poet, the courtesan, and the disputed authorship of the response to the verse riddle on her bedroom wall the ideal vehicle for a feminist *jeu d'esprit* some three decades later, in *The Pleasures of Conquest.*

The 'rediscovery of Sinhalese and later of Pali' by James D'Alwis, 'born in 1832 into that class among the Sinhalese that had been most consistently exposed over a long period to Western influences' similarly foreshadows one aspect of Edward in *A Change of Skies,* while her comments on her great-grandfather in *Relative Merits* suggests another, his position as an ancestral mentor to Barry and Jean:

> As a scholar and writer, [James D'Alwis] appeared in the role of historian, translator, literary critic and poet ... His devotion to literature and to literary pursuits, and his independence of spirit, would have been rare in any age or place. He is the ancestor I am most thankful to have, the one whose achievements I have most pleasure in passing on to my children.
>
> (*Relative Merits,* p. 128)

1968, the year in which her first book appeared, also brought Yasmine Gooneratne several tangible acknowledgments of her international standing as a scholar, such as the Sir Bartle Frere Exhibition awarded by Cambridge University, the Leon Fellowship from the University of London, and a research Fellowship awarded by the American Association of University Women which supported her second major intellectual engagement, a study of Jane Austen's life and writings.

Jane Austen, which Cambridge University Press published in 1970, demonstrates a deep awareness of the author's circumstances as a woman of her time as well as a grasp of her aims and skills as a writer. Interestingly, the stress does not fall on social comedy, but on Austen's acute understanding of the workings of society, particularly the irksome limitations imposed on women against which superiority of intelligence and spirit was little defence, as in the case of Charlotte Lucas in *Pride and Prejudice,* and of Jane Fairfax in *Emma* who has to consider an unwilling 'sale of intellect'. The Dashwood

sisters in *Sense and Sensibility* must listen to their brother's computing their chances on the marriage market. It is the awareness of this aspect which animates Yasmine Gooneratne's searing sonnet 'Winchester 1969' that memorializes a visit to the tablet beneath which 'the profoundest critic of her age /buries in silence her disciplined rage'. The results of close reading are impressively demonstrated in an exploration of the symbolic dimensions of Maria Bertram's escapade at Sotherton in *Mansfield Park*.

Apart from the real value of the book itself, it is evidence of the deep engagement with Austen's *oeuvre* which prompted Wolfgang Zach's allusion (in relation to Yasmine Gooneratne's more recent work in the same field) to 'the central role of the resisting, deconstructive, or creative readers who focus their attention on the - often hidden - colonialist dimensions of canonical British texts or reconstruct them through counter-discursive reading practices. This has led to important new insights into formerly disregarded dimensions of important British works, as in the seminal case of Yasmine Gooneratne's re-reading of Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*' (W. Zach, 1999). Fittingly, as Roger Thiedeman has recently observed, two decades later 'in acknowledgement of her devotion to her favourite author, Yasmine was invited to become Patron of the Jane Austen Society of Australia' (R. Thiedeman, 2001)

These books established her standing as a scholar and critic, but other facets remained known but as yet undeveloped. Thoughtfully selected books were provided by both parents and shared among their three daughters. Reading aloud was encouraged, so that both taste and an ear for the ring of words, the cadence of a line, distinctions between types of characters conveyed through the vocabulary and tempo of speech were absorbed unconsciously, laying the foundation for skills first shown in school and at university, but fully evident a good while later. She attributes much to the examples set at home by her two elder sisters (Gwen Dias Abeyesinghe and Sonia Hall), who were 'discriminating readers while we were growing up', and to 'an exceptional teacher of English language and literature at Bishop's College, Pauline Hensman. Mrs Hensman taught me how to read literature analytically ... and actively encouraged me to write creatively'. Yet skill alone does not lead to poetry: in *Relative Merits* she writes:

> I didn't wish to move out of our safe, golden circle ever. Inside it everything was known, dependable, familiar as the hem of my mother's silk sari moving quietly beside me, and the sound of my sisters' soft voices. To stay would have been so easy, so comfortable. But I know that if a University Scholarship hadn't carried me away from my home in 1959 I would never have written a single line that I can call my own. I would never, certainly, have written a single poem.

When *Word, Bird, Motif* appeared in 1971 (privately published in a limited edition on paper chosen by the poet's husband in Colombo and lovingly printed on a Heidelberg hand-press in T. B. Godamunne's almost Dickensian establishment in Kandy) M. C. Bradbrook pronounced the poems 'Masterly in their range and ease', while K. L. Goodwin recognised in them the work of 'a poet of human warmth ... sensitivity and clear-sighted asperity'. He thought them 'extraordinarily accomplished'. Their dazzling dexterity, sure control and speed to the target were a delight, a fresh and exhilarating sensation even to readers who habitually relished the pleasure of reading poetry. Here one could enjoy satire, sure and swift in its suave savagery with no debt to Pope except the honourable one of spirit, vigour and honesty that did not ask help of Donne or Macneice, and rhythms that moved beyond sun-lit clarity to the darkness of nerve and feeling: what E. F. C. Ludowyk identified in this collection as 'the authentic ring of poetry'.

The volume's first reviewer in Sri Lanka was Patrick Fernando, whose achievements as a poet add value to his analysis of this early collection:

> In an effortless manner, achieved mostly through a smooth and swift diction, the verse sets about its own poetic task. In the lines from 'The Fire',
>
> Not that I ever saw a prairie fire
> lick up the grass, nor lit a funeral pyre
> but once I had to watch a woman burning,
> her beauty shrivel, kindness slowly turning
> to ashes with the years, all joy consumed
> till cold at last and, like her marriage, doomed

> we recognise a humanity and craftsmanship which need no justification other than their own combined worth. The poetry talks rather than meditates, and the general impression is of a person keen on living without illusions, on finding meaning in the actual situation, personal and social, in which she is placed, and on conveying this experience with striking earnestness. It is appropriate, therefore, that the style is light, its pace quick and easy, and that - being bent on conversation - it relies more on tone and movement, than on richness of metaphor and image. In these poems, most of them short, the poet has achieved a personal diction.

He highlights the poet's precision of technique - the 'careful attention paid to each line, variety of construction and the effective use of pauses' - and observes that

> nobody who has enjoyed a swing will miss the long upward movement, the instant's pause and the swift descent in
>
> Up and away the children fly sky-
> wards and return
> Exulting.

Patrick Fernando found particularly enjoyable the

> tenderly lyrical 'Our Children Swinging', the more complex but equally well-executed 'Three For a Wedding', the vivid humanity and poignant final stanza of 'A Review', the very personal 'Past, Present, Future' and 'A Problem of Storage', and also two poems titled 'The Anniversary' and 'The Horoscope'. These are among the best, but the delicately satirical 'The Peace Game' and 'Lexicon' as well as 'A Marriage 1938' and 'Tides of the Middle Passage' are impressive. (Patrick Fernando, 1970)

Thiru Kandiah's analysis of 'This Language, This Woman: A Lover's Reply' dwells on a technique Gooneratne favours, the functioning of a single many-faceted image to communicate a complex mesh of ideas and feelings:

> This poem [which, the poet herself says, 'was written out of irritation at the continual denigration of English by Sinhala writers ... that was a feature of the literary milieu in Sri Lanka during the 1960s and 1970s] makes an eloquent case for the language, drawing in for the purpose the whole 'imperial theme', the bedevilling association of the language with conquest and its attendant evils of boastful pride and unworthy gain, and replying to the charges made by its detractors on the basis of this association. The reply is made not defensively but with great vigour. The very opening of the poem, in fact, is combative, dealing a blunt warning to the detractors of the language and reinforcing it with a series of aggressive counter-charges against them. But it is not just these qualities that give the poem its compelling power. Showing a great deal of those creative powers and that consummate artistry which have made her one of the finest of Sri Lanka's English poets, together with Patrick Fernando and Lakdasa Wikkramasinha, Gooneratne brings what she says to life by means of a masterfully developed image of a love relationship between a man and a woman, an image which is fused together with her own relationship with the language with such ingenuity and concentrated control that the two relationships are experienced throughout as being organically one. This permits the grandeur and pride that were put on the language-woman by the imperialist enterprise that carried her to us to be conjured up with telling immediacy ... Likewise, the image permits a meaner and more sordid matter that ... propped this "Empress's daughter" up in her position of dominance and power, to be concretely realised and brought unflinchingly before our eyes ... But perhaps the greatest of the felicities that the image affords the poet is that it enables her to evoke glowingly her deep love and esteem for the [English] language. Choosing her words and placing them with characteristic

fastidiousness, and hitting off the rhythms of the living voice with customary assurance, the poet strikingly recreates a warmly satisfying love relationship, one in which the language-woman generously yields to her poet-lover the wealth of her varied riches. (T. Kandiah, 1988)

Among the seventy poems in *Word Bird Motif,* many are noteworthy for deftness of form and mercurial wit: 'A Problem of Storage' is delightful in its playful poise; in 'Words to a Daughter', the 'commandments' are Augustan in sense, pith and wit though not in form -

Your days on earth being short and few,
Don't let me live your life for you,

nor let me fill you with false terrors -
live with your own, and not my errors.

'The Peace-Game', which captures the recognisable accents of the 'swell, upright, regular guys' who 'chose the ground and made the rules:

Their object was to keep us out
and ours to get, and then stay, in
for since our fathers didn't want
rough-housing near the orchid-sheds,
we fought our battles over their
parents' vegetable beds

is sharply effective in the vivid impact of the working out of the cohesive image, and the strong yet laid-back rhythm so telling in its implications of irresponsible dominance. Originally inspired by an account in *Time* of the My Lai killing in Vietnam, it has gained validity and force in later years, and is predictably much anthologised.

'Masks in the University Senate Room', referring to the devil-dancers' masks used there as decor, is epigrammatic in its pithy, devastating wit -

The bulging eyeballs of the *kolam* masks
Seem ready to forsake their painted faces,
Intently watching at thir various tasks
the solemn dons and grave administrators.

An age-old insight in these fine grotesques
Creates a mute, observant audience
Who mimic in traditional burlesque
The passion spied behind each prim pretence:

Anxiety, contempt, malevolence.

while 'The Brave Man who keeps Snakes as his Pets', beginning as a casual if detailed description of the herpetologist Anslem de Silva's vivarium cum office develops into a graceful allegory;

Since snakes exist
With us and in us ...
... let them lash harmlessly in a transparency of words
Where you can observe their curious markings
And admire
Their vicious grace,
And exercise them, when they need a run,
In the airy enclosure of a poem.

Pope's question and answer ('Ask you what provocation I have had/ The strong antipathy of good to bad') is sufficient justification in poetic terms for the feline, lethal grace of her comment in 'Curtain! pleads a Weary Critic' on bad soft porn in the guise of poesy -

As our hero puffs on (like a chef by the fire)
Tenderizing a breast or a thigh ...

What a blessed release, could these tireless lovers
Of Love from their verses omit
Guided tours of their private delights, and uncover
The modest contours of their wit?

Ryhana Raheem and Siromi Fernando rightly identify Yasmine Gooneratne as having to her credit 'a substantial body of poetry which is characterised both by its technical perfection and its depth of feeling' (R. Raheem and S. Fernando, 'Women Writers', 1978). The latter is well illustrated in 'Jataka', a superbly realised portrayal of a moonlit Peradeniya night and a small boy's query which, by juxtaposing legend and news of space exploration, frame the opposition of ageless human values to technological 'progress':

Last night
The moon swung
Down through a milky sky and hung
Low, letting its lucid light
Flood and fill
The earth as far as eye and mind could reach ...

He said
"Those marks on the moon! Look! Do you think
That every time a space ship bumps down there
It leaves a dent?" The calm
Assumption
That space was now a roller-skaters' rink ...
Put me quite out of patience with presumption
And forms of competition
On earth and out of it ...

Here the freedom of form is finely controlled by a sure and subtle sense of the poem's auditory impact which infuses it with solemnity and power. Also noteworthy is the optimising of rhythm to communicate suppression of feeling in a poem of protective ruthlessness and regret in 'The Wall'.

Among the love poems that are particularly rewarding for their freshness and vibrancy are 'The Wheel', a brief acknowledgment of Platonic and/or Asian fancies of transmigration, enchanting and beautifully poised; and 'White Cranes' a poem in which the variations of rhythm give force and urgency to the theme of *viyoga*, love in separation. Traditionally, as in the bright precision of the Kangra painting, cranes and rain-clouds herald the union of parted lovers:

Today black rain clouds gather in the west
and three white cranes
pierce, like a flight of arrows, through that darkness ...

O find your way to where the earth waits under
the rolling echoes of the chiding thunder,
keeping her secrets for the springing rain.

Here the oblique implication - *vyangartha* - so much a part of the Indian and indigenous poetic tradition hints powerfully at the exploitation of intertextuality, recalling the more direct appeal of the medieval English lyricist -

O Western wind, when wilt thou blow,
The small rain down can rain?
Christ! that my love were in my arms,
And I in my bed again.

Yasmine Gooneratne's acknowledged skill and power seem to have sprung out, fully-armed and full-grown, lying long dormant after the award won at school for 'The Coming'. In 'Past, Present, Future', a very moving expression of *gurubhakthi puja* to her teachers Pauline and C.R. Hensman, she writes

Somewhere the words waited
to root themselves one day in something real ...

Loss became lyric, wrong dissolved in laughter,
A long-remembered dolour put out wings;
Love takes a new dimension, each day brings
Such happiness, I dare to look hereafter
And of our poets say, I may not need them
Now that it seems a door swings wide at last
To let the right words for my living past
- Thanks to you both, who taught me how to read them.

A link seems visible in *Relative Merits*:

> Return is impossible ...Except, as James D'Alwis, Canon Dias and Sir Paul Pieris discovered, through literature and the power of the written word. And except, as I was to find in the weeks following my father's death, in memory and imagination. In those weeks I found myself writing poetry that flowed of its own accord, verses that, for the first time, I recognised as fresh and new ... The first poem that came to me in this way was 'Review', a memorial poem for my father. (*Relative Merits*, p. 229)

This 'first poem' drew praise from Patrick Fernando in his assessment of *Word Bird Motif*.

The Lizard's Cry, which followed in 1972, was different in tone and scope, reflecting uncertainties and conflicting pressures within the island and within the poet herself. The long poem which gives the collection its title, and which the Canadian poet Earle Birney described as 'a finely wrought and moving poem by any standards', still holds its place as a major Sri Lankan poem by its magnitude of conception as well as proportion. 'It was written a very short while before I left Sri Lanka for Australia in 1972, and I deliberately modelled the design of this message of farewell on the *Selalihini Sandesa*, which I had read in a literal translation', Yasmine Gooneratne says. As H. W. Piper commented some years later (see **Bibliography**), her impending departure 'had obviously sharpened her view of her Sri Lankan heritage [and] the literary and historical tradition which meant a good deal to her verse'. *Sandesa* (message) poems derive their form from Kalidasa's *Meghaduta*, in which a cloud is entrusted with a message. In later times, Sinhala poets in their *sandesa kavi* and Tamil poets in their *thoothu kaviyam* adapted the form to fit their own purposes; often, in the Sinhala poems some bird is taught a message to deliver to a god, a king or a pre-eminent monk. While this 20th century English descendant of Kalidasa's ancient line reflects, like the earliest Sinhala *sandesa kavya* extant (*Tisara Sandesaya*, 1352), a time of political distress, the poet does not presume to teach her messenger, a house lizard, a message: what results is a dialogue. Yasmine Gooneratne's

choice of 'the humble gecko' as her messenger was guided, she says, by three factors: first, that the gecko is supposed to get its information directly from the gods; second, that its chirp is heeded by people who believe in this tradition; third, that its unobtrusive presence 'allows it to listen in to every conversation in Sri Lanka, public or private'. As Piper points out, 'the Messenger [of the poem] knows more and judges better than the Poet' -

> 'Whom do you accuse? I see it all
> and not in part, as you do, I record
> all, not a blackened fraction ...'

Again, satire is not an overt feature of the extant *sandesa* poems, which provide views of urban and rural life, and perhaps a glimpse of court life as seen in the courier's flight. In contrast, searching, often searing wit operates in delineating a bleak vision of degeneration and disintegration in 'The Lizard's Cry'. According to the writer herself, the poem bears the prints of Pope's *Dunciad*, but the parallels appear to be more those of circumstance and mood than of surface resemblance; as when, as Piper notes, 'in the section of the poem 'Convocation', the poet expresses disillusionment with the condition of a University once rich in intellect and creativity'.

'The Lizard's Cry' can with fairness be termed a triumph in its strength and complexity. The clear-eyed irony, illuminating what it plays on, that is so frequently her tool co-exists here with the questioning and anguish awakened by the youth insurgency of 1971:

> Do you see
> the city streets awash with children's faces?
> ... Within the house a mother's ageing face is
> absent behind polite, abstracted smiles:
> she scans the 'smalls' for vacancies - the space is
> limited, but it spans the hungry miles,
> and helps them all salute while well-kept faces
> that make the news serenely sipping tea
> smoothly succeed to undisputed places,
> heirs of your bland, guilt-edged security ...

Here the writing is sharp as a sword edge, every millimetre of it functional, smooth and discomforting.

The *sandesa* convention does more than give formal unity to a poem already tightly-knit by the interrelation of phrases and images: it sets the poem firmly in its context. The poet has used the warp and woof of our history and culture - a culture that grew both richer and poorer by absorbing that of a succession of invaders - in order to bring out her picture of the crisis. Quotations from the *Chronicles*, juxtaposition of the events of 1971 with history and legend, serve to give an added dimension to the lines; as when the poet dwells with bitter, yet controlled anger on two burials of the living, the latter being the denial of literacy in English to the young through the 1956 language policy of the Bandaranaike government, which drove frustrated men and women in the south whose government-funded education from kindergarten to degree left them stranded without jobs, money, dignity or hope, into a suicidal insurgency:

> Little Scaly-skin, your ancestor
> described the scene, he saw the chains drawn tight
> on wrinkled flesh, and watched the clay bricks rise
> relentlessly above an old man's eyes.
>
> 'Our Royal Parricide would joy to see
> his murderous heirs compound his lunacy
> and doom their stunted seed in airless light
> to twist up crazy walls for breath, for light.'

Another example of this fusion of past and present occcurs when the *Mahavamsa* tale of the conflict between the Lion and his son is joined with the youth insurgency to create a startling image:

> ... your fiery youth embrace
> Death till it seems the Princess, *'fair of face*
> *and amorous'*, courts again her taloned love.
> See, as the grace and vigour of your race
> sport in a gun's eye, her soft fingers rove

> deliberately the honey-coloured flank
> that trembles near ..... from that dank
> den spring the Twins, your incestuous ancestors,
> to slay their shaggy sire, as a new breed
> of beast-begotten heroes, manhood's seed
> proven by parricide ...
> ... set up a murderous deed
> once more for target -

In such a blending of beauty and brutality the lines speak directly to the nerves, affecting the reader beyond the threshold of logic. It is Yasmine Gooneratne's greatest achievement that, for all its close reasoning and intellectual pith, her poetry is not confined to what Yeats memorably called 'the thoughts men think in the mind alone'.

As is appropriate to a *sandesa* poem, 'The Lizard's Cry' moves through a wide range of mood and setting. A railway carriage, like the narrow confines of the island, thrusts two cultures and two social classes into uneasy proximity, and a village with its squalor and organic vitality contrasts with the futile, infertile groves of academe

> where smiles turned swords upon each other
> and words drowned facts in May-tides
> of typed memoranda,
> reports now root in reports
> sub-committees are grafted on committees ...

The variations of tone and diction which such shifts demand are an exacting test of a writer's technical capabilities. Here the flexibility of the rhythm, the ease with which it captures every intonation of the speaking voice, every nuance of feeling, serves Yasmine Gooneratne perfectly. The hilarious 'Tourist *kafferinha*', in the dialect used by the less affluent and educated descendants of the Portuguese and Dutch invaders, and recently utilised in Carl Muller's trilogy, is not solely fun but functional. It not only records the latest invasion, but will inevitably leave its imprint on our hospitable land:

All the papers shouting bout the Eastern courtesy
Telling, smile and show the culture that they come to see
Molly's girl is doing well
She's working in a big Hotel ·
Dressing batik cloth and jacket, bringing morning tea ...

In Piper's words, 'the form here has been drawn from local popular song, and adopts the rhythm of 'Kafferinha' or 'baila' music. This lively passage contrasts with the richness of traditional story on which the poet draws elsewhere in 'The Lizard's Cry', showing how the comic can complement the grim or tragic'.

The telephone call in the section titled 'Petition' in 'The Lizard's Cry' reflects faithfully not only the flavour of Sri Lankan English but the state of mind (and confusion) that reigns in every 'corridor of files':

What? Can you hear
me I say Another thing just
now I heard them say your section must
shift into Grandpass I can fix it yes
but you must also ha ha ha remember
us Good good good Glad to help a friend
Goodlooker your Boss has got himself Congratulations
boy I'd like to give her some dictation myself Send
her along some time So how's the
wife and kids Regarding
the other matter No need to tell I told I say King
Kong on line son I'll be hanging
up now Cheer-o cheer-o Yes sir Morning sir
All the mail in order sir Unlock
the files Watch the clock
Grease a palm Pass the buck
Our responsibility stops here

These are the results of art, not chance; but there are lines in this poem, often in the personal passages, the effect of which cannot be ascribed to skill alone:

Unready, yet pricked onward by
need and a thin prophetic cry,
pitched between hate and love I try
for smoother satire, calmer joy
and balance passion in the ring
of rhyme; I fear the slackening
the spirit suffers, dangling free
above the flickering are-
na's swaying: ·
Rhyming Line,
swing me to love, to hate, in discipline.

It is not only the movement of the verse which so finely reinforces the trapeze image in this closing passage of 'Invocation': it is the nervous strength which conveys an internal tension and poise, won not by conscious effort of trained mind or muscle alone, but by instinctive response called out by discipline.

Poetry then could happen, like a wood
carving where luck and skill expose a beauty
of grain beneath the polish, as a good
jewel renders fire a filial duty ...

What strikes the mind is the truth of the gem image. It is a quality peculiar to the best of Yasmine Gooneratne's poetry that the imagery expands in the receiving mind: its clarity is the surface simplicity of white light that refracts into prismatic brilliance. Of the shorter poems in *The Lizard's Cry*, the lively, delicate 'Scribble', the limpid wistfulness of 'Water Song', 'Apostate' with its rich cadences, and the crisp urbanity of 'Making Poems' and 'Being Female', dissimilar though they are, are equally successful.

The last-mentioned poem (a tongue-in-cheek analysis of female superiority in the act of writing or assessing poetry), as well as another in the collection, 'Yasodhara', indicates that Yasmine Gooneratne's interest in gender issues appears to have been deep-rooted. The genesis of 'Yasodhara', described by the author in a 1990 article that placed the wife of Prince Siddhartha among a group of 'Women in shadow: Silenced voices in literature and culture' (see **Bibliography**), is revealing:

> ... the research idea behind this essay appeared first as an idea for a poem. I had been reading Sanskrit poetry in translation and attempting to translate Sanskrit-based Sinhala classical poetry ... In the process of doing so I had become familiar with the ancient trope that depicts woman as a vine, graceful with flowers and loaded with fruit, that exists by clinging to a sturdy tree ... drawing sustenance from it, and being protected from wind and sun by the support of its trunk and the shadow of its branches. Just at that time, a cyclonic wind caused extensive damage [in the district, and] a fine tree we very much admired on a neighbouring property was pulled up by the roots ... In a few days the vines which the tree carried shrivelled and died and they dropped ... The parallel with Yasodhara came into my mind ... There is a sense, I would suggest, in which the liberating influence of Buddhism has been built upon the abandonment and betrayal of a woman.

In line with this view, the 'Yasodhara' of Yasmine Gooneratne's poem is presented as a discreet but resentful victim of masculine insensitivity -

> Betrayed by life into a loveless chamber
> O may my twitching hands that touch and pleasure nothing,
> my shaken gaze
> leaping from emptiness to emptiness
> and my body, shrivelling quietly
> beside the aching cavern where my soul stood
> never reveal that there has taken place
> an act of violence

The poem ignores the tradition that Yasodhara's father-in-law, during his son's brief visit, praised Yasodhara because she followed in her chamber the austerities practised by her husband in the forest, and rejected the suggestion that she should take a new husband; she had the power of choice. The anonymous Sinhala poet who composed the *Yasodharavata* assigns to the princess the lines accurately translated by Ranjini Obeysekere in 1972 (see **Bibliography**)

> Your goal was Buddhahood; I sensed the signs
> But chose you for my refuge; none the less
> May meditation never leave my mind.

By ignoring (or possibly, discounting) this tradition, Yasmine Gooneratne characterises Yasodhara, deserted wife of a religious teacher whose principles of 'detachment' and self-discipline she respects and faithfully tries to follow in his absence, as the helpless victim of a patriarchal society.

At the time that these two collections of poems were taking shape, Yasmine Gooneratne's vision and energy drew her into a project (first mooted by her colleague at Peradeniya, Dr Merlin Pieris of the Department of Western Classics) that was to prove of immense value to the island's isolated creative writers in English.

> **'Do You Write in English?** In the absence today of a good quality journal that publishes English writing by Ceylonese, we propose to circulate a small magazine to which those interested are invited to contribute poems, reviews of books, films, plays, etc., short stories, criticism, and articles on artistic and cultural matters. As we hope to distribute the magazine free, expenses must be kept down ...'

Idealism, hard work, with practical advice from Dr Brendon Gooneratne, produced the first issue of *New Ceylon Writing* in 1970. A second issue, focusing on the theme of theatre and drama in Ceylon, followed in 1971. *New Ceylon Writing*

> was sponsored by no University, nor by any other institution, and its appearance has been made possible by the generosity and encouragement of individuals interested in literature and the arts in Ceylon ... *New Ceylon Writing* exists to put readers and publishers in touch with the best work of Ceylon writers, and to put writers in Sinhala, Tamil and English in touch with each other ... [The magazine] welcomes translated material originally written in Sinhala or Tamil. Would you like to help

> *New Ceylon Writing* to continue? Send assistance in the form of ... 5-cent stamps, Gestetner stencils, duplicating paper, money. There is no subscription to be paid ... This does not mean that there are no costs involved ...

A third issue came out in Sydney, evidence of Yasmine Gooneratne's dedication, despite her 'transplantation' to Australia, to the strenuous task of promoting creative writing in Ceylon. At a time when there are many groups publishing magazines which feature the work of local writers (such as *Navasilu* and *Phoenix*) or are solely devoted to it (*Channels, Waves, Slippage*) it is easy to forget that there was a time when a newspaper was the only place in which a gifted writer could place their work before readers. Readers might spot a striking poem or an absorbing story, but the effect was random, ephemeral. In 1970, *New Ceylon Writing* provided not only space but critical standards. It nurtured writers of poetry and fiction, distributed their work to libraries around the world, and was the sole forum till *Navasilu* was published six years later.

The motives that sustained the venture emerge in 'Family Histories as Postcolonial Texts', an essay Yasmine Gooneratne contributed to Anna Rutherford and Shirley Chew's *Unbecoming Daughters of the Empire* in 1993:

> From 1956 on, the position in Sri Lanka of English language writers such as myself became very problematic. During a period of feverish nationalist 'resurgence', English was officially down-graded and the indigenous languages of Sinhala and Tamil were elevated in what one must regard, however tragic for the country its consequences, as a well-intentioned attempt to redress earlier inequities ...
>
> My personal response to this was twofold. I tried, on the one hand, to deepen my linguistic skills and my understanding of my mother-tongue and the culture it supported by translating from classical and modern Sinhala poetry, and drawing images from it into my own writing in English. At the same time, I tried to assert, through the act of writing and publishing, my faith in the English language (in the form in which we spoke and wrote it in Sri Lanka) as a medium capable of accommodating a truly national, indigenous Sri Lankan literature.
> In 1970, I established, with the collaboration of a colleague in the Department of Western Classics at the University of Ceylon who originated the idea, a literary journal that we named *New Ceylon Writing* ...

The magazine was intended to continue the task performed by its predecessor *Community*, a journal brought out by C. R. Hensman which, like *Sankha* and *Harvest* before it, had published high-quality writing in the English language that was yet indisputably and effectively 'local' in its character and concerns. Yasmine Gooneratne had been involved in the editing of some of *Community*'s literary issues, and she transmitted its aims to the new magazine.

Two of her earliest pieces of fiction appeared in *New Ceylon Writing* under a masculine pseudonym, 'Tilak Gunawardena'. 'A Pot of "Rice"' is an episode seen through a child's eyes, revealing through his simple statements of events, the dignity of a village woman who will not submit, despite her poverty, to the humiliation of charity. 'For Love or Money' is a story of substantial length and terrifying in the smooth calm of its tone, finely appropriate to the orderly ease and decorum of mid-20th century upper class affluence, which delicately underlines the inhumanity of one woman's manipulation of another. Characterisation and the handling of sociolects in the two stories show her as an accomplished writer of fiction, though once again the skills were to lie dormant and await a catalysis.

The first book she published following her arrival in Australia was *Alexander Pope*, brought out by Cambridge University Press in 1976. It is an acute and loving study of a poet to whose aims and technique she seems perfectly attuned, her detailed analyses showing her grasp of Pope's flawless sense of rightness in the placing of a word, a caesura, an emphasis, showing how precision is the essence of wit. While her exposition of the *Dunciad* and *The Rape of the Lock* are predictably excellent, her detailed examinations of less familiar passages, Pope's translation of Homer, for instance, are rewarding. The *Times Educational Supplement* of June 1977 accorded unstinted praise

to the book:

> Close reading and informed textual analysis are here put to the best and most illuminating use. The assumptions of the society Pope worked in and for, his use of traditional forms and influences, his debt to Milton, are all explained ... without condescension or dilution.
>
> So skilled is Professor Gooneratne's analysis that couplets known by heart reveal fresh depths of meaning; her explication of the structures and patterns of the poems is helpful to experienced readers and beginners alike.

Yasmine Gooneratne's abiding interest in the development of English creative writing in Sri Lanka and in placing it in a global context found full scope in the opportunity to bring out three anthologies overseas (one as a special issue of the *Journal of South Asian Literature* published in the USA in 1976, the other two commissioned by Heinemann Educational Books, Hong Kong in 1979) reflecting the level which local writers had attained in the writing of poetry and fiction.

Discussions of Sri Lankan writing also figured importantly in *Diverse Inheritance*, a collection of Yasmine Gooneratne's essays that was published by Flinders University, Adelaide, in 1980. Defining the author as 'a leading Commonwealth critic' whose work 'brings distinction to her discipline', Alastair Niven noted her qualities as a critic - 'earnest but pithy, allusive, contemptuous of pretension, admiring of well-sculpted language, and especially keen on writers who use irony and discretion'.

6000 Ft Death Dive (1981), published after nine years' domicile in Australia, exploits a lucent sensuousness without sacrificing wit or pith. Though it is not exactly 'speech after long silence', since the poems 'Cave' and 'Nambiliya' were published in 1973, and a sojourn at the East-West Center in Honolulu produced a lively sequence illustrating the *rasas*, such poems as 'Poetry's Over' and 'There was a Country' speak too clearly of some hindrance to be discounted. The contents of the new book make clear

that a quest for new directions is taking place which is prompted by more than a poet's simple desire to test the extent of her powers. 'Poetry's Over' is couched in a West Indian idiom that is, perhaps, an acknowledgment of her connections with that region; it is certainly evidence of her flawless ear for the rhythms and syntax of a dialect:

Poetry's Over

Poetry's over
for me, man
the words don't come
the tears don't fall
no pictures form
no anger burns, no throb, no thrust,
I just
existing.

And so I went to thinking
I was poet born
just because a time of feeling bad
gave me a few
good verses!
That time gone for ever, man,
I happy now, it seems, and
poetry's over.

Why don't I write like other poets? Words
strung side by side, and at the end no meaning
only a mixed-up
memory. Because I know
that's not poetry that's just
pretend. Enough rubbish in print, man,
not to want to add my two cents'
worth and call it poetry.

So I again
pick up my pen and try to shape
the separate thing a poem is.
Not easy, always wanting to give up
except among the sand I still pick up
what my palm tells me has the weight and bone
hardness in which I sense the precious stone.

This poem is placed opposite another, which is more ambiguous, and which again equates poetry with gems:

There was a country where fine poems lay
close to the surface ...

The lines are appropriate to the poet's past, and to a country once called *Ratna-dwipa* (Gem Island), a land, it is implied, fluently productive of poems, gems, and sorrows. In the new country, by contrast,

Grief would need to strike so deep
here, that I'd rather let creation sleep
than mine the diamonds for a poet's crown.

'Migrant Poet' is, appropriately, a richer poem in which the writer uses the legend of the Indian migrant prince Vijaya who founded a kingdom in Sri Lanka as a wonderfully evocative image (conjoined as it is with the figure of the poet's 'lost Muse') of Kuveni, who sits spinning by a lotus-pool and offers him power in the new country:

Behind him a Kingdom sliding to decay
dragging with it lost childhood, sheltered youth,
Before him alien shores, an unknown bay,
another Vijaya, he ventures south ...

Legend permits the uninhibited use of traditional incantatory rhythms that give an underlying sense of security, movingly mixed with a faint hint of the elegiac. The poem ends in resolution:

I, a wanderer in this land,
turned by necessity to new material
strange to my eyes, uncertain in my hand,
shall I be fortunate enough to call
into forms unimagined in my youth
new life? Create in joy, here, on Death's lip?
Another Vijaya, I venture south
here to reshape my art, refit my ship.

H. W. Piper sensitively interprets the effect produced on the poet (who had, up to that time, been confined to suburban city life in Sydney) by her first sight in 1973 of the Jenolan Caves in New South Wales: 'These are huge limestone caves with an infinite variety of traceries, and what they gave her was what she had missed in Australia till then: a sense of time and history, though it is history of a different kind. of a slow growth into what they are. What she seems to have drawn particularly from her vision of the caves [and expressed in the poem 'Cave' that she wrote soon after her return from this expedition] was, that it must now be her own development that made poetry; that it could no longer come from outside; that while Australia did not offer the sort of support that Sri Lankan culture did, on the other hand it did offer space for personal growth'.

The change as seen in the new book is less in her subject matter than in her aims. It is as though the clarity and predictable precision of her earlier style has ceased to satisfy her, and she is now exploring the resources of resonance, the depths and echoes that rim the edge of a poet's line. She has always had the faculty of conveying sensation in all its fullness, as in the serene abundance of life in the closing section of 'The Lizard's Cry' ('Courtyard'), yet the new poems make it apparent that she is still seeking for something beyond it, and has achieved it in 'Cave'. The architectonic strength and expansiveness of the form are appropriate, not only to the central image of the deep dark caverns where the light of a torch reveals scintillating crystal encrusting slow growths that have formed through the accretion of years, used as a many-sided metaphor for poetry, but to the magnitude of the conception:

Stalactite, stalagmite,
grace and strength, met in a night
of silence
Span these perilous spaces
hang translucent flutes, weave your air-thin laces
in the chill dark
From their black caverns call the mysterious faces
Pillars, spin
from floor to filigree ceiling
In the startled torchlight's wavering circle
Towers, sparkle frostily
Build on, poets,
out of ourselves, our pain
and our delight,
we build our own support

Build on, we shall feel this darkness glow
one fiery night
as our astonished fingers tremble on
the blazing summit of our own creation

Yasmine Gooneratne's tranquil life in Australia, punctuated by such high ponts as the award to her in 1981 of Macquarie University's first higher doctoral degree of D.Litt, the publication to international acclaim of *Silence, Exile and Cunning* (a study of Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, the fiction-writer who stands next, in her opinion, to Jane Austen), and the completion of the first draft of *Relative Merits*, suffered a severe jolt in July 1983, when Colombo erupted in racial rioting and arson, creating horrifying images of a city in flames that she witnessed on television in Sydney. 'Black July' prompted a new issue of *New Ceylon Writing*, which came out the following year in the colours of mourning: black and grey, and was very different in appearance from the colourful covers that had been a feature of earlier issues. Its theme, taken from a letter that had been written to the editor from Sri Lanka in August 1983, was 'the multi-ethnic character that defines the essential nature and spirit of this land'.

'Big Match', a poem which she wrote at this time merges the excesses of Sri Lankan cricket mania (intense long before the winning of the World Cup in 1996) with ethnic conflict: it was a bitter reaction to the poet's sense of outrage at the senseless havoc she had witnessed on the TV screen:

The game's in other hands, in any case,
these fires ring factory, and house, and hovel,
and Big Match fever, flaring high and fast,
has both sides in its grip and promises
dizzier scores than any at the Oval.

Yasmine Gooneratne's memoir of her family, *Relative Merits*, which was published in London and New York in 1986, is outside the scope of this project, except in so far as it provides essential background to the sensibility that has produced her poetry and fiction.

The Queen's Birthday Honours List of June 1990 included the award to Yasmine Gooneratne of the Order of Australia (AO) for distinguished service to literature and education, in recognition of her record both academic and creative as well as for educational work at the forefront of Australia's efforts to participate actively in the cultural life of the Asia-Pacific region. In 1991 she was appointed by Macquarie University to a Personal Chair in English. In 1988 she had been appointed Foundation Director of Macquarie University's Postcolonial Literatures and Language Research Centre. These appointments, and especially the last, which introduced her to the reality of a new, multi-cultural Australia, and which she held for five years, might have played some part in encouraging her to write the kind of sustained prose fiction set in Australia which she had been hitherto reluctant to attempt, although some of her short stories had appeared in *Meanjin*, *Span* and *Short Story International* and, like her poems, in several anthologies. The world-wide success of *Relative Merits*, a book in which she had brought her ancestors memorably to life, might also have encouraged her to venture into the writing of novels.

Her attempt in the genre, *A Change of Skies*, began as a short story, 'How Barry Changed His Image', which was published in *Meanjin*, and developed into a complex, multi-faceted book in which it now figures, with

some changes, as Chapter 15. Bharati Mukherjee distinguishes between 'the aloofness of expatriation', where the newcomer resists adaptation and assimilation into the host ethos, and 'the exuberance of immigrants' who buoyantly accept them. In Yasmine Gooneratne's startlingly sophisticated debut novel, which was short-listed for the Commonwealth Writers Prize and won the 1992 Marjorie Barnard Literary Award, her sober academic, Bharat, and his irrepressible wife Navaranjini, a Sinhalese-Tamil couple, set out for Australia with the resolution to follow the first course, but are gradually warmed and charmed into the second.

Occasionally, the book displays a new rowdy, Rabelaisian, vein. The deft handling of incident and character is to be expected after *Relative Merits*: that work, however, was necessarily composed in the realistic mode, while *A Change of Skies* is presented as a conscious construct. The story launches out with Edward, the romantically thwarted son of a pedigreed family from a Matara *walauwa* setting off incognito on a voyage to Australia:

> 'God knows I love my home and my dear Mother ... but I have no regrets. May God forgive my father. I too forgive, but I will not forget!'

The pastiche deftly mirrors Edward's literary taste *circa* 1882, reminiscent as it is of Charlotte M. Yonge's *The Heir of Radcliffe* (1853) and Mrs Henry Wood's *East Lynne* (1861), just as the results of painstaking research underpin many telling references to real events in Australia's past, such as the period in which a demand in Queensland for indentured Asian labour enables Edward to assume his disguise.

With cunning time shifts, Bharat's edited version of his ancestor's journal serves as contrast and comment, since the novel deals with changes of time as well as of clime. Underlying the light, brilliant, crowded, almost-too-quick pace of the novel is a graver, deeper note. Edward's journal reflects the strongest virtues of 19th century realism - a vein too valuable for so acute a writer to totally relinquish. Here she exploits it, not merely to display her power to go deep, to move as well as tease the reader, but to convey a sense of an enduring stability of spirit that can face the flux and change that alters all around and within the human being as the tides alter the contours of Fraser Island which, as Edward writes, is 'an island made entirely of sand ... The world about me is being perpetually altered and re-made'.

Neither does she sacrifice any of the advantages proffered by post-modernist short cuts, as in the strategy of nomenclature. We are informed by Edward that the colonists (who in more overtly destructive moods had turned the sea off Tasmania 'crimson with the blood of its slaughtered Aboriginal inhabitants') have, being 'impatient with [their] lengthy tribal names ... bestowed on venerable chiefs ... the names of vegetables and fruits that are articles of daily consumption'. So we find that the Australian characters in *A Change of Skies*, most of them members of an academic 'school' of English, bear decidedly fishy names - Crabbe/crab, Coquelle/cockle, McErrol/mackerel. A further dimension is obtained by the relation of the same tale by male and female storytellers: Edward's story of 'The Invisible Prince' re-retold by Jean to her daughter Edwina as the tale of 'The Merchant's Daughter' shows the two sides of the gender coin, while Edward's poetic invocation of the Goddess Saraswathi and Barry seated palm to palm before his computer stress the responsibilities of the writer.

Wide enough in its scope to take in socio-political events across the world and centuries, *A Change of Skies* focuses a quizzical gaze on Australia and Sri Lanka. The humour is inventive, spirited and swift-paced. There are finely orchestrated episodes of high comedy, particularly the cross-cultural encounters where we have Jean, demure in her devilry, educating dons and students alike with her book display featuring the *Kama Sutra*; a confrontation during which she first demolishes, then 'consoles' a racist academic in new and carefully acquired Strine; or routs an American rival with a blending of black magic and Asian acuteness, this last episode topped off with a pithy pun. On their brief return to Sri Lanka, the Mundys see nothing but political violence, and a new commercialised, restless, comsumerist Colombo. They revisit the ancestral *walauwa,* where damaged slates of a sort no longer available result in a leaking roof, while its former retainers live in houses built on parcels of *walauwa* land bought with Middle Eastern earnings. The

Mundys flee like Lot, without a backward look, to their chosen land. The story does not end, however, in closure, but with Edwina on the verge of rediscovering Sri Lanka.

'Our last view,' wrote Nancy Schaumburger, reviewing the novel in *Antipodes*, 'is of Edwina grown up, a socially concerned economics student going off for field work in the ruins of her ancestral land'. A 'bloody-minded Aussie to her bootstraps' she may be, but the novel's stress on nomenclature links Edwina with her great-grandfather Edward, with his quickness to learn from new experience, his ability to empathise and bond with men of a different class, his deep fund of feeling, his integrity.

'Edward's moment of epiphany,' Chandani Lokuge wrote in 1996,

> central to his identity transformation, takes place when his Anglocentric complacency gives way to a non-Anglocentric empathy for his own community. Stirred in spite of himself by their plight, he recognises his compatriots as human beings of equal status and, in a moment of utopian transcendence, he "blesses them unawares". With this gesture the imperial mimic identity that had distanced him from the majority of his own people falls off him. He finds himself 'gloriously free'. Now he is able to mourn David's death with the sorrow of a friend, and interact without class consciousness or intellectual superiority with Joe, a simple-hearted, illiterate Western Australian stockman ... With the help of a Buddhist monk in the small Sri Lankan community in Thursday Island, he penetrates the heart of his civilisation, and develops new ways of seeing it ... He returns as an Orientalist committed to retrieving and reconsructing his submerged pre-colonial civilisation ... Thus his expatriate experience is finally a life-line.

Through her heroine, who combines acumen and strength of will with traditional values ('My mother taught me to worship Lord Shiva in my husband. I've always tried to follow her instructions, especially when my husband is under strain'), Yasmine Gooneratne touches lightly but incisively on gender issues.

In Chapter 16 we have Jean bemusing the Women's Group at her husband's University with her lecture on women's rights in Asia. Why did she, a qualified librarian, end up as a chef? Primarily to promote the multi-cultural values upheld in the novel? But that is too simplistic.

In 'Woman as Gendered Subject' (1994), Neloufer de Mel expresses the tenable view that

> in cocking a snook at a brand of militant feminism through her heroine Jean who becomes a successful business woman in Australia by making a profession out of oriental cookery - that drudgery of most housewives - Gooneratne asserts a woman's right to choice that jabs at 'politically correct' stances which downplay and deny a vision and capability such as Navaranjini's.

Yasmine Gooneratne's second novel seems, however, to be less ambivalent regarding feminism; though here, too, her ironical glance plays over the modish feminism of Stella Mallinson, who shudders at the epithet 'girlie' and invests in a male 'love slave'. Elsewhere she stresses the injustices caused by circumstances and masculine prejudice which deprive women by preventing their gaining full development and fulfilment. This is particularly apparent in the case of Mallika, strong-minded and gifted, but illiterate and regretful about it. Leila Tan also experiences injustice of a different sort, but evens the score with grace and humour. Two stories of the past as viewed by three women of the present, Stella's reading of the episode of the courtesan and the rhyme-riddle and Leila's and Mallika's comments on Dona Isabella's history underline a thematic concern regarding the place of the woman scholar/writer in a world perceived as semi-hostile, or at best discouraging.

The Pleasures of Conquest, which appeared in 1995, was also short-listed for the Commonwealth Writer's Prize. Sudeep Sen described the novel as

> an absolute delight ... a sharp comment on present day colonisers ... It is a multi-tiered novel with the past and present ingeniously

structured, written in an effortless prose style, which is at the same time bitingly astute and enormously funny.

Carol Leon's succinct evaluation of the novel (1995) is illuminating:

> *The Pleasures of Conquest* has three important things going for it. First, the novel has an epic breadth and scope that also distinguished Gooneratne's first award-winning work, *A Change of Skies*. We are introduced to a whole host of characters and issues. The allusions and symbols are both intriguing and funny. This takes us to two other strong elements in the book - its wit and relevance. With Swiftian sharpness and subtlety, the author lays open life's ironies and discrepancies ... She hits out at ... fake ideals and convenient justifications.

This novel, like her earlier one, grew out of a short story. '"In the East My Pleasure Lies": A Postcolonial Love Story', written in 1991, while the author was a Visiting Professor at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, and recorded for radio by a colleague, Professor Richard Tillinghast, is a brilliantly ironic presentation of sex and dominance in the relationship between two academics - male WASP and female Asian/Australian. This story developed and took its place in a novel which delineates four widely varied characters in four distinct styles: the burlesque vigour of the first section which centres on Stella Mallinson gives way to astringent sophistication in tracing an eminent American scholar's attitude to his research and his research assistant. This is followed by a realistic and moving episode of an expatriate who returns to her homeland in 'Amnesia', and recalls the years preceding World War II, including the lives and talk of expatriate Britons who have made their homes there. The closing section is a monologue by a sturdy Amnesian woman, illiterate yet a poet, and a repository of the memory of Dona Isabella and D'Esterey. These sections, though only lightly linked by encounters and cross-references, fuse to form a comprehensive view of the results of the pursuit of power on the individual or the nation.

As Carol Leon comments: 'Whether it be in politics, publications, literary research, religion or gender, the ability to subdue and exploit must indeed be a pleasurable experience!'

The novel presents a revealing panorama of transactions, interpersonal and international, that occur today in a world of fluid frontiers and values. The ironic overview of the unequal trade between alien and resident is not confined to the present: the elusive John D'Esterey, the benevolent (or duplicitous) 19th century administrator and his rapacious ancestors extend the vista of British exploits and exploitation backward in history. D'Esterey, perhaps a spy, certainly a poet and a scholar in the Amnesian language, is the subject of Professor Destry's research, and the insoluble mystery of the relations between him and the lovely and learned local poet Dona Isabella is neatly resolved by Destry to his own masculine chauvinistic satisfaction.

Emblematic touches are used deftly and economically: the elephants still salute that lasting seat of power. Built by an Amnesian King in 1592 to house his Malay mercenaries, 'razed to the ground' and rebuilt as a Portuguese armoury, then converted in the 18th century into a spice-storehouse by the Dutch, Sir John D'Esterey's headquarters after the British occupation of the hill capital, it evolves into the Grand Oriental and ultimately the New Imperial Hotel. 'Now controlled by a multi-national,' wrote Adib Khan in 1996, 'its name is particularly fitting as it represents the 'new' cultural imperialism flourishing in Amnesia'.

Based in the hotel is Stella Mallinson, an assured American 'celebrity writer', a buxom blonde beauty backed by big-name fashion-firm sponsors and superabundant hype, savouring the fruits of far older conquests, reaching backward to the East India Company. She supports environmental concerns, comes to promote the safety of Amnesia's endangered elephants, but sees nothing wrong in acquiring an antique ivory box which has to be smuggled out of the country. (It is to be noted that the elephants are emblematic of Amnesia, and appear in a host of significant contexts - van Ryckman's stately wild tusker, tamed to a performing jumbo without grace or dignity in the mosaic on the Hotel floor, the

hundreds of elephants shot by British planters or military men, as ruthlessly and with as little thought as rebellious villagers were shot down and their huts torched in 1818 and 1848.) Stella serves the cause of another endangered species - Amnesian writers.

The novel begins in a gay tempo, its satire divided between the financially shrewd visitors and the combative Amnesians:

> "It is interesting that no royalty payments seem to have been arranged for the local members of Mallinson's Eleven," sneered a sports reporter ... An academic from a local university expressed grave doubts about what he saw as a subtle form of neo-colonialism ...

The novelist Adib Khan's reading of 'the Mallinson Project' does not class the argument as laughable:

> Reputed to be an 'environmental activist' and 'bound on a mission of mercy to the beleaguered Nations of Asia', Stella is ranked among Amnesia's 'defenders against the forces of capitalist exploitation'. She has impeccable credentials for [her] Government-backed project ... There are strong overtones of cultural and economic subjugation right from the start ... The imperial motive of commercial gain remains a prominent incentive, and literature is now regarded as no different from other manufactured goods.

Narelle Shaw (1996) concurs:

> The Mallinson project itself constitutes an act of imperialism, a misappropriation of Amnesian culture as transgressive as the physical invasion by the British.

The novel's narrator, however, indicates that there are no such things as entirely blameless and victimised nations:

> It is quite possible that by the time we next visit the Sovereign Republic of Amnesia, the Gerard van Ryckman floor-chart will no longer be part of the decor of the New Imperial Hotel. That hoary institution is itself to pass, so they say, under new management, and will house the Asian arm of an organisation set up two years ago in California ... Artists who are hard at work on a new floor for the lobby say their aim is nothing less than the symbolic reconstruction of Amnesia's national identity shattered by the cataclysm of Empire ... Apart from the new design planned for the floor of the lobby, the management assures the public that modifications to the grand old hotel will be minimal. Such changes, which merely update and continue the New Imperial's gracious old traditions, will in no way affect the game of profitable mutual seduction which has, through so many centuries, enlivened Asia's commerce with the West.

Such perfect control of mode and tone shows that a writer consistent in her mastery of verbal resources has now matured to the point of a sure control of feeling as well. Irony sheathes the stress laid on shameless self-interest and the betrayal of cherished values in the pursuit of power and pleasure. Condemnation emerges, swiftly and suavely, from strokes of comedy in the portrayal of local politicians and savants as well as such characters as Stella, Philip Destry, and Pa Schumacher, the Canadian tourist whose Western perceptions ring with rich irony in the context of Stella's departure:

> "If there's one thing we've learned on this trip, Mrs Mallinson, it's that you mustn't give natives an inch or they'll take you for everything you've got."

Their rapid pace, variety of well-defined characters, and distinctive idiolects have led to both *A Change of Skies* and *The Pleasures of Conquest* being recorded as 'Talking Books'.

An aspect of this second novel that should not be overlooked is its close connection with *This Inscrutable Englishman*, the biography of Sir John D'Oyly that Yasmine Gooneratne wrote in collaboration with her

husband, Dr Brendon Gooneratne, a medical practitioner, historian and conservationist, and published in 1999. His account of D'Oyly in his earlier work, *The Epic Struggle of the Kingdom of Kandy* (the edited text of the 1990 Sally Sage and David McÂlpin Lecture) provided the seed from which both books grew. D'Oyly is the original of the ambiguous figure of Sir John D'Esterey in *the Pleasures of Conquest*, as the Sri Lankan poet Gajaman Nona is the original of Yasmine Gooneratne's fictional Dona Isabella. Although the Gooneratnes' jointly written *Life* of D'Oyly has been justly assessed by Professor Lorna Dewaraja as 'one of the supreme examples of the art of biography', its importance to the present project is not as biography *per se*, but as a resource for the study of the novel with which it shares a common origin.

For a short period, Yasmine Gooneratne wrote and published short stories under the pseudonym of 'Tilak Gunawardena', for which she created a persona (a male author who 'writes plays and film-scripts in addition to his stories'). These stories include 'A Pot of "Rice"' (1970) and 'For Love or Money' (1979). The latter story was described by D.C.R.A. Goonetilleke in his introduction to an anthology in which it was included in 1986, as a 'horror story'

> controlled by the writer's irony as he(sic) plays off a young girl's innocence against the designs of her step-mother. The sense of horror arises from the success of the step-mother and the unawareness of the girl that she is, in fact, a victim.

In 1999, Yasmine Gooneratne was appointed a Trustee of the Pemberley International Study Centre in Sri Lanka. The spacious bungalow, built in 1876, is situated 4000 feet above sea-level, in Viharagala Estate, Haputale. The Centre originated in a promise made to his father in the mid-1970s by Dr Brendon Gooneratne who, having purchased the property in 1996 and extensively renovated it, set up the Centre naming it Pemberley and dedicating it to his wife in celebration of forty years of a felicitous and fruitful partnership. The Pemberley Foundation is administered along the lines of the Rockefeller Study Center in Bellagio, Italy by a Board of Trustees, with support from a Governing Council and Advisory Board drawn from around the world, and offers Residencies every year to writers, scholars and artists, local and foreign. The Foundation Fellows are eminent figures in the fields of law, medicine, wildlife conservation, religion, commerce, education, engineering, literature, history and other academic disciplines.

Yasmine Gooneratne is working on a new edition of Leonard Woolf's *The Village in the Jungle* (1913), based on a close comparison of the manuscript with the extant printed texts. Her deepening interest in Woolf's novel is evident from her references to it in *English Literature in Ceylon 1815 - 1878* (1968), in her poem 'The English Writers' Circle' (1971), and in essays which have been published in the *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* (1972 and 1983); an interest first awakened when her father, a collector of Sri Lankan first editions, introduced her to the book. She is also currently engaged in completing her third novel.

Her poems have been published in the following anthologies: L. Wikkramasinha, ed. *Twelve Poems to Justin Daraniyagala 1903 - 1967* (1971) pp. 5-6; L.Fernando, ed. *A Book of Modern Asian Verse in English* (1972) pp.1-13; D. Lowell, ed. *Shalom* (1974); R.Dobson, ed. *Australian Voices: Poetry and Prose of the 1970s* (1975) p.98; M. Stewart and T. Doyle, eds. *Hey, English is Fun* (1976) p.95; R. Siriwardhana and A.J. Gunawardhana eds., *Reading With Understanding: An Anthology of Literature in English* (1976) pp. 209-210; Bertus Dijk, ed. *Moderne Poezie uit Asie* (1977), pp. 88-9; Y. Gooneratne, ed. *Poems from India, Sri Lanka, Malaysia and Singapore* (1979); Fa J.Jeno, ed. *Ulaznica: Selections from the poetry of Sri Lanka* (1979); R. Obeyesekere and C.E. Fernando, eds. *An Anthology of Modern Writing from Sri Lanka* (1981); R. Wijesinha, ed. *An Anthology of Contemporary Sri Lankan Poetry in English* (1988); S.C. Harrex, ed. *Flinders Silver Jubilee Anthology* (1991); M.Drouart, ed. *Postcolonial Fictions* (special issue of *Span*, No. 36, October 1993) Vol. 2, pp. 595 - 607; Government & Review Division, Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, Canberra, *Post Migration No. 100: "Enriching Australia: Celebrating 50 Years of Migration"* (1995); J.Thieme, ed. *The Arnold Anthology of Post-Colonial Literatures in English* (1996), pp. 762-5; R.Agrawal, ed. *Fabric of a Vision 2001*, an anthology published on Internet at http://cyberwit.net/new.htm

Her short stories have been published in the following anthologies: *Stories from Sri Lanka* (Heinemann Hongkong 1979); D.C.R.A. Goonetilleke, ed. *Modern Sri Lankan Stories* (Delhi 1986) pp. 128 - 146; *Short Story International* (1990); V. Mishra, ed. *Span* (Nos. 34 and 35, November 1992 and May 1993) pp. 269 - 279; M. Drouart, ed. *Postcolonial Fictions* (special issue of *Span*, No. 36, October 1993) Vol. 1, pp. 230 - 240; C. Vanden Driesen, ed. *An Anthology of Australian Literature* (Korea 1995); W. Ommundsen and M. Boreland, eds. *Rubicon* I, 2 (Special issue: 'Refractions: Asian/Australian Writing', Victoria 1995) pp. 45 - 53; J. Thieme, ed. *The Arnold Anthology of Post-Colonial Literatures in English* (1996), pp. 763 - 765, 883 - 891.

Her poetry and short fiction have also appeared in several journals and periodicals including: *ACLALS Bulletin* (Nigeria); *Hemisphere* (Australia), *Indian & Foreign Review* (India); *Community* (Sri Lanka); *The Journal of South Asian Literature* (USA); *New Ceylon Writing* (Sri Lanka and Australia); *Adam International Review* (UK); *Ariel* (Canada); *English* XVI, 94 (Spring 1967), pp. 131 - 133; *The Australian* (22 October 1988), p. 9; *Sydney Morning Herald* (10 February 1996); *Meanjin* 48, 1 (Autumn 1989) pp. 109 - 115; *Koinonia* (Sri Lanka); *The Literary Half-Yearly* (India); *Outposts* (UK); *Span* (Journal of the South Pacific branch of the Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies); *Tenggara* (Malaysia); *Macquarie University News* (Australia); *Toronto South Asian Review* (Canada); *World Literature Written in English* (USA).

A complete list of her publications in all areas may be found on the archival website of the National Library of Australia, which has acquired her literary papers:

http://www.nla.gov.au/ms/findaids/9094.html

Other websites which provide information on her writing include the following:

http://www.emory.edu/ENGLISH/Bahri/Gooneratne.html

http://www.umiacs.umd.edu/users/sawweb/sawnet/books_bios.html

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Goolbai Gunasekera

Born in Colombo, and educated in Sri Lanka and India, Goolbai (Motwani) Gunasekera is the elder daughter of two very distinguished educationists, Mrs. Clara Motwani, the America-born principal of Visakha Vidyalaya and Musaeus College, Colombo, and founder of Buddhist Ladies' College, and Dr. Kewal Motwani, Indian academic and Professor of Sociology. She is herself the Principal of the Asian International School, Colombo.

Goolbai Gunasekera was educated at Froebel School, Bandarawela; Visakha Vidyalaya; Ooty Convent, in the Western Ghats, India; Hindu Girls' College, Jaffna; Musaeus College, Colombo; Bishop's College, Colombo; and St Sophia College, University of Bombay where she was awarded the Best Student Award for 1st Year Arts in 1953, and the Best Student Award for 2nd Year Arts in 1954. She holds the degrees of Bachelor of Arts in History (University of Bombay/Nagpur), and an Honorary Doctorate in English literature (D.Litt.) from the Open International University awarded in 1995. Other awards and honours include the Zonta Award for Women of the Year in Education (1995). She was President of the English Association of Sri Lanka in 2000/2001.

Although she works full-time as Head of a leading educational institution, the Asian International School in Colombo, Goolbai has established a satisfying literary life for herself. Possessed of a frank and trenchant style and a mind that penetrates directly to the heart of things, she is essentially a free-lance writer who writes for her own satisfaction and pleasure, reviewing books, plays and concerts, and regularly writing articles on education and social problems for the newspapers, especially *The Leader*. From 1983 to 1990 she wrote a weekly column in the *Daily News*, and contributed a page of humorous observations to the *Lanka Monthly Digest*. She has collaborated with the British Council and the University of

Sabaragamuwa to write five books on historical and cultural subjects specially directed to the needs of Sinhala-educated undergraduates.

Goolbai Gunasekera describes herself as 'a writer in humorous vein' and 'a historian of sorts', and her ethnic identity as 'Indo/Sri Lankan'. These strands of interest and identity come together in several books that range from works of educational and cultural interest to the genre of humorous fiction. The second has produced three popular and highly entertaining sketches of social and family life in Colombo, in which the relationship between the narrator and her lively grand-daughter 'Kitkat' is a source of special delight for the reader.

In 1996 the *Times of Ceylon* serialised Part I of *Chosen Ground*, a book on which Goolbai is presently engaged, and in which she explores the lives and careers of her late parents, and especially of her American mother, who had been a major influence in her intellectual life: Clara Motwani, herself a busy teacher, provided her daughter with 'books to read, and read all my early efforts with care and appreciation'.

Goolbai Gunasekera is married (on 5 December 1957) to J. S. ("Bunchy") Gunasekera, and has one daughter, Khulsum Edirisinghe, who is herself a poet. She lives in Kotte, Sri Lanka.

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Publications

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Lakmali Gunawardena

A children's book titled *Song for the Setting* by Lakmali Gunawardena won an award in the State Literary Festival, sponsored by the Department of Cultural Affairs in September 2001.

Publications

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Yvonne Gunawardena

Yvonne Naomi (Weerakoon) Gunawardena, musician and poet, was born in Kurunegala, Sri Lanka in 1926. As children she, her three brothers, and their young sister experienced frequent changes of location while their father (Edmund Ronald Weerakoon, of the Ceylon Police) was in service. This meant that they saw a good deal of the island throughout their childhood.

It also naturally involved several changes of school. Yvonne Gunawardena successively attended Hillwood School, Kandy, Holy Family Convent, Kalutara, Girls' High School, Badulla and, finally, Bishop's College, Colombo. Showing a remarkable musical talent from an early age, she was encouraged by her family (and especially by her mother, Edith Alexandra Herft Weerakoon) to develop her love both of music and of poetry. Following her father's retirement, the family settled in Mount Lavinia, and at the end of her school career Yvonne Gunawardena entered upon a career as a teacher of music.

As a young adult, she had been influenced by Regi Siriwardhana to pursue her literary interests. In London, as a student on a Ceylon Government scholarship, she studied at the Trinity College of Music for two years, and on her return to Sri Lanka, married Charles Gunawardena in October 1952. Family life and travel to destinations decided chiefly by changes in her husband's career and professional interests occupied the succeeding years, during which the writer and her family lived in London (1959 -1966), Colombo (1966 - 1968), New Delhi (1968 - 1972), London again (1973 - 1988), and Geneva (1989 - 1990). Since 1991, she has lived in London, making regular visits to Sri Lanka.

In 1999 she obtained a BA Honours degree in the Humanities from Britain's Open University, thus fulfilling a long-felt desire to study the literature she had loved all her life. Her dissertation for this degree, titled 'Hybridity, Expatriation and Identity', focused on a study of writing by two Sri Lanka-born writers, Yasmine Gooneratne and Michael Ondaatje, and earned Yvonne Gunawardena a Distinction.

Yvonne Goonewardena describes herself as a poet with an interest in literary criticism and social history, particularly in relation to post-colonial studies. Her poems, sometimes yielding that fleeting resonance of Wordsworth or Eliot which is a feature of the writing of her generation, reflect experiences in the various places which she has visited, or where she has lived. Though these include holiday destinations such as France, Cyprus, the USA, Canada, India, Egypt and Jordan, her verse is no poetic *Baedeker*: on the contrary, it is a feature of her writing that each poem carries in its heart, frequently so subtly under-stated that it is easily missed, an expression of the poet's highly individual approach to life.

That approach includes a sensitive awareness of the social inequities and cultural contrasts which surround her at home and abroad, and an honest, unpretentious understanding of her own place in the scheme of things: well illustrated by "Ancestral Voices", a poem written in London in 1982 which includes the poet's persona among those who, over many centuries, have `crossed frontiers'.

Ancestral Voices

She sang quietly under her breath
an old song about fallen heroes
and a rough sea passage.
This was the burden of her journey.
A cleaner at London's airport, she paused,
sighing for the golden mustard fields she'd left.

On these drab North London streets
more shadows pass me.

I make a mental note of their names
and of this particular mannerism or that.
See in a pair of light eyes a Burgher from
the Dutch East India company; or search
the old maps and prints to be rewarded
with a single-minded conquistador
sitting po-faced at his interminable ledgers.
Perhaps he is an ancestor of the Krauses, Kochs,
or de Witts, or of Claasz the music-lover and
the gifted organist we knew named Herft.
These had crossed frontiers too, spurred on
by fear or greed; they rode their slim caravels
through unfamiliar seas to exotic spice islands.
Some returned. Some stayed and mingled their blood
with those they called the "lesser breeds".

Today, I would like to tell the singer
that the burden of her song is mine too.
We share a common enemy; a faceless establishment
moves the pawns.
We must cling like barnacles to the rocks' scabrous surface.
(*A Divisive Inheritance*)

It has been well said of Yvonne Gunawardena (by Gamini Seneviratne, in a review of this first collection of poems) that 'she portrays the predicament of the expatriate with a pithiness born of honesty', a view echoed by 'A.S.' in the *Sunday Island* when he observed that the volume is 'a faithful portrait of the expatriate's condition keenly observed and sharply rendered'.

A recurrent theme in Yvonne Gunawardena's poetry (as in the writing of many diasporan poets) is an abiding affection for her motherland. Repeatedly, as in the "clusters of incomparable blue dream-like flowers: the water hyacinths" that bloom in the muddiest pools on the Elkaduwa Road (in `The Rains Came to Wattegama'), or the glowing green emerald that "dazzled" the conquistadors (in `Coming In To Land'), she celebrates its beauty.

Coming in to Land

Each time we fly out of the
dense low-lying clouds,
we follow the same rituals.
Like a flash of silver is the promise
of a tentative foray into the space
beyond.

Soon, the smart familiar names
are left behind, the desert mellows
into dark night and folds us close
within her warm underbelly.
Over Arabia a phosphorous gleam
on the water signals the exit of a
couple of tired stars. We step
into a rosy dawn.

Below us a green emerald glows,
dangling temptation, dazzling every
voracious conquistador to come hither.

Coming in to land, I see this island
has a child-like innocence; its
mountain ranges, spread out like
the wings of guardian angels,
glow euphoric with the rising sun.

Notable, however, is the fact that this poet's love and concern for her homeland are expressed, not through sentimentality but through irony. In 'Colombo Love Lyric', a well-placed pun on 'double take' establishes the distance between "us" (the returning expatriates) and "these people", the destitute homeless whose presence stains the elegance of the cityscape:

Colombo Love Lyric

Outside the Green Cabin sleep the superfluous people.
We having just arrived from another planet, are transfixed.
These people blight our morning's eager anticipation,
lying here huddled in twig-like skeletal heaps on the

hard carapace of a jagged pavement. Later, laden
with chocolate cake and a sickening surfeit we

may drop them a passing glance and a rupee:
our older sensibilities have surfaced. Tomorrow,

we argue, is another day. Another opportunity for a
double take will come our way, or we may blame it all

on some immutable law of cause and effect, for our
supple innards had now grown well-lubricated linings.

The contrast between the "sickness" brought on by the Green Cabin's speciality chocolate cake and that other sickness, the "blight" represented by the "skeletal heaps" of the ragged poor, are all part of the horror of this most unlyrical "lyric", dedicated to a city once dearly loved, now lost to poverty and destitution.

Besides these large themes, involving countries and cultures, there are many poems in Yvonne Gunawardena's collections that focus on the personal: her family, her reading, the music that is part of her life, changes in the landscape, all yield emotions and thoughts that are woven into her poetry. Her tone is conversational, her observations are wry, her poetic 'voice' quiet, her endings often surprising. In 'Non-Pareil', the name of a celebrated beauty-spot and an old legend of the butterflies' annual pilgrimage - parts of many children's experience - combine unexpectedly to shape a site of contemporary conflict:

'Non-pareil'

They called you 'Non-Pareil'. Surely a poet
named you, while he watched the land
dip deep through a gauze of mist
down to the measureless edge of the sand.
In former days children caught,
in small glass bottles, tiny yellow-speckled
butterflies, compulsively dancing to their doom
in a seasonal pilgrimage to Samanalakanda.
Today it seems that wild-eyed young men
sprouting beards and revolution
often lurk in these wooded places,
driven by the Fates and Furies
to flutter blindly forward and dash their brains
(like the tiny yellow-speckled butterflies)
on the state's unyielding, monolithic visage.

Yvonne Gunawardena's first volume of poetry, *A Divisive Inheritance*, was awarded the Sri Lanka Arts Council Prize for English Poetry in 1988.

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Publications

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Theja Gunawardhana

In his Foreword to journalist and poet Theja Gunawardhana's volume *Vimukthi* (1966), Framroze Rustomjee described the author as 'a persistent student of different Religions, Arts, Sciences, Philosophies, Mysteries and Ancient Wisdom,' concluding that

> the sublimity of her thoughts, the throbbings of her heart and the charm and lucidity of her composition will become manifest to every thoughtful reader.

'Through her personal investigations made in countries whose in habitants have passed through dire forms of afflictions in the past,' writes Rustomjee, 'she has in some of her poems touched upon the lamentable subject of insensate fury ... unleashed by man against man'. Theja Gunawardhana's travels in east Asia opened her eyes to world events from knowledge of which most Sri Lankans, due to the insular nature of their homeland, had been largely protected. Her poem, 'The Korean War', with its dramatic use of statistical information and its direct appeal to the reader's feelings, is a good illustration of the impact that world events close to 'home' have had on the sensibility of at least one female Sri Lankan poet.

The Korean War

The Korean war
Was a saga of moral violence
On the one hand;
An epic of mighty valour
On the other.
All norms, decency holds dear
Even in war, were abandoned

In mad desire
To wipe out the Korean nation
In its entirety.
The Commander of the US Eighth Army
Had ordered shamelessly:-
'Kill everyone! Do not let your hands tremble,
Even when those before you are children,
Even when those before you are old,
You will be serving your land
As good American citizens,
By killing as many children as possible'.
And so they not only killed,
They massacred, they slaughtered
They burnt and dynamited children.
Of course - not only the children -
But they perfected their brutality
On children.

I saw in Shinchun county
Eloquent proof of mass murder,
Under direct command of Harrison,
Commanding Officer of the US Army for
Hwanghai Province.
Oct. 18th 1950, 900 people,
Men, women, children and babies
Were stripped in front of the Workers' Party Office,
Driven into a hollow,
Poured over with gasoline and burnt
To cinders in that death pit.
Harrison personally supervised
The whole process, gloating over dumb anguish, in joy;
Taking photographs for his future welfare.
Similar massacres went on day after day
2090 were dumped into the Namboo reservoir

In Wonan-ri there were two warehouses,
A hundred square metres wide,
A thousand women and children were taken there
And packed so that no one could even move.
Five hundred were slaughtered.
The rest were starved -
No food, no water.
"We thirst"! cried the children.
Yankee soldiers answered
With bucketfuls of dung ...

Bayonets separated mothers from children
Trying to reach each other once more,
Mothers cried out the names of children,
Who in turn called out for mothers.
The babies crawled on the floor until their
knees were bloodstained.
Straw was thrown over their mothers,
Gasoline on their heads,
Fire wrapped the warehouse of mothers.
While the fire raged,
Over a hundred grenades exploded.
In the warehouse of children
The same thing was done -
All but one perished.
Ki Mung Ja
Breathing fresh air through a crack
Survived to tell the nightmare,
How while grenades exploded
Limbs flew all around her.
Unable to bear the heat
Of that volcanic hell fire.
The walls were clawed in agony,
The little nail prints are still there
For the world to see ...

What think you of a nation's rulers,
Feeding on mountains of corpses;
Thriving so, on mutilated humanity?
What think you of such mental deformity
Worse than death?
What think you of cannibals
Boasting to be of the most civilised nation,
Whose hunger spares not
Woman or innocent child
In the curtailment of humanity?

Publications

Vimukthi. Privately published, Colombo 1966. Poems and essays

References

Rustomjee, Framroze Foreword to *Vimukthi* (1966) pp. 1 - 2

Rohini Hensman

Rohini Pauline (Hensman) Banaji, researcher and writer, was born in 1948 in Colombo. She is the elder daughter of C.R. (Dick) Hensman, writer, and Pauline (Swan) Hensman, teacher. Her parents, who individually and together influenced a generation of scholars and writers through their creative approach to the teaching of English, have been a major influence in their daughter's life, and their example probably encouraged her in the direction of academia, social history and political activism.

Educated in her early years at Bishop's College, Colombo (where her mother taught English to the Senior classes), her family's moves between Sri Lanka and Britain resulted in Rohini Hensman's acquiring a diverse educational experience, attending in turn Kingsgate Junior School, London, Greycoat Hospital, London, Ladies College, Colombo, and St Anne's College, Oxford. She graduated from Oxford University in 1970, with a BA degree in Psychology and Physiology, obtained a Postgraduate Certificate in Education by correspondence from London University in 1971, received the degree of M.A. (Oxon) in 1978, and is currently working for a doctoral degree (PhD) at the University of Amsterdam.

In an interview with Rukhsana Ahmed, Rohini Hensman revealed that the writing of fiction was to her a means of communicating a personal ideology:

> I don't see myself primarily as a novelist. I see myself as someone more involved as an activist, as a researcher, involved in activity-oriented research. Fiction and social history perhaps put across the same things, but in different ways, and I used the fiction just because I find it easier to express myself in that way.

In *To Do Something Beautiful*, as Elizabeth Bullen noted, she 'impressively adapts the novel form to her purpose'. The 'intricate design of brilliant colours' that a character in the novel (Kavita) sees is a poster designed and executed by a child (Asha): it is a telling image of the fruits of female (and feminist) solidarity, for it consists 'of countless women and girls engaged in all manner of activities':

> They were dancing and singing and playing the guitar; working in factories, fields, hospitals and kitchens; writing, drawing and teaching; two women were playing with three small children ... girls playing cricket and football, and two of them simply holding hands ...

The poster emphasizes the author's belief that there is unity in diversity; and over and beyond that, that there are possibilities through unity against adversity. The novel's crisis point - unsuccessful trade union action leading to the dismissal of six workers - brings about that unity: 'a gradually expanding network of friendship and sympathy,' writes Bullen, 'a network of collective purpose embodied by the women's co-operative that draws them together'.

Sheila Rowbotham paid both author and book a very high compliment in her review article on 'Post-Fordism' (see **Bibliography**):

> It is a novel in which class and gender issues are intertwined with a sophistication and subtlety rare in feminist theory, and in which the characters actively struggle to overcome differences. There are no teachers and followers, everyone learns, insights are shared. It is infused with a vision of dignity, co-operation, and happiness, but it is also the best description I have ever read of what socialist feminist organizational strategy might be.

She found it the kind of book which 'is not only about what is going on in capitalism, but about what we can do. This is a crucial element which has gone missing from much of the theoretical debate'.

Interviews conducted with working women in India that provided the base for her co-authored book *My Life is One Long Struggle* (1984) helped to shape this novel, and probably provided the substance for the dilemmas faced by Rohini Hensman's characters. Her active participation in women's organisations and the trade union movement is likely also to have had an important part in creating in this first fictional work a book that addresses, as a reviewer (Angela Hussain) noted in the *Law and Society Trust Fortnightly Review*, the problems of modern Asia. *To Do Something Beautiful* was one of the 20 titles selected for Feminist Book Fortnight in 1990, and it was warmly and enthusiastically reviewed at the time of its publication.

Hopeful and positive in its approach to the subject of Indian women struggling with dilemmas and crises of various kinds in the city of Bombay, a reviewer in *The Voice* noted that the book 'transcends all cultural boundaries'. The novel's characters are mainly women, who have to struggle with problems involving unequal working conditions, low wages, sexual harrassment at work, and infidelity or violence in the home. These, remarked Rukhsana Ahmed, reviewing the novel in *Spare Rib*,

> are the real dispossessed: people who find themselves in the brutal, sometimes violent slush of the slums of Bombay ... There isn't the distance of the camera that you might expect in *cinema verite*, or the sketchiness of documentary drama. instead, there are real people, compassionately felt and seen ... The representation of working class life is both honest and unsentimental. There is no attempt to glamourise them, you see the warts as clearly as you see the glory.

There are moments, however, when the author's undeniable passion and idealism leads her to be somewhat over-optimistic in reaching solutions. Angela Hussain, reviewing the book in Sri Lanka, and bringing Sri Lankan experience to bear on Rohini Hensman's fictional creation, expressed some doubts on this point:

> [A] wave of sympathy for destitute neighbours ... leads to co-operative efforts which benefit all. One cannot help wondering how long this co-operation would last in real life, under the strain of equally strong emotions of a conflicting nature, such as petty jealousies ... Another instance is the story of Chandran's garden, flourishing in a waste lot, a symbol of hope under unpromising circumstances. In our experience in Sri Lanka, home vegetable gardens have to be so rigorously protected from looters and vandals that they have become the hobby of those rich enough to have watch dogs and security guards. Are we to believe that this is purely a local problem, and can we accept the promise of Chandran's garden?

In Britain, where the problems described by Hussain do not appear to obtain, Lyndie Brimstone described the book endearingly in *Gay's the Word* as a

> strutting and striding, elbows and knees young novel, arrogant and vulnerable and very much alive,

and expressed her 'sincere hope [that] it will find its way into every secondary school library in the country'.

Rohini Hensman, who has said in an interview that she regards writing 'as a social activity, and not as an individual product', is a frequent contributor to *Pravada*, the Sri Lankan journal of current affairs. She is currently working on her second novel. Titled "Playing Lions and Tigers", it is set in Sri Lanka.

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Publications

Journey without a destination: Is there a solution for Sri Lankan refugees? The Refugee Council, London 1993, 66 pp. Interviews with Sri Lankan Tamils now living in Britain as a result of the race riots of 1958 and 1983. Non-Fiction

My Life is One Long Struggle: Women, Work, Organisation and Struggle. (Co-authored with Sujata S.V. and Neelam C.). Belgaum, Pratishabd, Madras, 181 pp. 1984) Non-Fiction

'Religious Sentiment and National Sovereignty: The Case of the Bamiyan Buddhas'. In *Pravada*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (2001), pp. 26 - 29.Non-Fiction

To Do Something Beautiful. Novel. Sheba Feminist Publishers, London 1990; Streelekha, Bangalore, 1990. Fiction

References

Ahmad, Rukhsana interview with the author of *To Do Something Beautiful*, in *Spare Rib*, 213 (June 1990), pp. 6-8

Brimstone, Lyndie 'The elbows and knees novel', review of *To Do Something Beautiful*, in *Gay's the Word*, June/July 1990, p. 8

Bullen, Elizabeth 'Grist for the Ideological Mill,' review of *To Do Something Beautiful*, in *CRNLE Reviews Journal* 1 (1990), Flinders University of South Australia, Adelaide, pp. 137 - 139.

Hintjens, Helen review of *To Do Something Beautiful*, in *The Journal of Gender Studies*, London, 1990, pp. 157 - 158.

Hussain, Angela review of *To Do Something Beautiful*, in *Law and Society Trust Fortnightly Review*, Colombo, 1 & 16 December 1992, pp. 22 -25

Reed, Penny review of *To Do Something Beautiful*, in *Rouge*, London, 1990.

Rowbotham, Sheila 'Post-Fordism', review article in *Z Magazine*, London, September 1990, pp. 31, 36.

Ellen Herat Gunaratne

Ellen Herat Gunaratne was born in 1916 at Attanagalla, Sri Lanka. She received her education at Musaeus College, Colombo, and then at the University College, Colombo.

In 1950 she began her career as a teacher at Ananda Vidyalaya, Chilaw. Three years later, she received an Honours degree from the University of London.

For seventeen years she served on the staff of the Ananda Balika Vidyalaya, Colombo, until she retired from teaching in 1954.

Ellen Herat Gunaratne started writing light verse after her retirement, and *The Song of Freedom* is her first attempt at creative composition.

Publications

The Song of Freedom. Lake House Investments Ltd., Colombo 1976. Poems

Nirmali Hettiarachchi

Born in Colombo in 1949, Nirmali (Gunasekara) Hettiarachchi is by profession a teacher. At her family home, "Pagoda House" in Nugegoda, which has been made familiar to Sri Lankan readers through the writings of Alfreda de Silva who spent her early years there, Nirmali Hettiarachchi benefited from the influence of a literary-minded grandfather, and a father (Rex Lucian Gunasekara, civil servant) who encouraged her reading.

She was educated at C. M. S. Ladies' College, Colombo, where she was encouraged to write creatively by two teachers in particular: Sarojini Nagendran and Nalini Mather. Rajiva Wijesinha, too, has been an important influence in her creative life.

In 1983 she graduated from the University of Peradeniya with an Honours degree in Arts, and would describe herself today as a novelist, a short story writer, and a teacher of drama and literature. She edited a series of supplementary readers for a British Council 'English as a Second Language' project (1985 - 1992), and undertook the editorship of *Channels*, the bi-annual publication of the English Writers Cooperative of Sri Lanka, in 1990. She has edited many books for publication, and is also the author of a Grade 6 textbook for schools that is scheduled for publication in 2001.

In 1985 Nirmali Hettiarachchi received the Deusche Welle Award for Creative Writing in South East Asia. She is Vice President of SLELTA (the Sri Lanka English Language Teachers Association), and a committee member of both the English Association of Sri Lanka, and the Classical Association of Sri Lanka.

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Publications

Replacements. Privately published. Colombo 1998. Novel

'The Favourite'. In *The New Lankan Review* (1987) pp. 90 - 94; reprinted in *The Lost One and Other Stories*. Short story

The Lost One and Other Stories. Privately published. Colombo 1997. Short stories

Sujatha Hettiarachchi

Songs of Lanka, a slim undated volume of poems dedicated to her mother by Sujatha Devi Hettiarachchi, is a publication that might have been ascribed to the earlier part of the 20th century on the basis of its style and language, had it not been for a poem celebrating the Indian poet and political activist Sarojini Naidu (on p. 36) which helps to date it as post-Independence, and therefore relevant to the current project.

The essential quality of the poems, which celebrate the virtues of Buddhism and Sri Lanka's natural beauty, are well represented by the two stanzas below, taken from Hettiarachchi's poem, 'Lanka' (p. 10):

Pearls have dropped their lustred shadow
Round your shores of coppered sand,
Ambered green in feathered mosses
Trace their beauty round the land.
Maiden palms in whisp'ring accents
Stretch their forms of midnight grey,
Moon and stars in glinting splendour
Shine as pensive as the day.

Solitude in valleyed lowlands,
Furrowed farms, their harvest pride,
Birds contrasting in their plumage
Vespers chant down country side.
Rising to the peaks of coldness,
Lanka smiles in terraced slopes,
Rivers piercing hearts of mountains,
Wend their way in crystal ropes ...

Publications

Songs of Lanka. M. D. Gunasena & Co., Ltd., Colombo n.d. Poems

Ameena Hussein

Sithy Ameena (Hussein) Perera was born in Colombo in 1964, and wrote under the pen-name of 'Sithy Hamid' for a short time.

The first person who insisted that she should keep writing was a friend, the writer and academic Qadri Ismail. She then showed her work to Regi Siriwardhana, who showed his faith in her by publishing three short stories in *The Thatched Patio*, a publication of the International Centre for Ethnic Studies, Colombo, of which he was then Editor.

Ameena Hussein's sister, who knew that she wrote, encouraged her by sending her books by little known authors. After her book *Fifteen* was published, her parents (Mahdi Hussein, a lawyer, and his wife Marina Caffoor Hussein) gave her their support and encouragement: 'They hadn't known before that I wrote'. Today Ameena Hussein's writing is supported by her husband, Samantha Perera, her immediate family, and a close-knit group of friends, among them Jody Miller, a classmate at the University of Southern California, who 'read and liked my stories, encouraged me, and took it upon herself to inform some of the professors in my Department that I wrote'.

By profession and training a sociologist, Ameena Hussein followed her schooling at St Bridget's Convent, Colombo, with studies in the USA, which won her a Master's degree in Sociology from the University of Southern California and a BSc. in Sociology from the University of La Verne, California.

As mentioned above, Ameena Hussein's stories have been published in *The Thatched Patio*, but they have also appeared in *Nethra*, *Channels*, and *Options*. The list of publications and the bibliography below is incomplete because at the time of the compilation of the present survey, the writer was

unable to access her material in Sri Lanka from her current residence in Europe.

Asked how she would describe herself, Ameena Hussein replies: 'At some time or another I have been a poet, a short story writer, a film critic [and] a literary critic'. She is, currently, a novelist.

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Publications

Fifteen. Short stories. International Centre for Ethnic Studies, Colombo. 1999. Fiction

'Sometimes there is no blood: Rape and domestic violence in rural Sri Lanka'. ICES, Colombo. 2000. Non-Fiction

Ruvanya Illesinghe

One of the youngest writers included in this survey, Ruvanya Dhyathri Illesinghe was born in Colombo in 1985, and lives today in Australia. She was encouraged to write by a sympathetic grandfather and by her parents (Drs. Dhushan and Purnima Illesinghe). Authors she admires include the Australian writer John Marsden, and two writers of the Sri Lankan diaspora, Michael Ondaatje and Karen Roberts.

Ruvanya Illesinghe was educated in England and Australia, and remembers two teachers, Mrs Turner at her primary school in Leeds as having been especially supportive of her young student's 'difference from the other kids', and Mrs Horton Andrews at Penleigh and Essendon Grammar School in Victoria, who 'gave me both the support and constructive criticism that I needed'.

As a child of the Sri Lankan diaspora, Ruvanya Illesinghe's comments on her homeland are of special interest:

> Although I do not have many opportunities to travel overseas, this part of my life has a major effect on my writing. Last year, I went overseas for six weeks and found it really inspiring in many ways. I got the idea for one of my most recent pieces, "Twilight", while staying in a hotel in Wadduwa. When we go to Sri Lanka, we often try to spend time away from the crowded cities, usually spending a night or two in each place. Because I left Sri Lanka at a very early age, I think it's very important to get a true sense of your heritage, and one of the best ways of doing this is to travel. Last year, I visited Kandy for the first time, and found it to be one of the most beautiful places I've ever seen.

Ruvanya Illesinghe's writing has featured for the last two years in the Youth Short Story section and the Youth Poetry section of a publication produced by the Moonee Valley Library Corporation that prints the work of its annual competition winners. Winning bursaries in creative writing from the Science Teachers' Association of Victoria in 1998 and 1999, she won Second Prize in the Mooney Valley Regional Library Competition Youth Short Story section in 1999, and both First Prize and the Jim Hamilton Memorial Prize (awarded to the best entry by a 14-17 year old) in 2000.

Although she writes a small amount of poetry, Ruvanya Illesinghe regards herself as 'primarily a short story writer':

> I would definitely like to write something longer, in the way of a novel, perhaps, after I finish school.

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Laleen Jayamanne

Born in Sri Lanka, Laleen (Jayamanne) Rutnam is a poet, cinem atographer, essayist, academic and novelist. She is a graduate of the University of Sri Lanka in Philosophy, English Literature, and Western Classics, obtaining her Masters degree in Drama at New York University, USA in 1973, and her PhD degree from the Film School of Drama, University of New South Wales, Australia in 1982.

Laleen Jayamanne has taken as her special field of interest the cinema and its interpretation of the female. (Her PhD dissertation on 'The Position of Women in the Sri Lankan Cinema 1947 - 1979' was an analysis of Asian popular cinema from a feminist perspective.)

In an account of her contribution to feminist studies written in 1991, Eva Ranaweera described Laleen Jayamanne's novel, *Prodigal Daughters,* written in collaboration with Sheilah Steinberg and published in Melbourne in 1981, as

> a frank and revealing feminist novel, a book by a truly liberated Asian woman.

It is dedicated

> to our mothers whose thwarted energy, desperate existence and tragic death can never be atoned for but make our wo/andering even more urgent. It is also dedicated to our stepmother New York City where the prodigal daughters Lived/ Loved/Died/ and were/Born again ...

In the following passage (pp. 58 - 63), Jayamanne describes her Sri Lankan protagonist's return, after four years spent in the USA, to her homeland in order to mourn her mother's death with the other members of her family:

> Due to a contingency unforeseen our heroine got stuck in the tropical island. It was during the waiting that she woke up from her ahistorical wo/anderings into an awareness of history, of change, both personally and politically. She hated the semi-feudal life of the country and felt quite powerless to change it except in her interactions with people who did not belong to her class.
>
> She was a visitor in her own land. She could not endure it. She had none of the things the world recognised as being achievements. Even the man at the customs said 'Aiyo, why old clothes ah?' She wanted to say it's none of your fucking business, but didn't. Not only were they old, they were also dirty because she didn't have time to do her laundry in New York just before she left...
>
> Being a 'stranger' in one's own country was not as difficult as to starve or live a sub-human existence, but it was nevertheless difficult. In her father's house there were many servants. They came when called and obeyed all orders. She too had done domestic work for people in New York City in order to live and felt a bond with the Tamil girls who worked for her family. Yet there was a world of difference in treatment. In New York City there was a minimal dignity in whatever shit job she did. Not that there was no exploitation ... Yet she sat at the same table and ate with them though she really hated looking after their kids and cleaning their toilets and kitchens. She worked for four hours a day at $2 an hour and that was enough to keep her going in rent, food, plays and films. But here within a neo-colonial economy, in a semi-feudal society, the domestic worker was virtually a slave. Race and class differences made it

impossible for them to sit at the same table and eat. They had no time of their own. They had to work from dawn to very nearly midnight... She wondered what kept them going, working for others with so little gratification yet so cheerful and full of energy and physical strength. She was ashamed of her listless waiting for an Australian visa and longed to be more in control of her life, less unproductive. They cook, sweep, wash, come and go when asked to do so, carry, feed, and put to sleep others' children, these young girls whose adult life has just begun ...

A friend of hers, seeing her restless, told her to relax on the beach and enjoy her stay here but she had no heart to go lie on the sand and listen to the sea, she was sick to her stomach and could not enjoy like a tourist the natural beauty of the country. All she could see was the disparity between th rich and the poor. This was nothing new in her country but due to her privileged class position she had not felt it (it was part of the way things were, almost natural) let alone being able to understand analytically the reasons for such a state. She had to go and come back and feel like an outsider before she could see, feel and understand the life of her country as an unjust one.

... She remembered the old female servants in her father's house say that her mother was born under a 'male star', simply because she could not be contained by home and children ... Her mother was such a restless woman, she was restless to do things that usually only men do, like get electricity to her father's village or start a cottage industry for the women of the village. But she had very little support and a great deal of opposition from her father who could not understand why his wife was not like his brother's wife, docile and obedient and always consulting her husband before taking decisions. Her mother was a model 'headstrong wife,' who made the home a hell. Even as a child of about five she remembered how she was embarrassed when her mother visited her at her nursery school ...

She saw the changes that had come over the country since 1971 when the oppressed youth of the country rebelled unsuccessfully against the injustices of that society. That event was the most significant failure in the country's history. The economic life of the country had begun to get harder since then. The upper classes

for the first time, also felt the material hardships. Yet they continued their life regardless, dancing and hanging out at the 5-star hotels that marred the coast of the island. The young intelligentsia seemed powerless except through art. Most plays had a political content though formally many of them needed to be rethought... She knew she had to leave.

So the prodigal daughter (unlike her biblical male counterpart who returned to eat the fatted calf and accept his role which he had rebelled against) left her island home and her weeping father once again.

ublications

Prodigal Daughters. An Adventure in Four Parts and a Bit (with Sheilah Steinberg). Backyard Press, Victoria 1981. Novel

'The Wisdom of the Old'. In *New Ceylon Writing 1* (1970) p. 31. Poem

References

Ranaweera, Eva 'Laleen Jayamanne'. In *Some Literary Women of Sri Lanka.* Women's Education & Research Centre, Colombo. 1991, pp. 14 - 19

Kamani Jayasekara

A Senior Lecturer in (Western) Classical Studies at the University of Kelaniya, Indira Kamani (Jayasekara) Bandara says she writes 'on compulsion',

> when the thought or emotion in me makes it essential that I express myself on paper. Many plots that have turned out as short stories have been nagging [at] my mind for a considerable time.

This being the case, it seems likely that any novel Kamani Jayasekara might write in the future would have had its beginning as a short story.

Born in Colombo in 1959, Kamani Jayasekara was encouraged as a writer from her earliest childhood by her parents, whose own professional lives were lived in the atmosphere of books: her father, Professor Ananda Jayasekera, was former Head of the Department of Sinhala at the University of Kelaniya, and her mother, I. P. Jayasekara, was before retirement a sub-editor in the Dictionary Office. She finds sources of support and encouragement today in her husband, Athula Bandara, and in several colleagues at Kelaniya University, among them Professor Lakshmi de Silva, Mrs Pulsara Liyanage, Mrs Rupa Amarasekera, and Professor W. Rajapakse. She also enjoys that precious gift the teaching profession can make available to a good teacher: rapport with her students. Her senior students, says Kamani Jayasekara, 'are always available for discussion and comment'.

Educated at St. Paul's, Kelaniya (1964 - 1967), Musaeus College, Colombo (1967 - 1968), and St James Norlands School, London (1968 - 1970), she returned to Musaeus College for a period (1970 - 1978), where Mrs Thilaka Subasinghe and Mrs Stella Dandeniya encouraged her literary interests. While

still a schoolgirl at Musaeus, she wrote a book of poetry (1975), wrote and directed a Sinhala play (1977), served as Secretary to the college Sinhala Literary Society, and organized a 'literary festival' in 1977. Awarded a scholarship from Musaeus College (1975 - 1978), she entered Kelaniya University in 1979, to read for an Honours degree in Arts, undertaking at the same time a Diploma in Journalism at the South Asian Media Centre, Colombo (1981). Graduating from Kelaniya University in 1984, Kamani Jayasekara successfully undertook studies for a MA degree in Western Classical Culture (1990).

Her literary appointments include membership of the editorial board of *Retrospect*, journal of Kelaniya University's Department of Archaeology. Her principal interest as a teacher is the introduction of Greek and Roman literature through discussion and translation.

In her Introduction to *The Balloon Factory* (1999), Kamani Jayasekara's first collection of short stories, Lakshmi de Silva described them as

> direct yet delicate ... unpretentious and [so] deceptively simple as to seem artless

and praised the author's 'subtlety and uncompromising honesty' in presenting the dilemmas of everyday middle class life. She found the story "Pooja" particularly interesting

> for what might be termed its 'double vision': the author is neither totally an observer nor a participant, but draws us into the experience. None of the oddities or intensities of the setting or atmosphere are played down, and the effect is powerful.

Most readers would agree with these opinions, for Kamani Jayasekara has an attractively light touch that she puts to good use in pointing up the 'contradictions' which exist at every bend in the road of middle-class life in Sri Lanka.

In 'Good Deeds', an intelligent little pre-schooler is finding it difficult to understand the world of adults:

"It is a world full of contradictions, if you ask me".

Having just seen her beloved grandfather, who is recently deceased, placed 'in a beautiful playhouse built of carved paper' which had been then, unaccountably, burnt down, she is inconsolable. Her father assures her that her Seeya is in "a better place now", having been born again as a baby as a result of the good deeds he has done during his life. The narrator decides to undertake a "brilliant and wonderful" act of virtue which will stand to her credit when she tells her teacher about it at school the following morning:

> It was with this intention that I set about my special task. The task of ending the misery of as many insects as possible in our garden. I would seek them out carefully and put them out of their misery as quickly as possible so that they would be reborn as babies. They would not have to hover around the garden, seeking food, looking for a place to rest...

Having presumably killed as many butterflies as she could catch, the would-be doer of 'good deeds' ends up

> punished, in my room, commanded not to come out. No TV either ... Yes, the world is full of contradictions. Grown ups are difficult to understand.

In story after story, everyday situations are made to yield perceptions that are subtly subversive of many aspects of 'traditional' life and practice. The hospitality of the givers of a Christmas party in 'Outsiders' is an excuse to display their "prosperity and good taste", leftovers are parcelled up for distribution to the "needy", the children of the household encouraged to wrap up their old toys in glittering wrapping paper, to give away to the "poor". In 'Betrayal', a puppy that has been abandoned in a busy city street by its owners who want to get rid of him, awakens compassion in the heart of a dog-lover, but she knows - as does the puppy - that her compassion has limits beyond which she cannot, or will not, go.

And finally, 'Old Rubbers', Kamani Jayasekara's tale of an adolescent boy's attachment to a pair of slippers that belong to the youthful aunt he adores, Dr Lakshmi de Silva found

> a light but wonderfully perceptive delineation of the lines between genders and ages; it gives us entry into our own past, because the writer magically plays on the reader, touching chords that evoke intimate echoes.

A true bilingual, author of several books of poems for children written in Sinhala in addition to scholarly books and articles in both Sinhala and English, Kamani Jayasekara appears to be one of those fortunate writers whose work in one genre and/or language dovetails creatively with her work in others: a good example of this being the Sinhala play written and directed by her, which was essentially an introduction to the plays of Euripides and the problems of misinterpretation, that was staged at the University of Kelaniya in 2000.

Some examples of her published academic essays are listed below. Her remarkable literary talent, backed by scholarship of a high order, suggests that she has a great deal to give to the development of creative English writing in Sri Lanka.

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Publications

The Balloon Factory. Privately published. Colombo, 1997. Short stories

'The theory of Empedocles on the origin of life against the background of Greek Myths'. In *Aquinas Journal*, Vol. 2 (December 1985), pp. 132 - 155. Non-Fiction

'Femininity and the position of women in Ancient Rome'. In *Aquinas Journal*, Vol. 4 (June 1987). Non-Fiction

'Women in politics during the Julio-Claudian period of the Roman Empire'. In *Journal of Humanities*, University of Kelaniya (1999) pp. 91 - 114. Non-fiction

References

de Silva, Lakshmi introduction to *The Balloon Factory*, reprinted with the title 'Piquant, refreshing short stories', in the book review page of the *Daily News*, 12 February 1999

Malika Jayasinghe

Co-winner of *New Ceylon Writing*'s essay prize in 1984, fiction writer and free lance journalist Malika (Goonewardene) Jayasinghe was born in 1933, and lives in Dehiwela. She was educated at St Mary's Convent, Matara, and was encouraged to write by her father, Edwin Goonewardene, a Government Servant who was himself a writer. Her prize-winning essay, titled 'The English Language in Sri Lanka: An Agent of Unity' addresses in terms both moving and well-researched, the tragic situation created in her homeland when Sinhala was declared the official language:

> With the change of medium ... those who had once stood shoulder to shoulder with the Sinhalese in their fight for freedom now identified themselves as a group that was unwilling to share the burdens of a developing n ation. Many retreated behind invisible barriers they believed to be protective, each mindful only of his own fate, a mood complemented by the argument of self-protection. It was a psychological phenomenon not uncommon among people facing ... sudden and radical change ... It has brought on a situation that has affected our society, our national life and our international relations.

Malika Jayasinghe pointed out that, as a result of the change of medium, school children were now 'divided and sub-divided from one another'. They were beginning to view one another 'with suspicion and distrust', building up 'stereotype images of those who do not belong to their own group or sub-group':

> They see those who do not share their class-room as unreliable and selfish 'friends', as humourless and uninteresting companions, as biased and sinister countrymen... This ... conflict has had a pernicious effect at all levels of society, fanned the flames of communalism and brought on a costly disturbance of the national conscience. It has also resulted in the gradual deterioration of relations with people both inside and outside the country, it has cut through the edifice of society and sharpened divisions between people of differing nationalities.

This essay, as remarkable for its frankness as for its balanced viewpoint at a time when Sri Lanka was attempting to recover from the race riots of 1983, was published in a special issue of *New Ceylon Writing* which focused on the theme of 'A Multi-Ethnic Community in Document and Literature', and deserves attentive re-reading today, when the situation the author described has deteriorated even from what it was at the time of writing.

Malika Jayasinghe's short story 'Cul-de-sac' was highly commended in the Shenelle Creative Writer of the Year Short Story Competition of 1988. She also contributed to D.C.R.A. Goonetilleke, ed., *Phoenix* (Journal of SLACLALS, the Sri Lankan branch of the Association of Commonwealth Literature) in 1992 (details unavailable).

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Publications

'Cul-de-sac'. Published in *Shenelle* (1988). Short story

'The English Language in Sri Lanka: An Agent of Unity', in *New Ceylon Writing* 5 (1984), pp. 145 - 151. Non-Fiction

Dagmar Jayawardena

The eighth child of A. C. de Lanerolle and his wife Mary, Dagmar (de Lanerolle) Jayawardena was educated at Southlands Girls School in Galle. Her brother Kenneth de Lanerolle, who edited her novel *Pale Hands* and published it posthumously, writes in his Foreword to the work that

> when Dagmar married and went to live in a remote village of the Hill Country ... she soon learnt to appreciate all that was fine in the village culture and at the same time to see its unsavoury side. Though Christians, she and Felix found themselves the patrons of the village temple and strict observers of the folk rites which accompany all phases of village life: birth, betrothal, marriage, death.

In 1979, Dagmar Jayawardena was diagnosed as suffering from cancer of the spine. Confined to her bedroom, she began writing a novel - 'first at her bedside table, then, as she lay on her back, writing on scraps of paper held up in the air; then, when her fingers failed her, she spoke her thoughts to kind friends who took them down'.

The most detailed discussion to date of Dagmar Jayawardena's novel is found in Tissa Jayatilaka's essay, 'The English-language novel of Sri Lanka and the critical response to it: An overview' (2000), a slightly edited extract from which is quoted below:

> Dagmar (de Lanerolle) Jayawardena's *Pale Hands* (1983) is a short novel that tells of a moral life with a difference. *Pale Hands* is a simple tale, primarily of two people, Robert and Louisa Boyanayaka of Yatiyana, through which Jayawardena has given us a whiff of the clean air and simple joys of the countryside of

Ceylon during the early decades of the twentieth century ... Nothing out of the ordinary happens to the Boyanayakas; neither is the course of life changed dramatically in the village Yatiyana once its protagonists have been and gone. But like most writers who in their writings do not concern themselves with momentous events of their day, but write rather of the doings of ordinary people with sympathy and perception, Jayawardena has created a vivid picture of a life of beauty and harmony; a picture of a kind of life that moves predictably but rhythmically onward.

The tale is narrated by Amelia van Rooyen, a Burgher classmate of Louisa's ...All goes well at Yatiyana. Robert and Louisa, occupying as they do "strategic positions" in the village, are called upon to perform certain duties by the people. And they do so unhesitatingly ...

The salient feature of the novel is the honesty with which the author has rendered aspects of rural life ... What is most significant about her awareness of the unsavoury side of rural life is Jayawardena's warm sympathy for fallible humanity that is the cause of this unsavouriness. She has gently and delicately satirized the foibles of the rustic characters and some of their customs and beliefs which are not consonant with her own convictions ... There is no naive acceptance of folk traditions ... The author achieves a fine balance ... between personal conviction and common belief.

Although on occasion she lapses into avoidable detail, a generally elegant prose style has enabled Jayawardena to convey her experiences of rural life with admirable artistic economy.

Jayatilaka notes that Dagmar Jayawardena avoids both 'the type of vague idealization of the countryside that has marred the efforts of certain other Sri Lankan writers in their efforts at rendering the rural

experience' and 'the risk of melodrama to which lesser writers handling similar themes not infrequently succumb'.

Publications

Pale Hands. Edited by Kenneth M. De Lanerolle, posthumously and privately published (1983). Novel

References

de Lanerolle, Kenneth M., Foreword to *Pale Hands* (1983), pp. 7 - 8

Jayatilaka, Tissa 'The English-language novel of Sri Lanka and the critical response to it: An overview'. In *Navasilu* 17 (August 2000) pp. 1 - 22

Sharmini Jayawardena

A company director by profession, Sharmini Kamalika Jayawardena was born in Colombo in 1957, educated at Visakha Vidyalaya (1963 - 1979), and entered the University of Kelaniya in 1979. She graduated in 1982, with an Honours degree in English Literature and Language. She was encouraged to pursue her literary interests by Lakshmi de Silva and Ranjith Gunawardene, her teachers at University, and by Darshini de Zoysa, a friend.

While at university, she edited (in 1981) the first issue of *Blink*, a publication of Kelaniya University that showcased the writing of its students. She has lived for eight years in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, an experience that has inspired some of her writing.

Her first volume of poems, *Wet Paint*, was introduced at its launch in Colombo by Dr. Lakshmi de Silva who, as Sharmini Jayawardena's mentor at the University of Kelaniya, had known her poetry from its beginnings and through its development.

In speaking of the poems in this first volume, Lakshmi de Silva draws attention to the 'complexity of widely varied experience' from which they arise, and indicates that they contain implications and questions related to everyday social pressures and emotions, 'always brilliantly refracted through a double perspective of involvement, plus detachment'. Such intellectual power as de Silva identifies in Jayawardena's poetry is rare in the writing of Sri Lankan women which, especially at the present time, registers an outpouring of feeling rather than a concentration of the mind. De Silva describes *Wet Paint* as representing

> a new kind of poetry. It is poetry like a scalpel - but it will tickle you with its subversive wittiness. It is keen and sharp - surgically it will probe to the root of our disease, the malaise of the decade, and hopefully alert you on how to cut it out.

The poems, as she observes, show a wide range of tone and mood, 'ranging from the witty to the wistful, from reflection to razzle-dazzle'. They are brief, 'strong in their impact', and very memorable because they 'probe the seeming solidities of facades'. These views are echoed by Niranjala Arulnanthy, who finds in Sharmini Jayawardena's poems ' a voice that speaks with wisdom, energy and insight', and by R.S. Karunaratne, who detects in them 'a fresh voice in modern poetry'.

Lynn Ockersz, finding in *Wet Paint* 'a direct confrontation with the poignant reality of a money-driven world, unashamedly materialistic and spiritually emaciated', regards Jayawardena's achievement in her first volume of poems as being primarily the relation of personal suffering and torment to

> the vampirical money-driven economies of the East. The growing insensitiveness and inhumanity of the socio-economic order is the invariable backdrop to personally experienced acute inner suffering, spiritual *ennui* and death.

Bringing to Jayawardena's poetry the insights of an anthropologist, Darshini de Zoysa finds that *Wet Paint* 'vividly brings to light that which is muted and devalued within the societies of which the author is a part':

> It provides a refreshingly critical perspective on the impact of globalisation on Asian self-identity by posing hitherto taboo questions which do not neatly fit in with the prevailing orthodoxy ... In the politics and poetics of the text, the apparent contradiction between the uniqueness of fragmented self-identities on the one hand, and the sameness that we share through our common humanity on the other, melts into thin air.

While noting, as Lakshmi de Silva has done, the diversity of moods and themes that characterises this volume of poems, Darshini de Zoysa gives special praise to the brilliance with which Jayawardena epitomises in her poetry 'the domestication of Asian women into monogamous unions, and the bridling of their passions through the monotony of housewifery and "legalised prostitution"'.

In 1997 Sharmini Jayawardena was presented by the International Society of Poets with the Editor's Choice Award for her poem, 'Monotony':

One of these days
I will leave this house
And
I will get myself into another house
And that day
I will leave this name behind
And
I will get myself another name.
From one house
To another house
From one name
To another name
but a step on the same spot
One man to one woman
one mother
one father
To one child
life goes on
a step on the same spot
Cutting succulent orange-red ripe tomatoes
into slices
dicing onions
I listen to its sharp, sharp clear sound
cutting into bits and pieces.

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Publications

'A lady-in-waiting' and 'Aspacia'. In D.C.R.A.Goonetilleke, ed., *Phoenix* (Journal of SLACLALS, the Sri Lankan branch of the Association of Commonwealth Literature), 1991. Poems

'Ganesh: Prince of Princes'. Published on the cover page of D.A. de Zoysa, ed., *The Great Sandy River* (2nd ed) Het Spienhuis Publishers, Amsterdam, 2000. Poem

'Mirage', 'Title-Untitled', and other poems, published in the first issue of *Blink* (University of Kelaniya) 1981 - 1982, under the pseudonym of 'Rashmi Q.' Poems

'Monotony'. In *Between a Laugh and a Tear.* International Society of Poets Anthology, UK, 1996; also published in *Blink* (University of Kelaniya) 1982 - 1983 under the pseudonym of 'N.S.' Poem

'Patchwork' (poem) and 'We are sleeping' (translation by Sharmini Jayawardena of 'a village poem, "Api Nidi"'). In D.A. de Zoysa, ed., *The Great Sandy River* (1st ed) Het Spienhuis Publishers, Amsterdam, 1995. Poetry / translation

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Karunaratne, R. S.,'Fresh voice in modern poetry', review of *Wet Paint* in the *Sunday Observer,* 27 September 1998

Ockersz, Lynn '"Wasteland" reminiscences', review of *Wet Paint,* in *Daily News,* 3 October 1998

Suvimalee Karunaratna

Suvimalee (Gunaratna) Karunaratna was born in Colombo in 1939, and travelled a good deal in her early years with her parents (her father served Sri Lanka as Ambassador to Burma and Thailand, and as High Commissioner to Australia).

Educated at C. M. S. Ladies' College, Colombo from 1947 to 1948, and at Maret School, Washington, D. C. from 1948 to 1952, Suvimalee Karunaratna returned to Sri Lanka and to Ladies' College for the last five years of her schooling (1953 - 1957). She worked as a free lance journalist before joining the English Service of the Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation in 1972 as a Producer of Feature Programs. She resigned from this post in 1976, earned MA and M. Phil degrees from the Postgraduate Institute of Pali and Buddhist Studies at the University of Kelaniya, and is presently working towards a PhD at the University of Peradeniya while functioning as Assistant Editor of the Buddhist Encyclopaedia of Sri Lanka. Her MA thesis (for which she earned a distinction) examined the empirical basis of Nibbanic experience, and her M. Phil studies focused on the topic of 'The Female in Early Buddhism'.

As indicated in the notes above, Suvimalee Karunaratna is extremely well read in Buddhist studies. However, she carries her erudition lightly in the fiction she has published under both her surnames. Her short stories have been broadcast by the World Service of the BBC and published in local journals and newspapers. Some of them appeared for the first time in book form when Hansa Publishers brought out her first collection of short fiction, *Bili Pooja (Human Sacrifice)* in 1973. In his foreword to this book, Professor Ediriwira Sarachchandra observes that

> Miss Gunaratna is not looking at life in Ceylon through the eyes of someone alien to the soil, as most writers in English do, but as someone who has lived the experience she is recording, and is part and parcel of the society she is describing. The pieces on the village evoke a genuine atmosphere and, although written in English, they breathe the idiom of the native speech.

This, coming from a creative writer in Sinhala of Sarachchandra's accomplishment, is praise that is well worth having, and Suvimalee Karunaratna (as she later became) has continued to write well and authentically of Sri Lankan life. Her meticulous attention to detail in her own creative writing may be glimpsed, too, perhaps, in the unobtrusive editorial assistance she appears to have rendered her former husband (Dr Nihal Karunaratna) in the preparation and publication of his books on the history and environs of Kandy.

Her stories 'The Bus Ride' and 'The Golden Oriole' (included in *Bili Pooja*) have appeared in several anthologies (see below). She has also written a television film script, "The Journey", which was televised in 1982 by Rupavahini, the National Television Network of Sri Lanka. Four booklets on Buddhist themes, *The Walking Meditation* (1988), *Prisoners of Karma* (1991), *The Healing of the Bull* (1996) and *The Struggle of Letting Go* (1999) are included in the list of Suvimalee Karunaratna's publications below: they are 'Bodhi Leaves' which, their author suggests, 'might possibly belong to a new genre of creative modern Jataka tales'.

In the story 'The Raban Contest' the relationship of a pair of young cousins in love is intruded upon by family rivalries, and presented against the feasting and merrymaking that accompany the celebration of a Sinhala New Year. The narrator's mother, a strong-willed woman whose deft, imperious touch even the dice seem to obey, dominates the foreground of the picture: the marriage is in her hands, to arrange or to destroy. In the tension of waiting, the narrator's panic (kept under control and conventionally out of sight) transfers itself to the shrill crying of the *kirala* birds, her emotions echo in the voices of the competing drums, and her happiness proclaims itself at last in the sound of exploding fire-crackers.

'The Golden Oriole' was *New Ceylon Writing*'s selection as the best Sri Lankan short story of 1973. Miss Vitharne is 'a good girl': to anyone familiar with notices in the marriage columns of Asian newspapers that propose 'nice, good girls' of thirty-five and over, well-educated - B. A. - and 'neat in the home' to 'kind, mature' widowers of established means who hold a government post (thereby qualifying for a Government pension), the phrase carries an authentic irony. An efficient school teacher, devoted to religious activities, obedient to her mother and to the rules of social propriety, Miss Vitharne experiences a brief period of self-assertiveness and even of physical bloom as a result of an aunt's energetic attempts at match-making. The author's irony is gentle, but it sharply defines its object. Staid Miss Vitharne begins to see herself as a heroine of romance, forgetting that in such a role she is stepping out of the character she is expected to assume in relation to the proposed marriage: merely that of a 'nice good girl who will look after her husband and do everything nicely in the home'. She should expect as her right neither the joy of requited love nor the fulfilment of motherhood. Her pleasure takes her from private enjoyment to a somewhat smug complacency, and she unconsciously allows the Buddhist principles on which she has hitherto based her life to relax their influence.

Although the tale begins in comedy, an underlying moral concern manifests itself in the double-level symbolism of the contrast Suvimalee Karunaratna makes between the yellow-feathered oriole soaring off into unimaginable heights of power and bliss, and a pair of homely brown mynahs pecking up their day's supply of food. Yellow, as Miss Vitharne knows well, is 'an auspicious colour ... the colour of gold, of ripe grain, of sunshine', and of the fruitfulness and harmony associated with marriage: brown is a colour more suited to the celibate life of the hermit. On this level, fortune flies away from Miss Vitharne as the oriole soars into the sky, and she is left looking at the dull prospect of continuing spinsterhood symbolized in the mynahs. But the golden oriole is also, in being single, spectacular and brilliant, a living symbol of the high goal of chastity and purity striven for by the monks who wear the yellow robe. The mynahs, on the other hand, are a companionable 'pair', and their homely activities of food-gathering and nest-building symbolise the cares and companionship of the householder's life. Miss Vitharne was once 'motivated ... by religious impulses', a dedicated temple-goer and pilgrim;

she might herself have achieved that ideal of a chaste spiritual life. But she has neglected the shining ideal for illusory fancies of marriage, romance, and self-importance, and ends by losing both.

Suvimalee Karunaratna possesses an ear very finely tuned to conversational nuance. Between Miss Vitharne and her Aunt Beatrice, between Miss Vitharne and her mother, between Miss Vitharne and her colleagues in the school staffroom, between Miss Vitharne and Aunt Beatrice on the telephone, words pass that carry the sickening thud of death-blows, or the soft music of hope and of long-deferred romance.

This gift, so evident in 'The Golden Oriole', reappears in 'The Bus-Ride', a story in which conversational exchanges accumulate significance until the speakers cease to be commonplace individuals riding a pilgrim 'special' and are transformed into unconscious representatives of their varied and complex society.

"I would give you room if I could," says a woman in the over-crowded bus to a fellow-traveller, "but the man at the edge will be pressed to the wall." The conductor of a Sri Lanka Transport Board bus becomes, in the eyes of his passengers, the representative of an insensitive, callous administration: his business, as he says himself, is "to issue tickets, not to solve problems". Filthy, overcrowded and comfortless, the pilgrim bus becomes a symbol of the lives ordinarily led by the people inside it who are even now bound for the shrine at Kataragama, where a kindly deity will, they hope, use his powers to lighten their lot. The bus they ride takes on a vivid life of its own: already torn and damaged, its panes spattered with mud, betel-juice and vomit, it `lurches', `leaps', and `prances' on its demented way, its passengers protesting, arguing, and praying with equal violence inside. For such misery there is no hope in anything but a resigned despair:

> Humanity compressed and confined in a miserable heap, swayed and fretted and sweated. Some had squatted on the floor, the grime-laden floor of the aisle. Others hung, tortured and stricken with pain, from the rail that ran across the length of the bus. The child on the floor had begun to retch.

> "Sadhu! Sadhu!" shouted the old woman suddenly from her seat. "Let us all suffer on silently to Kataragama!"

Christian readers will recognise the significance here of the word 'aisle', and the reference to bodies that 'hung, tortured and stricken with pain', in a Christ-like agony. But the allusion includes, in addition to the Christian concept of religious self-sacrifice, a reference to the forms of self-imposed torture practised by pilgrims to the Hindu shrine at Kataragama. Suvimalee Karunaratna's irony is many-sided: for the bus is not *meant* to be comfortable, it is fulfilling its religious function in inflicting pain and torture on the pilgrims it carries. Hence the aptness, at once comic (because she is the last person to suffer 'silently') and cosmic, of the old woman's prayer.

The conflict between individuality and the conventions imposed upon it by society and religion is clear in Suvimalee Karunaratna's fiction. Miss Vitharne resents her mother's apparent desire to take the active role of fate in her life, Nandini resigns herself to her elders' insensitive 'arrangements' for her future, the pilgrims defiantly follow individual paths of selfishness to the neglect of their religious intentions. One man has to be actually reminded by the conductor: "Have a little compassion for others. It will please the gods."

But sympathy remains, sympathy and a saving sense of humour. The talkative old woman makes people laugh at her, but they help her to achieve some comfort. The pilgrims show hostility to those standing at the halting places and queueing to come in, yet their anger is not vented on them but on officialdom as represented by the conductor in his uniform. And even he is finally accepted, and the bus allowed to proceed on its bumpy and uncomfortable way to its certain and holy destination: a comic but nevertheless apt symbol of a society that, bedevilled by the problems of over-population and economics, contrives to hold on to its religious faith, its fatalism, and its sense of humour.

In an interesting review of Suvimalee Karunaratna's first novel, *Lake Marsh* (1993), Lakshmi de Silva responds enthusiastically to its satiric viewpoint, identifying in it a new departure in the author's fiction. Its principal theme, 'the morass of degeneration slowly enveloping the country', is symbolised by the gradual degradation of the magnificent lake that was built in the centre of his royal city by the last ruler of the Kingdom of Kandy. It is a characteristically moral and even didactic theme which is developed, however, with a comic tone and 'a delightful ironic poise'. Kandy, as de Silva notes, is the appropriate location for the novel, not only because of the presence there of a 'real and indubitable lake', but

> deep in the interior of the island, shielded far longer than the other [Sri Lankan] cities from the assaults of externally imposed change, it appropriately embodies the idea of an eroded culture.

Early in the novel, an elephant nearly drowns in mud, while an enterprising motor-boat owner 'had been doing brisk business taking relays of local and foreign viewers to the middle of the lake for a better view of the drowning beast and the rescue operations'. At the novel's end, a yellow de-silting machine bobs gently in a corner of the lake, 'looking somewhat forlorn and quite unequal to the task for which it is meant'.

The device by which the shrinking and clogged lake becomes a symbol of the gradual deterioration of Sri Lanka's national and cultural life is quite clear in the quoted passages, and foreshadowed on page one:

> "It won't be long before the whole lake becomes a marsh," Jagath said grimly ... "Pretty soon there will be only a drain."

Noting that Sri Lankan writers, specialising in the short story, are generally 'excellent short-distance runners', Lakshmi de Silva welcomes the appearance at last of a firmly structured longer work, in which satire and symbolism are 'integrated within a strictly realistic framework', with no effect of contrivance. The characters, she comments,

> are numerous, consistent, familiar as far as type goes but not so typical as to become shadowy or mere caricature. The canvas is blessedly rich in figures and the interplay of clearcut and distinct personalities. Particularly commendable is the author's rendering of differentiated sociolects ... Suvimalee Karunaratna evidently has a keen and receptive ear.

By drawing her characters from two generations of a single family, Karunaratna indicates that cultural erosion is a gradual process. Podi, a single lady of the older generation, is rapturous about the art and music of the West and, anxious to retain the aesthetic joys that give her life a meaning, involves her talented but idle nephew Jagath in writing a film-script to promote the wonders of 'Mayu', a strain of lentil developed by the 'Demeter Food Aid Agency' that will solve all Sri Lanka's economic problems. No one really believes in Mayu, but there is a lot of money to be made out of it by the Westerners involved in developing the product, and numerous perks to be enjoyed by all concerned. The growing cynicism of society as Karunaratna depicts it here is pin-pointed, de Silva says, in the author's presentation of the many 'Third Worldlings [who know or suspect that they] are being taken for a ride, but accept it for the sake of the air-conditioned limousine'.

Lake Marsh, Lakshmi de Silva finds to be 'sometimes hilarious and consistently entertaining'. This is perfectly true, for Suvimalee Karunaratna deftly satirises the local film-making industry and such figures of contemporary Sri Lanka as a Sinhalese village mother who, elevated to high status by her daughter's marriage to a 'white gentleman', sticks her hand out stiffly to be shaken' while greeting guests at the wedding; and the spoiled rich boy (Jagath) who wastes his time and intelligence idling in the company of 'Tilak and crowd' (drones like himself) when he is not dabbling in artistic enterprises for the sake of 'the experience', and shies away from anything that actually resembles work:

> It was past noon when Jagath stumbled out of bed and came drowsily into the pantry looking for iced water to drink. He was bare bodied and in a sarong. His eyes were red, his face unshaven and hair all tousled. Podi had never seen him in quite such a state before.

"That was quite a party!" he croaked, sitting at a table.

"You can say that again!" Podi said grimly. "Anyway, all in aid of a good cause. I'm glad you've decided to go to America and work with Mark and Rogers for a while."
Jagath sat down at the pantry table and rubbed his eyes. "Oh, that! That was just a little idea that occurred to me when I was there on the farm," he said. 'But I'm not quite sure film making is in my line, really. I'm not sure I like the medium."

Podi looked at Jagath, wondering if she had heard him correctly.

"It being Sunday, Tilak and crowd are coming over in a little while," he continued. 'They said they'd pick me up on their way up to Nuwara Eliya for the weekend."

Podi did not answer.

"I might go to the States sometime and take a rain cheque on Mark's invitation," Jagath said, noting Podi's silent disapproval. "But I'm not at all sure film making is really my line. I'll think about it when I return from my holiday in Nuwara Eliya." He yawned and stretched himself lazily with the contentment of a well fed cat. "God knows I've earned my little holiday."

One of the most interesting strands in this novel focuses on upper-class Podi's romantic expectations that her paying guest Professor Wimbrel, a cultured British academic, is about to propose marriage to her. With an elaborate dinner menu and equally elaborate floral arrangements of roses and anthuriums she creates an appropriate setting for this event, only to be shocked and confounded by his shy confession that he is in love, not with Podi herself but with her domestic aide:

"I am now more sure than ever about my feelings." He came up to her. "You see, I went off to Colombo and distanced myself ... quite deliberately in order that I may be able to think things

over. I now know the emotion I felt was not an infatuation. I have a very important confession to make." He put both hands on her shoulders. "I hope you will have no objections."

"Yes?" Podi urged him on.

"Could I ... may I have your permission ... I think I've fallen in love ..."

Podi felt weak and swayed a little.

"Yes, isn't it odd how things happen to one all of a sudden? I would like to marry Nandita ... with your permission, of course."

Podi stared at him in amazement. "W-whom?"

"Nandita. I wish to marry her."

"Oh!" she managed to exclaim.

"I do really mean it. Don't ask me why ... or how ... I just know she is the right person for me. Do you think she will have me?"

Podi continued to stare at Professor Wimbrel aghast. Had this man - this staid, scholarly British professor - taken leave of his senses?

"But Nandita is my servant girl!" she blurted. She hardly knew she was saying it until it had been said.

This effective social comedy becomes something very different when Podi's disappointment at Professor Wimbrel's revelation turns to irritation with Nandita, this 'subtle, scheming ... silly, shallow, village girl' in whom Professor Wimbrel has apparently seen the authentic Sri Lankan simplicity that he calls 'the genuine article', but in whose behaviour to herself Podi now detects mutinous insolence. Hitherto submerged class feeling rises

unexpectedly to the surface in this scene, surprising Podi herself, and bringing an unexpected depth to a novel that had up to this point appeared to float along on a surface of easy satire:

> Podi noticed [Nandita] littering the kitchen floor with vegetable ends and onion skins, a thing which Podi detested and when she told the girl to sweep it all away, she retorted that she'd do it later, after cooking.
> "You do it now, not later!" Podi lost her temper. But Nandita pretended not to hear her. Podi felt a sudden hiatus in her thinking process and an uncontrollable rage took hold of her. She found herself grabbng hold of the girl by the shoulders and shaking her violently. What frightened Podi later was that for a second or two she could not leave off shaking the girl as though she were glued to an electric appliance that had short-circuited and which she had held accidentally. What frightened her even more was the unmistakeable emotion of wicked pleasure she derived from the act of shaking the girl ...

The characterisation of Jagath's cultured maiden aunt enters a new dimension altogether as, 'shocked and shamed' by the violence hidden within her own nature and submerged in her quiet, 'civilized' way of life, Podi confronts its implications. With admirable honesty, she recognises that her treatment of her servant girl has had in it an 'uncontrolled frenzy of delight' mixed with ' murderous intent'. She is terrified by her own loss of self-control, and realises very clearly

> how close she had been to committing an even more terrifying act of violence.

This is a scene the reader will recall much later in the novel when, in the race rioting of 1983, Podi is the helpless witness of the deliberate burning and stoning to death of two Tamils by a mob of Sinhalese people:

> Everyone was watching in silence two human beings being chased and exterminated like vermin.

As Podi feels 'her legs begin to tremble, and a wave of nausea [sweeping] up to her throat', she makes the connection between her own brutality to Nandita and the brutality of the Sinhalese mob to their defenceless Tamil fellow-citizens:

> The curfew sobered passions and on the first night after the outbreak of violence, only the barking of stray dogs was heard, thrown from hill to hill, across the waters of the lake and with it the sound like that of detonators exploding which, later it was learnt, was a fireworks shop going up in flames. In the silence of the night, the weird noise of combustion and explosion seemed an unreal echo from a not so distant episode in the past.

Podi finds some relief in offering refuge in her home to the Ponniah family, Tamil friends of Jagath's, when they are confronted and their house set aflame by a murderous mob. But, although order is restored, the curfew 'sobers' passions, and the Ponniahs depart to the comparative safety of Vavuniya, allowing *Lake Marsh* to return to its even-handed and essentially gentle satirisation of such things as American 'expertise' and Sri Lankan prevarication, ominous notes have been struck that convey Suvimalee Karunaratna's unease at the gradual deterioration of Sri Lanka's national and cultural life.

In her second novel, *The Vine* (2001), comedy is rarely seen, although the interest in, and unobtrusive use of, symbolism that Suvimalee Karunaratna had first manifested in such stories as 'The Golden Oriole' and 'The Bus Ride' and also in *Lake Marsh* can be recognized in the changing depictions of a vine that recur throughout the book. In her review of 'this powerful and thought-provoking novel', Lakshmi de Silva notes the symbolism that continues to function side by side with 'full-flavoured realism' in this writer's fiction, but detects a significant change in atmosphere and tone:

> It is as though the author's engagement with the pace and pressure of the present period has lent a depth and force to the writing which produces a corresponding involvement on the part of the reader.

The selection of Lata as the protagonist's name, de Silva regards as 'a brilliant choice', appropriate to the theme (since it reflects the traditional poetic allusion to woman 'as *lata, liya*, a vine dependent on male support) and equally so to the character's provincial origins. Lata's tempter is given the name of Kam. This is a contraction of 'Kama', the Hindu concept of sexual love, but its bearer also functions, since the name is associated with Mara, the tempter of the Buddha, as a symbol of values that 'Lata' must conquer and outgrow in order to attain fulfilment of her destiny.

Such symbolism is not overdone, nor is it laboured. Lata is entirely convincing as a character, 'vulnerable yet resourceful', as 'tough and resilient' as the stalks of the vine for which she is named.

Though not so well known as a poet, Suvimalee Karunaratna's identification with Buddhism and Buddhist values is clear in a poem which, though brief, indicates the nature of the thread that binds her poetry to her prose, and both to her individual approach to life:

Ode to Pali Grammar

Bind me, chaste rules,
expurgate
the clutter in the brain; sure tools
to grapple with, to extricate
the word. To that let me hold fast,
not wildly milling now, nor shifting
quick-sand under foot:
let me grasp this sure, safe raft.

Or better still to conjugate,
dissect
the subject, object, cause, effect ...
emancipate the self
from march of 'self'.

Her erudition and her profound knowledge of Sri Lankan tradition (both of which reveal themselves occasionally to public view when she responds to contemporary debates in local newspapers on subjects that relate to Buddhist affairs) serve Suvimalee Karunaratna well in the writing of this unusual novel and will continue, one hopes, to inform her future writing.

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Sita Kulatunga

Sita (Wickramarachchi) Kulatunga was born in 1937, and worked as a teacher of English and Sinhala, and additionally as an editor, at the Open University from 1987 to 1997. She writes in both English and Sinhala, having been encouraged in her creative efforts by her late father (a village Headman who was, his daughter recalls, 'a great story-teller'), by Professor Ediriwira Sarachchandra, and by Dr Lakshmi de Silva of the University of Kelaniya.

Having attended a local village school from 1942 to 1947, Sita Kulatunga studied at Piliyandala Central College from 1948 to 1951, and next at Visakha Vidyalaya, Colombo, from 1952 to 1957, where her creative talents were recognised and encouraged by three of her teachers: Daisy Karawita, Gwen Dias Abeyesinghe, and Marian Abeysuriya. While at Visakha, she won prizes for Sinhala in Forms III, IV and V, and crowned her school career with an award for the best performance in Sinhala at the HSC examination.

At the University of Ceylon in Peradeniya, she had the good fortune to encounter Ediriwira Sarachchandra, one of the great creative spirits of our time, and to obtain his advice on her writing. Following her graduation from the University of Ceylon with a BA degree in 1960, Sita Kulatunga went to Australia on a Colombo Plan scholarship, returning in 1971 with a Diploma from the University of Sydney in the Teaching of English as a Foreign Language. She followed this with a Diploma in Education from Sri Lanka's Open University in 1978, which she put to good use by spending several years teaching English in Nigeria. An interest in Distance Education took her on a Visiting Fellowship to Vancouver in the autumn of 1989, which she followed with a course in Training & Writing for Distance Education in Thailand in 1992.

She is a member of the English Writers Co-operative, and has functioned as Secretary of the Sri Lanka Association for Commonwealth Literature & Language Studies (SLACLALS)

Besides her work in English (listed below under **Publications**) she is the author of several collections of Sinhala short stories, and of the Sinhala textbook *Sinhala Apata Ingrisi (English for Us)*. She has translated Kamala Markandaya's novel *Some Inner Fury* and Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights* into Sinhala, besides other, non-fictional, works.

Sita Kulatunga's novel *Dari, The Third Wife*, was awarded the Sri Lanka Arts Council Prize for English writing in 1988, and shortlisted for the Gratiaen Award. The fruit of the author's teaching experience in Nigeria, this novel is an ornament to Sri Lankan English letters: a quite remarkable *tour de force*, it reveals through a series of intimate letters to a school-friend the inmost thoughts of a young Nigerian woman who, just when she is beginning to think of higher education and a career, is given in marriage to a prosperous businessman as his third wife. 'Dari' is a thoughtful, high-minded. and passionate young woman who must learn to keep her deepest feelings and aspirations under control in the enforced idleness of her husband's house. Her relationships with her 'mates' (the two senior wives of Alhaji Bello) and their children, her relationship with her husband, and her strategies for survival in the claustrophobic atmosphere of her new existence are areas explored in convincing detail and with the utmost naturalness by Sita Kulatunga:

> The heat saps your strength and even moving from one place to another seems an exhausting and heavy task. The throat is parched all the time and when you drink something sweat pours out of every pore of your body. Mere trifles can irritate you, and throw you out of equilibrium. The pitifully small square of a window placed high on the back wall of my bedroom (it is so high that I have to climb on to a stool to reach it) is the only opening to the outside world ... I can't understand why they placed this apology of a window so high up on the wall. To me, it is a symbol of my woman's plight, the semi-imprisonment. Whatever I see of the world is through that aperture by getting

on to a stool which might totter at any moment. For the rest of my life, would I be looking at the world through such little openings, limited and circumscribed by the restrictions placed on my freedom? When I am in certain moods and pull at my fetters, the urge to break free and get out into the open world becomes almost a physical pain. Bello is not a bad husband, not by any means. But you cannot get round the fact that I am a married Hausa woman. Have you heard the Hausa saying 'komi dadin talal saki ya fi shi' (However long the rope, it is not like being free and unfettered). How I envy you. The opportunities you have had to go places, see things and now to study further, you should truly appreciate.

Often I try to imagine how the sea must look, people bathing in the sea and of women scantily clad. Do you know that according to Islam even a woman's voice is a private part? Her voice should not be heard by other men.

Sita Kulatunga's fine story 'The High Chair', which won first prize in the Short Story competition conducted in 1977 by the English Association of Sri Lanka, and was also awarded the SAARC Women's Prize in 1999, has been translated into German by O. Froehling and into Japanese by Tadashi Noguchi. It focuses on a Sinhalese village girl who has been able, despite her origins, to enter university. Prema is the daughter of a laundryman. A highly intelligent young woman, she is humiliatingly aware that she belongs to a caste that is considered inferior to most others according to the rules laid down by the hierarchical social system which still flourishes in 'democratic' Sri Lanka. At home on her first University vacation, she has offered to deputise for her sick mother, wash a bundle of soiled clothes and household linen at the stream, and, that task completed, deliver a bundle of freshly washed and ironed laundry to the home of the Chairman of the Village Council.

Prema picked up another dirty bedsheet. Nausea and disgust welled up in her. The sun seemed to beat down with greater ruthlessness, making her dizzy head swim with exhaustion. Every pore of her body seemed to burn and break into sweat.

She sat down for a moment, trying to gulp down the disgust. She might as well have stayed at home and let her father do the whole thing. Prema felt that she led a dual life; just at this moment the undergraduate was alien, the campus, the halls of residence, walks, passages, libraries and even the very waters of those streams at Peradeniya were a far cry from the reality of the dhoby bundle.

The 'sinewy, work-roughened hands' of Prema's mother, the 'chafed nails' of her father, above all 'that inescapable air of servility of which the [dhoby's] bent back was a symbol' - these make up 'the reality of the dhoby bundle', which Sita Kulatunga, with great sensitivity, sets against the aesthetic beauty and intellectual freedom of an elite University: the 'campus, the halls of residence, walks, passages, libraries and even the very waters of those streams at Peradeniya' that make up the other side of Prema's 'dual life'.

Dreading an encounter with the Chairman's son Thilak Jayasuriya, her classmate at Peradeniya (though not in their village, where he had attended a superior school), Prema enters his home through the back door. Lucihami, a servant of the household 'who knew who was who', provides Prema with a small school-room chair to sit on when she calls with her bundle of laundry: for a dhoby's daughter, the high-backed chairs of the dining room at the Chairman's residence - chairs on which she and her kind are not permitted to sit - are out of bounds, representing a way of life that her birth has placed beyond her reach:

Prema stood still, waiting, debating, wondering 'do I sit or don't I?' When she heard footsteps just beyond the curtained door, she stood, rooted to the ground praying it wouldn't be Thilak. Her heart beat against her ribs as if it were trying to break loose and break through. It was Thilak, just as my cursed and foul luck would have it, she thought in a panic. In that one brief moment which was an eternity, it was as if years of tainted servitude, low stools, cracked cups kept apart for the visiting dhoby, were one and all crowding on her, pressing on her brain, smothering her ...

> "Prema". Thilak seemed to breathe out his suppressed surprise in those syllables. Ignoring the bundle on the table he said, "Take a seat, here, do sit down," as if he too was pleading. He drew out a tall high-backed chair from near the table. Prema came up to the table. She stood holding the high back of the chair, running her fingers over its carved edge.

Thilak's spontaneous greeting to Prema suggests that to him, at least, the education they have in common transcends the barrier of caste. The pity of her situation is that she is so conditioned by her upbringing that she is uncertain how to respond.

And so the tale ends, the relationship between the two young people unresolved (in my view, although Dr Lakshmi de Silva, commenting on this story, holds the opinion that Prema's 'trauma ends in triumph'). D. C. R. A. Goonetilleke, who included this touching story in the collection *Modern Sri Lankan Stories* (Satguru Publications, Delhi 1986) observes, regarding the situation of its interesting heroine, that Prema's

> self-consciousness is tempered by a sneaking sense, as in a Jane Austen heroine, that she is a heroine only to herself.

The comparison which comes to my mind is not with Austen, but with a writer closer to Sita Kulatunga's time and region, Arundati Roy, whose magnificent first novel *The God of Small Things* confronts the 'reality' of the burden borne by India's 'untouchables' with comparable passion and subtlety.

Lakshmi de Silva, reviewing *The High Chair and Cancer Days*, a collection of eighteen short stories and a frank and moving memoir of the author's battle with cancer, published in one volume, notes that the book reflects Kulatunga's development as a writer, even as it mirrors changes in Sri Lankan life over the last thirty years, and the impact upon it of war, revolution, the open economy, migration and globalisation. Contrasting 'The High Chair' with another story, 'Wandering Cattle', written twenty years later, she observes that 'progress results in pressure':

Dorothy, the stenographer who seeks a land flowing with milk and honey in a migrant marriage, gazes through moments of poignant pathos at a vision of fulfilment. Both stories reveal the writer's characteristic strength in their penetration and portrayal of psychological and social realities.

An aspect of Sita Kulatunga's short stories and such a poem as 'A Gode Person' that merits special attention is what Siromi de Saram and Ryhana Raheem defined in 1979 as 'the search for an idiom and vocabulary that is true to our particular use of English'. Her characters, and even her narrators, express themselves in her Sri Lankan stories in ways immediately recognisable as local, natural, and authentic, devoid of either strain or satire.

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Chandani Lokuge

Chandani Kumari (Walaliyadde) Lokuge, fiction-writer, literary critic and academic, was born in Colombo, and educated at St Bridget's Convent, Colombo. The daughter of two educationists (her mother was a High School Principal, and her father the Director of the Department of Education, Sri Lanka) she obtained the degrees of BA in 1976 and MA (Research) in 1986 from the University of Sri Lanka (Kelaniya and Peradeniya). Proceeding to further postgraduate study at the Flinders University of South Australia, she received a doctoral degree (PhD) in 1994 for a thesis on Indian women writers of English fiction in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Chandani Lokuge's research for her Master's degree had focused on Sri Lankan English-language fiction, and the portrayal of contemporary society by three writers in particular: Leonard Woolf, James Goonawardena and Punyakante Wijenaike. At Flinders she contributed actively to the work of CRNLE (the Centre for Research in the New Literatures in English, directed by Dr S. C. Harrex), taught at the University in 1994, and worked for some years with CRNLE before joining the English teaching staff of Monash University in Melbourne. Her choice of profession was no doubt influenced by the example and experience of her parents, both of whom are educationists of high standing in Sri Lanka. Manel Abhayaratne, an aunt, encouraged her as a creative writer.

Her first major creative publication, a collection of eleven short stories, was published in Australia in 1992. *Moth and Other Stories* drew appreciative praise from Australian critics and reviewers, among them Dr S. C. Harrex:

> It provides a remarkably comprehensive insight - mostly through first-person narration - into the subjective lives of Sri Lankan women and men, and thereby into a society, under political stress. The double interactive trauma resulting from

civil war, and the dehumanising war games played within family and sexual circles, gives these stories a stark depth of feeling, a disconcerting justification of despair.

Dr Brian Matthews of the Australia Council found the book

> a deceptive and deeply moving blend of the calm and the violent, the sensuous and the sinister. Ordinary and every-day events become charged with the subtle tensions of human stress or the larger and unmanageable claims and counter claims of nationality and terrorism ... Lovers are sundered, children parted from parents, families broken up, always against a background of the larger tragedy - a whole nation gradually tearing itself apart.

Stories from this collection have appeared in several anthologies since 1992. In an interview with the Sri Lankan journalist Raushen Akbar in May 1993, Chandani Lokuge explained that her main concern in these stories had been to explore

> the problems of migrants. That is why [the] collection is titled *Moth and Other Stories* since, just like moths, people are attracted to experiencing life in foreign lands and then are destroyed by the resulting flames of isolation and alienation.

Given the tragic themes relating to immigration that pervade her short fiction, it is not surprising that Chandani Lokuge's first novel developed them further and at length. *If the Moon Smiled* was shortlisted for the NSW Premier's Award in 2001, in the Community Relations category. The story traces the life-experience of a young Sinhalese woman, member of a Buddhist family, who is educated and married in the manner 'traditional' in conservative families, and emigrates to Australia with her husband and their two young children. In the process it illuminates a dark area of Sri Lankan life, the ignorance in which 'modest' young women are reared and rendered unfit to cope, not only with the demands of marriage, but with the crises of modern life.

Among the articles that flood Sri Lanka's newspapers in the 'marriage month' of June, advertising the services of an ever-growing army of sari-designers, hair-dressers, florists, jewellers and caterers, without whose assistance no wedding can apparently take place in the island, the reader might occasionally discover a half- or quarter-page that cautions bridegrooms and their families against relying too heavily on the time-honoured 'Virginity Test': 'Do not condemn or cast aspersions on the bride if she does not bleed at first coitus,' warns Zanita Careem, in 'Honeymoon Blues', *Sunday Island*, 11 June 2000; 'Roughly 25% of virgins will not bleed due to variations in the structure of the hymen, and these young women have no scientific way of proving (if such proof is required) that they have not had pre-marital sex'.

As Lokuge's novel indicates, such sensible advice is too often ignored. Medical statistics show that the old-fashioned belief that bloodstains on the sheets of the marriage bed are proofs incontrovertible of a bride's virginity at the time of her wedding continues to cripple the emotional lives of many thousands of conventionally brought up young people who marry every year in Sri Lanka.

Manthri, the novel's narrator, is in many ways typical of a woman of her race, class and age. A lively and playful little girl who has always been the darling of her parents' household, her happiest memories are captured by her creator in a richly imaginative evocation of a Sri Lankan rural childhood. Recalled in Australia, Sri Lanka glows on the page as Manthri moves in memory and dream through sunny landscapes filled with lush vegetation and brimming with birdsong. The novel's opening paragraphs set both mood and method, as Manthri contemplates a wattle in full bloom, and glimpses through its golden haze a memory of herself as a child laying frangipani blossoms at the feet of the image of the Buddha in her familiar village temple. The rituals of worship and fasting, the practice of meditation, the hearing of sermons, the symbolic offering of flowers, the chanting of Pali verses, the making of festive lights for Vesak celebrations, all of which are part of Buddhist life in Sri Lanka, are lovingly detailed. So are a young child's perceptions of the joyous and loving atmosphere of her home.

But ominous notes are struck which remind Manthri (and the reader) that growing up will place limitations on her freedom. An only child, she is taught early to feel her parents' lack of a son as 'a sadness', a loss to her beloved father for which 'nothing and no one can compensate' (Not even, Lokuge implies, the fact that he happens to have a lively and talented daughter.) "Girls should not be climbing trees," the energetic little girl is informed by a servant maid who sees Manthri hanging upside down from a tree branch. As she enters adolescence, experiencing but not really understanding the changes taking place in her body and mind, Manthri is aware of romantic longings for the company of a personable young male servant who has been a playmate throughout her childhood. Mentioning her feelings to no one (she realizes without being told that such subjects are taboo), guiltily ashamed of them as being both morally and socially improper, she strives to do her duty by assuming the various personae that tradition seems to have marked out for her, attempting to become the pious young woman her father would like her to be, the 'innocent' her mother is expected to present to the world.

Since ignorance of the workings of her own body is an integral part of that 'innocence', the onset of puberty takes Manthri by surprise. She has not been prepared for it, and she discovers sadly that the freedom she has enjoyed as a child has come abruptly to an end. Confined to the exclusive company of women, 'life is suddenly private, four walls and semi-darkness'. Windows will always be 'half-closed' from now on.

When Manthri makes the traditional arranged marriage to Mahendra, it is evident that education, which might have opened some doors to understanding herself and the real world, has done little for her. It has consisted of a few years spent in a 'detested' boarding school for girls in the city, in order to 'improve her English and learn social graces ... before [her parents] give her in marriage'. Books, though she has found some enjoyment in reading English novels, have not been able to compensate for the loss of her home and her beloved playmate.

> School. A heap of books. Bells. English tuition, especially for her, only for her ... The evenings are long, so very long. And then she is back among the changeless trees lining the banks of the lapping river. A kokila sings in the emerald leaves, and she turns to find his face. His voice seeps into her trembling soul. Her lips half part. She tastes the sweetness of his song and traps it in. She wades into the sunset where the nectar-filled lotuses fold up their petals for the night. (pp. 21-3)

Her memories are becoming increasingly confused with powerful imaginings of love, the implications of which confusion Manthri does not begin to understand.

It is hardly surprising, given this background, that Manthri is as little prepared for marriage as she was for puberty. Putting fictional flesh on the statistics of the 'Virginity Test', Lokuge describes a wedding night that is the stuff of nightmare for both bride and groom:

> They turn to dress. [Mahendra] switches on the light. His eyes wander around the room, seeking solace. The crushed white sheet bears no stain. He focuses on the cold centre of reason. "You have been with another man?" he demands incredulously. "No," [Manthri] cries, but he flings the denial aside. "She comes from a good conventional family," his mother had persuaded him. "A well-brought-up girl. She will be a pure, innocent wife." His lips mockingly droop ... She falls at his feet and pleads her innocence. He withdraws. She is not worthy of his touch. (pp. 35-6)

Mahendra has not been brought up to question the values of his tradition-bound family. Due to his ignorance of sexual realities, he will always regard his wife's 'failure' to pass the virginity test as evidence of her moral weakness, guilt and deceit. His naive bride finds her protestations of innocence disbelieved. Sinc she has not been trained to differentiate clearly in her own mind between the romantic longings she has experienced in adolescence and the pre-marital sex she has not experienced, but of which her husband accuses her, agonising feelings of shame and guilt, plentifully reinforced by Mahendra's cold suspicion and her mother-in-law's reproaches, will saturate all Manthri's life-experiences thereafter with their chilly ambiguity.

The family's move to Australia strips this gentle young woman of her support system, the loving household in which she has grown up, the religious rituals that had shaped her family's days, the landscapes that had nourished an imagination which invested all her surroundings with a romantic glow. Manthri's 'failure' to respond adequately to the possibilities offered her for personal growth by the birth of her children and the family's emigration to a new country is traced by Lokuge to the 'nightmare' of her first sexual experience. Subject to social pressures and limitations of a different kind, Mahendra is capable neither of love nor encouragement. Disappointed in his marriage, he turns away from Manthri, and focuses on his children's success.

He is determined that his son Devake must qualify as a doctor, and equally determined that his daughter Nelum must make a wealthy marriage to a suitable son-in-law chosen by him. Unfortunately, these ambitions are defeated. Devake's interests are in music and astronomy, not medicine, while the intellectual brilliance Mahendra had hoped for in his son emerges unexpectedly and frustratingly in the daughter he regards only as marriage material. Attempting to cope with the strains and stresses that accompany these developments in her family, crippled by unresolved convictions of her own 'guilt' and inadequacy, Manthri 'fails' again and again.

In the course of her exploration of family relationships, Chandani Lokuge brings to her novel a searching and candid observation of Sri Lankan immigrant life in Australia that is comparable with Chitra Fernando's treatment of the same subject in her short story, "The Chasm". New migrants from the homeland are invited home by Mahendra, not to help them feel at ease in a new society but to impress them with the affluence and sophistication of their host. As Manthri's sense of isolation and inadequacy deepens, Lokuge captures the inward agonies of this outwardly happy and successful family when the children, two gifted young people, fall short of their father's ambitions for them. The Sri Lankan community of Adelaide, which shares Mahendra's outlook on life, is secretly glad to see his hopes come to nothing. Lokuge registers its social behaviour as vicious and competitive, as it cruelly reinforces Mahendra's own contemptuous view of his son as a worthless drop-out and his daughter as an ungrateful rebel. The

result, predictably, is unremitting misery for Manthri, whose incompetence Mahendra blames for their children's `failure', and who finds herself becoming `a blank space even in [her] children's lives':

> Mum, tell Mum. What does [Devake] think Mum can do?
> Couldn't he see that only Dad said yes or no in this house,
> making them crawl up the nightmare of his ambitions? (p. 108)

Alienated from her husband and her children, Manthri retreats from the arid realities of her family life into reading, memory and dream. Eventually, she attempts a physical departure - 'I'm going home'. But it doesn't work. Her hopes that she will find solace in her family home and self-discipline in the temple end in yet another failure, as her devotion to her Australian children and her compassion for them pulls her back to Adelaide, to share in their misery.

Original in conception, subtly ambiguous in its exploration of Manthri's emotional vulnerability, Chandani Lokuge's novel is heart breakingly true to the inner lives of many Sri Lankan women 'at home' and abroad. Disabled by the revered 'traditions' and customs which have controlled women for generations by keeping them ignorant, Manthri's outlook on life becomes increasingly dark and desperate. She asks no questions of the society which has brought her up and betrayed her, since all her queries are directed towards her own shortcomings and seeming 'failures'. This haunting and memorable novel, while in many ways a lyrical celebration of the loveliness of a remembered Sri Lanka, asks the essential questions on behalf of Manthri and her contemporaries.

At another level, that of the diaspora novel, *If the Moon Smiled* satisfies the reader that fiction written by expatriates such as Chandani Lokuge, who bring their memory and intelligence to bear on the realities of life in Sri Lanka, can make a valuable contribution to the development of contemporary Sri Lankan literature.

While working on a second novel (financed by a Writer's Grant obtained in 2001 from the Literature Board of the Australia Council), Dr Lokuge has been editing for Oxford University Press a series of

autobiographies and fiction written in English by Indian women between 1894 and 1956. When they were first published, these books had received scant critical attention and soon went out of print. They continued to be neglected through the twentieth century, and are now being re-issued under Dr Lokuge's editorship in the Oxford University Press *Classic Reissue* series.

Three books published in this series are Krupabai Satthianadhan's *Saguna*, the first autobiographical novel written by an Indian woman in English, and *Kamala: The Story of a Hindu Life* (1998); and Cornelia Sorabji's memoir, *India Calling: The Memories of Cornelia Sorabji, India's First Woman Barrister* (November 2001). *Love and Life Behind the Purdah* will be the next in the series, followed by three other books. Dr Lokuge's introductions provide contextual and textual analyses in the light of postcolonial women's theory and of British feminist theory of the same period.

In essays, conference papers and reviews written during her academic career, Chandani Lokuge has frequently made the writing of women authors her subject. Notable among these critical ventures are considerations and explorations of the writing of Chitra Fernando and Yasmine Gooneratne in particular, and of modern Sri Lankan fiction writers in general.

Chandani Lokuge is presently a Lecturer in the English Department of Monash University in Victoria, Australia. She has been guest-editor of Flinders University's *CRNLE Reviews Journal* which, in the first issue of its second series (No. 1, 2000) took as its theme 'Indian and Sri Lankan Diaspora Writing'. She has also co-edited *Piece of the Continent, Part of the Main: CRNLE 1977 -1997* (CRNLE, Adelaide: 1998).

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Rosalind Mendis

Born in 1903 in Hadeniya, a village fifteen miles from Kandy, Rosalind Mendis was the first Sri Lankan woman to publish fiction in English. She married at the age of nineteen, and after the birth of her children, thought briefly of taking up legal studies in England, possibly influenced, writes Eva Ranaweera, who interviewed the 88-year-old novelist in 1991, by the example of her brother who was studying law in Britain at that time.

Since the mere suggestion of such a course of action caused a furore in the family, she had to abandon the idea, diverting any intellectual aspirations she might have cherished to the enjoyment of books. Her favourite reading was 'Conan Doyle's three volumes on Spiritualism'. Macaulay's *Essays* helped her to perfect her English.

Justly described by D.C.R.A. Goonetilleke as 'an unpretentious writer with a prose style that is appealing in its simplicity and directness', Rosalind Mendis had her first novel, *The Tragedy of a Mystery: A Ceylon Story*, published in London. The date of publication is uncertain, but according to Tissa Jayatilaka (2000, p. 2), and the author's statement in 1991, the most probable year of its publication is 1928. The conditions prevailing with regard to 'colonial' writing in the 1920s may be gauged to some extent from the author's revelation to Eva Ranaweera in 1991: although the novel 'won acclaim as a submission made by a young Ceylonese woman writer', she received no monetary payment from her publisher, Arthur A. Stockwell Ltd., only receiving '500 copies as payment in kind'. Locally, i.e., in Sri Lanka, 'the book ... was a sell out'.

A second novel, *Nandhimitra: A Story of Ancient Ceylon*, was written in the midst of the patriotic fervour of the early 1950s that followed Independence in 1948. It was published in Colombo by M. D. Gunasena in

1952; and a collection of short fiction, *My Son Lia and Other Short Stories*, followed in 1975.

In his introduction to the anthology *Modern Sri Lankan Stories* (Sri Satguru Publications, Delhi 1986), D.C.R.A. Goonetilleke judged 'My Son Lia' to be the best of Rosalind Mendis's stories, and observed that it

> captures the [Sri Lankan] countryside in its totality as it impinges on urban life, with the more sensitive villagers aware of class division and class difference within and outside their society. When Lia is excited by momentary contact with the daughter of the richest man in that part of the country, he is keenly conscious of the social chasm between them and says of her: "She had the sort of patronizing kindness that thinks we are part and parcel of their surroundings, existing for their pleasure".
>
> [Lia] is a village craftsman in love with his vocation; and in the conflict between love of art and human love, it is the former that proves to be the stronger of the two. The story becomes markedly symbolic when 'the pain and frustrations of his love found expression in the work of art he had fashioned' in the rich man's garden. The writer emphasises the spirit of the villagers - that sturdy independence which has been traditionally associated with them. When Lia decides to leave the village at the end of the story he is, in effect, resisting a social system that tries to oppress and humiliate the rural folk.

Of Rosalind Mendis's story 'The Man', Goonetilleke remarks that it celebrates a happy marital relationship, creating an interesting story out of perfectly ordinary situations: 'the momentary pains and misunderstandings amidst a steady contentment, leading to a climax, [and] the anxieties, relief and happiness attending the birth of [a couple's] first child'. He observes of her short fiction in general that it possesses

a fine naturalness as the flow of the experience seems to shape the form. Behind it is the writer's own humane and broad outlook on life; it has enabled her to deal in a balanced way with experiences that are important.

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Flower Munasinghe

Flower (Wickremesinghe) Munasinghe was born in Colombo, and educated at C. M.S. Ladies' College, Colombo. A talented musician, she gave regular piano recitals over Radio Ceylon during the 1950s. She has travelled widely in Europe and the USA, and resided in Washington for fifteen years.

Flower Munasinghe is the author of two collections of short stories, all of which were written 'at a leisurely time of life between [the ages of] fifty and sixty, when my children were grown up'. Reviewing *The Spinning Wheel and Other Stories,* Malini Balasingam described the book as 'a bouquet of miniature literary gems':

> At first, the early stories in the collection appear to be a little formal, and garbed in genteel prose, but as [the reader] becomes accustomed to the cameo pictures of true to life incidents, selected from a lifetime of action and interaction with people at home and abroad, it is easy to relax and walk [hand] in hand with the author.

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Ranjini Obeyesekere

Born in Colombo in 1933, Ranjani Dayawathie (Ellepola) Obeyesekere, eldest daughter of D. B. Ellepola and Gladys Panabokke Ellepola, was educated at CMS Ladies' College in Colombo and at the University of Ceylon in Peradeniya, where she took a BA Honours degree in English, moving later to a Ph.D from the University of Washington, Seattle.

She has published two collections of short stories (*A Grief Ago*, Colombo 1992, and *A Treasure in the Forest & Other Stories*, Colombo 1969), and edited several anthologies of English, Sinhala and Tamil writing from Sri Lanka, but her chief contribution to Sri Lankan literature has been made as a translator who moves with ease between three languages: English, Sinhala and French. Her 'sensitive rendering of [Sinhala] folk-poems is an achievement in a difficult field', wrote Lakshmi de Silva in 1979. Obeyesekere has identified a insurmountable problem faced by the translator: 'The impossibility of capturing the sound-patterns so subtly evocative in the Sinhala but sounding so trite when one attempts to transpose them into English rhyme' (1973).

It is difficult to choose the best among Ranjini Obeyesekere's many translations. I have selected two poems (drawn from different periods) for presentation here which go some way to illustrating her skills, her sensitivity, and her special strengths as a translator.

Revenge

I took you by the hand
and kissed your fingers
and gave you tinkling anklets for your feet

I do not know you
I have forgotten.
You, adorned in silk,
decked in your golden anklets
I held beside me as
along a street lit by the myriad torches
of festive revellers, I drove,
a few days before I left.

I do not know you
I have forgotten.

Trembling, in a violent rage
I thunder
Bitch, you know me.
You have not forgotten.

Slowly she raises her head;
Her half-closed eyes now lighting
she stares at me.

I do not know you
I *have* forgotten.

(G.B. Senanayake. Published in *New Ceylon Writing 1*(1970), pp. 32 - 33)

An Unfinished Lesson

One by one each burnt-out leaf
falls, fills the yard.

A blackbird cries a sharp 'tu .. week'
perched upon a mound.

Blackbird, is that a question
you too ask of me
because you know me for a schoolteacher?

A full half of my life I've spent
answering questions.
Now my white-haired head
has no more strength.
Those who asked me questions then
where are they now?
To questions that are posed to them
what answers do they give?

Children, you who walked to school by flowering
forest trails,
You who brought the clouds with you, down mountain
slopes,
You who stepped through cool stream beds to wash
your feet,
Tell, O tell, where are you now, in what far place?

There was no playground for the school,
you trained on the bus route,
The hundred metres race was run
on the scorching road, barefoot,
While I stood at the bend, alert
for passing cars.

Where are you now, the lot of you?
whether far or near
Raise your hand for me to see
and answer clearly 'here'.

... Do you still, now, as you did then,
get drenched in the pouring rain,

trapped in the threatening storms,
wade across rushing streams,
see laughter in the sun,
run races on the road
see a winning post ahead?

A full half of my life I've spent
answering questions
Now my white-haired head
has no more strength.

(Parakrama Kodituwakku. Published in *Penguin New Writing in Sri Lanka* (1992) pp.194 - 195)

A talented actor, Ranjani Obeyesekere has a special affinity for the stage, acting in University productions as a student, and later directing and translating plays while at the same time writing about the theatre. Her translation into Sinhala of Garcia Lorca's play *The House of Bernarda Alba* (performances of which she directed in 1971 and 1987 for the University Drama Society in its English version) was published in 1991.

Ranjani Obeyesekere's work has attracted the following awards: National Endowment for the Arts, Translation Fellowship (1982); National Endowment for the Humanities Translation Fellowship (1986 - 7); a Fullbright Award as Senior Research Scholar at the University of Colombo (1991 - 92); National Endowment for the Humanities Fellowship (1994 - 95); National Endowment for the Humanities Translation Fellowship (1995 - 96)

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D.C.R.A. Goonetilleke, ed., *Penguin New Writing in Sri Lanka* (1992) includes translations by R. Obeyesekere of 6 poems and two short stories. Poems and stories (translated)

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'The Quarrel'. Short story by Gunadasa Amarasekera, translated from the Sinhala . In *The Toronto South Asian Review* 3, 2 (Fall 1984). Short story (translated)

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Shyama Perera

Shyama Perera figures on the cover of her novel, *Haven't Stopped Dancing Yet* as

> the first Sri Lankan to be born in Moscow. Her mother brought her to England in 1962, in vain pursuit of her father. Now a writer and a broadcaster, she lives in north-west London with her daughter[s] Nushy and Tushy.

Her novel is mentioned by Tissa Jayatilaka on p. 2 of his *Navasilu* article (2000), as having 'Sri Lankan affinities, although the central focus of the novel is growing up in London in the 1960s'.

Dr Walter Perera, who examined Shyama Perera's novel in the context of Sri Lankan expatriate fiction (see **Bibliography),** goes much further than this, considering the book to be

> a partial *bildungsroman* which charts new territories for Sri Lankan expatriate fiction. [In an] England characterised by 'The Beatles' and, later, the 'Sex Pistols' ... racial discrimination [has become] transparent and even vicious ... It is a world typified by hedonism, drug addiction, casual sex, and tensions in familial relationships. The specifically expatriate themes are generated by the dynamics created when the conservative Sri Lankan mother goes to England to find her husband - who disowns her - and her daughter, who is growing up in an environment inimical to Sri Lankan values.

Dr Perera notes that the author makes those 'verities' of existence, Sri Lankan values, the object of irony and satire:

> Mala takes her mother to task for lavishly entertaining Sri Lankans who pass through London. Her mother does so, in spite of the poverty represented by the 'black mould around [their] sink or the little army of ants that [she] was constantly bleaching off the worktop' because to do otherwise, or to ask for money from these affluent visitors, would bring shame upon the family. Mala also exposes the hypocrisy inherent in a value system that declares to the world that her father, Luxman Fernando, is dead, when, in fact, he has abandoned the family for a life of illicit pleasures.

He also observes that Shyama Perera's 'most scathing satire' is reserved for Sri Lankan transients and their gauche, money-grubbing ways, an example of which is the following excerpt from a typical 'conversation':

> " ... You know the only way to buy sterling in Colombo is on the black market? The rate is terrible. I spoke even to the minister about it - Ranjit Dimbulawela, he is my sister's husband's third cousin on the mother's side - but there's nothing to be done. Anyway, we had to come because Anil has a supplier here and Kumari wants all sorts of electrical mod cons for the new house - she married that Arugala boy, did I tell you? His aunt was the Prime Minister's father's piano teacher ..."

Dr Perera's analysis distinguishes clearly between satire (which Shyama Perera handles well) and triviality (of which she steers clear). Indeed, he points out that as Mala grows older, 'she is able to realise that the issues are much more complex than she originally conceived':

> Nowhere is this more apparent than in Mala's and her mother's [different] approaches to the vexed question of racial discrimination. Accustomed as she is to being a privileged member of the majority community in Sri Lanka, the mother finds it extremely difficult to adjust to [her] new situation in England.

Unlike her mother, who reacts to being called 'Paki scum' with an impulse to trade insult for insult - "Bloody skinheads - it's my taxes that pay for them to loiter in the street barracking and attacking respectable people" - Mala adopts a mature and realistic approach to the problems of living in a country in which she is both an insider and an outsider:

> [Unlike] my mum, whose experiences made me weep, but were the experiences of an outsider ... I was not an outsider, I was British. I had drunk from the same fount; had learned the same lessons that had spawned this ugliness [of racist abuse] ...

Ultimately, concludes Dr Perera,

> both mother and daughter prosper in England. The former ... saves, brings up her daughter to the best of her ability, takes professional courses that enhance her prospects, and eventually obtains a steady job. For her part, Mala makes best use of her status as a naturalised Englishwoman, her inborn talents, and an independent streak which she has inherited from both parents. Mala's 'victory' does not come without heartache, however. Her decision to have sex before marriage (indulging in relationships with several English boyfriends), her refusal to meet prospective Sri Lankan husbands, her resolution to give up university prospects for a career in journalism, and her determination to move out of her mother's home, are all important stages in her life. Each brings considerable pain to her mother who still clings to values that are obsolescent in England. Perera's contention is that such ruptures are both necessary and desirable in order for (almost) second generation expatriates to flourish in the country of their adoption. Small wonder that she has Mala declare at the conclusion of the novel, "Isn't life great?"

Haven't Stopped Dancing Yet bears out Dr Walter Perera's view that 'Sri Lankan expatriate writers ... retain their artistic verve, present a plethora of voices [and] set up ... authorial strategies ... to understand, reconcile, and articulate their expatriate experience'.

Publications

Haven't Stopped Dancing Yet. Sceptre, London 1998. Novel

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Suvendrini Perera

Cultural critic and academic theorist Suvendrini (Kanagasabai) Perera was born in Jaffna and educated at C.M.S. Ladies' College, Colombo, where her writing was encouraged by several teachers, among them Nalini MacIntyre and Carmini Sinnathamby. Her school career at Ladies' College was marked by several prizes: the General Reading Prize (1968), the English Prize (1972), and the Logic Prize in 1972 among them. Later, following a spell at the University of Sri Lanka at Vidyalankara, she received further support from Ranjith Goonewardene at Washington University, St Louis; and Professors Naomi Lebowitz, Edward Said and Carolyn Heilbrun at Columbia University, New York. Others who influenced her as a writer were her mother, Leila Selvaratnam Kanagasabai, the diasporan Sri Lankan novelists Chitra Fernando and A. Sivanandan, and the Australian writer Ruby Langford Ginibi.

Dr. Perera, who holds the degrees of BA Hons. (1978), MA in Literature & History (1981), MA in English (1982), and PhD in English (1991) teaches today at LaTrobe University in Victoria, Australia in the areas of literary and cultural studies. She has served or currently serves on the editorial boards of the following journals: *Journal of Intercultural Studies, Law/Text/Culture, Uts Review* and *X-text.* Her work on Sri Lankan writers is listed, together with her creative writing, in the **Bibliography** below.

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Publications

Asian and Pacific Inscriptions. Meridian, Melbourne 1991. Non-Fiction

'"Cricket, with a plot': Nationalism, cricket and diasporic identities'. In *Pravada*, Vol 7, No. 2 (2001) pp. 18 - 26. Non-Fiction

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(ed) 'From the Journals of Chitra Fernando'. In C. Lokuge, ed., *Reviews Journal 2000* (CRNLE, Adelaide 2000), pp. 9 - 12. Non-Fiction

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'We can be killed, but we can never be silenced: Narratives of Co-existence in Recent Sri Lankan Fiction'. In C. Lokuge, ed., *Reviews Journal 2000* (CRNLE, Adelaide 2000), pp. 13-24. Non-Fiction

Nanda Pethiyagoda

Reviewers who write for Sri Lanka's newspapers, as I have ventured to suggest in the Introduction to this study, carry a heavy responsibility towards their readers as well as to the authors whose works they review. They are usually the primary source of information for the average reader about books published or about to be published and, in the absence of a vigorous magazine culture such as exists in India today, reviewers have the power to influence readers and to shape public opinion about writing local and foreign.

Since the stimulus of good, intelligent criticism is essential to the development of a literary milieu, literary criticism that is published in the island's daily or weekly press therefore merits special attention in the present study.

Nanda (Wanasundera) Pethiyagoda is a librarian by profession and a free lance journalist by choice. She was born in Peradeniya, Sri Lanka, in 1932, and was encouraged to write creatively by P. M. Wijekoon, her brother-in-law. She also functions as Information Officer of CSHR, University of Colombo, and is an Honours graduate in Arts of that University. She was an Associate of the Library Association of the College of Librarianship, Wales from 1978 - 1979, and holds a Postgraduate Diploma in International Relations from BCIS, Colombo, which she earned in 1983.

Her experience of travel to the USA, India and Thailand qualifies her as co-author of a volume on Sri Lanka in Culture Shock!, the lively series of guides for expatriates and visitors published by Times Editions of Singapore. She is also the author of Palimpsest (1999), a novel set in Sri Lanka in the post-1930 period. 'Torn between filial duty and a promise made, a young woman defies conventions and family expectations ... A mix of fact and fiction, autobiographical snippets, and bits of make-believe ... Real and

imagined characters jostle against a background of rural Kandyan life', says the blurb on the book's back cover. Palimpsest reflects romantic interest and interaction between the generations. / / It is, however, as a reviewer and commentator on current affairs on the cultural scene that Nanda Pethiyagoda is best known. She contributes articles to Library Review (the journal of the Sri Lanka Library Association, and to SAARC Newsletter. In her newspaper articles for the Sunday Island, she reports on literary events, interviews visiting writers, editors, and others connected with literature and the arts, and reviews recently published books. Her contribution in the area of literary criticism invites special interest because of the frequency with which her journalistic writings appear in the press, and because of the enthusiasm she brings to the task of commentary and review. The list of her publications given below conveys an idea of the range of her interest.

Nanda Pethiyagoda's 'critical reviews', she has said herself, are undertaken 'for the pleasure of reading'. A writer of undoubted talent with a lively and original mind, she is well placed to do much to aid the future development of Sri Lankan creative writing.

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Publications

'Alastair Niven's view from London', an interview with a former Director of Literature at the British Council (UK), in *The Island*, 16 April 2000, p. 14. Non-Fiction

'Ayathurai Santhan's *In Their Own Worlds*', review in *Sunday Island* (no date provided). Non-Fiction

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Culture Shock! Sri Lanka. (co-authored) Times editions, Singapore 1990. Non-Fiction

Palimpsest. Privately published. 1999. Novel

Review of Vijitha Fernando (trans.) *Women Writing*. In *The Sunday Island* 15 April 2001, p. 6. Non-Fiction

Geetha Premaratne

Geetha Premaratne majored in English at the University of Sri Lanka, Peradeniya, and obtained a Master's degree in English as a Second Language from the University of Hawaii, Honolulu.

In teaching English as a second language, Premaratne used folk tales, including the stories relating to Andare, the King's jester, which are a staple of Sri Lanka's folk lore, and found them to be of great assistance in developing English language skills in her students.

In a note to her readers that prefaces *Andare: Folktales from Sri Lanka* (1999) Geetha Premaratne writes:

> I was inspired to write this book by listening to my father retell the Andare stories to my son. The joyful moments they shared together - narrating and enacting the stories over and over again - took me back to my childhood, when I was the enchanted listener wrapped in wonder and amusement. What I found most appealing in these stories as a child was Andare's smartness. Andare, who could not be outwitted by anybody, not even the wisest men in the royal court, was my favourite childhood hero and a source of pride and inspiration for me.

Andare himself, as she points out, 'was not a mere clown or buffoon, but an important political figure, because with his delightful wit and good-natured humour, he often reminded the King of his shortcomings, and of those of his ministers too'. Premaratne published the stories in 'an attempt to share with others the spirit of the Sri Lankan people, who are always ready for a good laugh even in the worst of times'.

Australian critics have responded with enthusiasm to this delightful book, with its clever illustrations by Rasika Niroshani Pitigala. 'The style is deceptively simple, and the stories of Andare are fun to read and to ... read aloud' (Doris Sharp); 'A very special book indeed, and ideal for young primary school children on up to adults' (Felicity Stehlik); 'Everyone young at heart will love Andare who will always outsmart the King. A delicious book, very highly recommended to be nominated for the Children's Book Awards' (Peter d'Angelo).

In Australia, Geetha Premaratne has taught Academic English in tertiary preparation programs in the University of New South Wales, the University of Western Sydney, and the Canberra Institute of Technology. She currently lives in Canberra, where she works for the Australian Public Service.

Poems by Geetha Premaratne have been published in *Channels*, and also in *Accents*, an anthology of multicultural writing published in Australia.

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Publications

Andare: Folktales from Sri Lanka. Papyrus Publishing. Melbourne 1999. Children's stories

Sunethra Rajakarunanayake

Attaining Age is the title of a collection of short stories by Sunethra Rajakarunanayake that won the Arts Council English panel award in the Short Story category in 1997. The author is much-travelled, and is an overtly feminist journalist whose stories are sophisticated, feisty and funny. She is also well known as a Sinhala novelist whose writing is sexually frank. Her English stories are, presumably because of her diverse cultural background, interestingly cosmopolitan, reflecting both her openness to European influences and her knowledge of traditional rural middle-class life.

Publications

Attaining Age. Published by Nihal Rajakarunanayake, Nugegoda. (1997). Short stories

Anne Ranasinghe

A writer of German origin who has lived most of her writing life in Sri Lanka, Anneliese Henriette (Katz) Ranasinghe was born in Essen, Germany, in 1925. Daughter of a Jewish family, she had her basic schooling at Jawne, the only Jewish High School still functioning at that time in Cologne, and completed it at Parkstone Girls' Grammar School in Britain, after she left Germany in 1939 for England. Her parents and most members of her family circle having died in Nazi concentration camps, her English teacher at Parkstone, says the writer, was the greatest influence on her writing.

Deciding on a nursing career, Anne Katz trained at Moorfields Eye Hospital in London, and as a nursing sister at Charing Cross Hospital, King's College, Moorfields, Chelsea and the Burden Neurological Reserve Institute. She holds a diploma in journalism, speaks and writes German, English, French and some Hebrew, and speaks Sinhala. Following her marriage in 1949 to a Sri Lankan physician, she settled in Colombo (becoming a permanent resident of Sri Lanka in 1951), and is the mother of two daughters and a son.

Anne Ranasinghe began writing poetry in 1968. Her work, published in Sri Lanka and abroad, has won several awards and prizes, including the Sri Lanka Arts Council Prize for Poetry (1985 and 1992), the Sri Lanka Arts Council Prize for Non-Fiction in 1987, the Sri Lanka State Award for the Best Collection of Short Stories in 1994, and first prizes in the international poetry competitions held by Triton College, USA. It has been translated into Sinhala, German, Serbo Croat and Dutch.

Anne Ranasinghe has worked for Amnesty International for 13 years as Executive Secretary for the South Asia Publications Service and gives her time today to the English Writers' Co-operative, as well as to writers' workshops in Colombo. When the Jewish Commonwealth Association held

a panel exhibition in March 1985 at the Commonwealth Institute, London, Anne Ranasinghe's poem 'Memory is Our Shield', with its stark image of the shattered yet unconsumed synagogue of Essen, her hometown, served as a symbol of endurance. As Lakshmi de Silva, Sri Lankan critic and translator, has noted, the poem's 'columnar effect, besides its appropriateness for panel display, emphasises the monumental clarity of outline, the sense of structure, that characterise [Ranasinghe's] best poems'. Lakshmi de Silva finds that the full sweep of Anne Ranasinghe's poetry reveals

> a sensibility that can balance passionate pity with poise, and ire with irony ... There is nothing cerebral in her work. It impinges directly on the nerves, senses and feelings. For Anne Ranasinghe forgetfulness of public or private fact is a denial of reality. Alertness and integrity of spirit demand a full awareness, a full response to every aspect of experience, sensation or emotion. Her ability to share her vision with the reader gives Anne Ranasinghe's work the stamp of authentic and enduring poetry.

Anne Ranasinghe's poetry focuses on three main themes: the Jewish experience of Nazism, personal relationships, and the thoughts and feelings that arise from contact with her second home in Sri Lanka. Poems of special note include 'Auschwitz from Colombo', 'Odonata', 'Secretariat', 'Holocaust 1994', 'At What Dark Point', 'Fear Grows Like a Cactus','Judgment', 'The Face of God', 'Sinhala New Year 1975', 'Flying Fish', 'Death in the Rain', 'Time and Place' and 'Who Remembers Treblinka'. 'Vivere in Pace', 'Trilogy' and 'Origami' are three poems that have all won first prizes in the Triton International Poetry Competitions, USA.

Pieter Keuneman has drawn attention in his Foreword to *Plead Mercy* to 'the pervading melancholy, the fierce Jewishness, and the compassionate identification with suffering in persons and other living things' which characterise Ranasinghe's work. Finding this quality of Jewishness worthy of special comment, Ashley Halpe notes that

> it would be a failure of nerve on our part to see in these poems nothing more than the records and echoes of a distant tragedy.

> Their point for us surely involves our here and now. Anne Ranasinghe can deal allusively with [Sri Lanka's] insurgency of 1971 precisely because the moral of that part of our history is so clearly before us in her representations of, or reflections on, the Nazi atrocities.

Another insightful comment, this time from Norman Simms, once again stresses Anne Ranasinghe's unique position as 'a Jewish writer of Sri Lanka':

> In a dialectic manner, Anne Ranasinghe interprets, making her poetry ... out of the problematic of history, memory and moral responsibility to act. Increasingly obsessed with the question of remembering - because she knows what it means for the Germans to forget; because it is through remembering that she creatively interprets her presence in Sri Lanka - she is very much a Jewish writer, but a Jewish writer of Sri Lanka.

Aditha Dissanayake has observed that Anne Ranasinghe's poems 'are strong, they pierce the heart and disturb the mind ... through her work Anne Ranasinghe tries to keep the torches burning for those who lost their lives in the Holocaust ... Yet, ensconced among the strong, powerful lines of her work (with words which come rapidly, like a long line of bullets fired from a shotgun) there are streaks of tremendous love and kindness' (2000).

As the reviews and comments quoted above indicate, Anne Ranasinghe's writing frequently links present horrors (the racial outbursts of 1958 and 1983, for example) with tortured memories of the past. She is probably the only Jewish writer of Sri Lankan nationality, and her unique status in this regard allows her to bring together the two parts of her experience with a particular sensitivity to the past 'and its pressures on the present'. This was especially evident following the youth insurgency of 1971, which came as a shock to many writers, but which in Ranasinghe's case was intensified by her recollections of the tensions and menace she had experienced as a child in Germany.

Among her short stories: 'A Woman and her God' (*Stories from Sri Lanka*, 1979, pp. 82 - 90) is outstanding: the story of a Jewish family in the period leading up to the Nazi holocaust, which reaches its crisis point when the narrator's mother, a devout Jewish woman, refuses to fast at the feast of Yom Kippur. A masterpiece of understatement that presents the Nazis' 'final solution' of what they termed 'the Jewish problem', and the growing sense of unease among Jewish people as their fellow-citizens and neighbours 'turned Nazi', is told from the point of view of a child whose family was wiped out in the Holocaust. It is a subject with obvious temptations to self-pity and sentimentality, not to mention sensationalism. But, like her poetry at its best, Anne Ranasinghe applies emotional controls in her fiction with satisfying and moving results. Her use of a spare, almost bald narrative style deepens the horror of the situation she describes in this story, and conveys a growing sense of menace without trading on the emotions of her reader.

> As it happened, the night the villagers did attack my grandmother's house - we were no longer there by then - they had not been able to cover the windows in time, and my uncle Julius, the one with only one arm, the other being shot off in the war, tried to jump from the first floor window. But having only one arm he couldn't break his fall, so he broke his neck instead. But maybe that wasn't too bad, when you look at it philosophically, because the villagers turned Nazi and chased all my other aunts and uncles up into the fields and there they killed them, slowly and in a very refinedly cruel fashion.

Reviewing Anne Ranasinghe's *Poems* in 1971, Claudette Taylor observed that a

> quality of dread, a tension created by an inability to enjoy complacently the joys of the present ... is the dominant theme of Anne Ranasinghe's work ... The persistent uncertainty is always there, and so is terror, but no hysteria. The resilience of her spirit, of a basically healthy and mature mind, of a disciplined adult sensibility, is expressed through many poems that make more of what life has to offer ... The total

impression ... is of a strong, adult mind with a finely developed sensibility playing upon experience; and a mature writer's ability to use language that is at once richly suggestive and disciplined in use.

As Eva Ranaweera has noted, Ranasinghe's reputation in Sri Lanka and the growing awareness of her work further afield in Britain, Europe, New Zealand, Australia, Japan, and the USA is mainly based on her poetry which has won a number of awards and draws on her memories of Hitler's Germany, as well as on an alert and sensitive response to her later surroundings and experiences (2000). Examples of her writing may be found in J. Thieme, ed., *The Arnold Anthology of Post-Colonial Literatures in English* (1996) and in N. Besner, D. Schnitzer, A. Turner, eds., *Uncommon Wealth: An Anthology of Poetry in English* (Oxford University Press, Canada).

Selecting a poem to represent Anne Ranasinghe here has not been easy: her *oeuvre* presents the critic with an embarrassment of riches. I have chosen to return to a comparatively early poem, the first from her tireless typewriter that I ever read. It had an effect on me that I have never forgotten, and I had the privilege of publishing it in the first issue of *New Ceylon Writing* in 1970.

Auschwitz from Colombo

Colombo. March. The city white fire
That pours through vehement trees burst into flame,
And only a faint but searing wind
Stirring the dust
From relics of foreign invaders, thrown
On this far littoral by chance or greed,
Their stray memorial the odd word mispronounced,
A book of laws
A pile of stones
Or maybe some vile deed.

Once there was another city; but there
It was cold - the trees leafless
And already thin ice on the lake.
It was that winter
Snow hard upon the early morning street
And frost flowers carved in hostile window panes
It was that winter.

Yet only yesterday
Half a world away and twenty five years later
I learn of the narrow corridor
And at the end a hole, four feet by four,
Through which they pushed them all - the children
too -
Straight down a shaft of steel thirteen feet long
And dark and icy cold
Onto the concrete floor of what they called
The strangling room. Dear God, the strangling room,
Where they were stunned - the children too -
By heavy wooden mallets,
Garroted, and then impaled
On pointed iron hooks.

I am glad of the unechoing street
Burnt white in the heat of many tropical years.
For the mind, no longer sharp,
Seared by the tropical sun
Skims over the surface of things;
Like the wind
That stirs but slightly the ancient dust.

The list of Anne Ranasinghe's publications and prizes given in the present survey is selective, rather than comprehensive, the items having been chosen to provide the reader and researcher with an idea of the range and variety of Anne Ranasinghe's writing.

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Publications:

And a Sun that sucks the Earth to Dry. Lake House Investments Ltd., Colombo 1971. Poems

Against Eternity and Darkness. English Writers Co-operative of Sri Lanka, Colombo 1985; reprinted 1985, 1988, 1996, 2000. Poems

'Atteriya'. In *The New Lankan Review* (1987) p. 49. Poem

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'A Woman and her God'. In Y. Gooneratne, ed., *Stories from Sri Lanka*. Heinemann, Hong Kong 1979, pp. 82 - 90. Autobiography/short story

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'Judgment'. In *New Ceylon Writing 1* (1970) pp. 51 - 52. Poem

Love, Sex and Parenthood. International Planned Parenthood Federation (1978). Non-Fiction

Mascot and Symbol.English Writers Co-operative, Colombo 1997. Poems, short stories, essays, translations

Not even shadows. English Writers Co-operative of Sri Lanka, Colombo 1991; reprinted with translations from the German by Rose Auslander (2000). Poems

Of charred - wood - midnight - fear. Alte Synagoge, Essen, Germany (in German and English). (1983). Poems

'On the Beach'. In *New Ceylon Writing 2* (1971) p. 77. Poem

Plead Mercy. Kularatne & Co., Colombo 1975. Poems

Poems. Privately published. Colombo 1971. Poems

'Secretariat'. In *New Ceylon Writing 1* (1970) p. 63. Poem

'Sinhala New Year 1971'. In *New Ceylon Writing 2* (1971) p. 82; reprinted from *Poems* (1971). Poem

'The Castle'. In *Channels*, 1, 4, pp. 32 - 37. Short story

The Letter. (In German translation). Privately published in Germany (1994). Stories

'The lingering weight on Germany's conscience'. In *Daily News*, 11 May 1995. Interview / Non-Fiction

'The mood in the ghetto is rosy'. In *Channels* I, 1, pp. 3 - 16. Autobiography/ Non-Fiction

'There is no longer a need'. In *New Ceylon Writing 1* (1970) pp. 31 - 32. Poem

'Unfortunately, however'. In *Channels*, 6, 2, pp. 58 - 61. Short story

You ask me why I write poems. Poems. Maro Publishers, Germany (1994). Poems

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—— ed., *Voice of Women* special issue "Women Writing" (October 2000), pp. 13-14, contains a complete and detailed account of Anne Ranasinghe's literary output and the numerous awards and prizes she has won throughout her career; it also reprints a poem, `Time and Place'.

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Wijesinha, Rajiva 'A Poetess of Positive Values', in *Island* Arts page, 8 December 1985

Other Sources

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Frank Herdemerten, 'Fireworks of Broken Glass', a scenic collage (Anne Ranasinghe's material is in German). 1 hour.

Michael Lentz, 'Heimschung', a film made on Anne Ranasinghe's work for West Deutschen Rundfunk TV (1987); forty reviews of Lentz's film that appeared in the German press.

Eva Ranaweera

Evangeline Charlotte Ranaweera, poet and activist in women's affairs, is the editor of *Voice of Women*, a journal supporting women's liberation that expresses a feminist voice and point of view. *Voice of Women* was established in 1978, Kumari Jayawardene being the initiator. It was begun as an alternative to conventional women's magazines that dealt exclusively with domestic affairs and featured fashion, recipes, home hints and occasional reviews of popular 'women's' fiction.

Educated at Holy Cross High School, Eva Ranaweera read for the BA degree at the University of Ceylon, and graduated in 1951. She does not travel for pleasure or on holiday, but usually with a particular purpose or destination in mind: for example, recent journeys she undertook to Egypt in order to attend the Afro-Asian Peoples' Solidarity Organization in Cairo; and to Australia on a Fellowship awarded to her by the University of Wollongong, New South Wales.

Eva Ranaweera's poetry was honoured with the award of State Literary Prizes for Poetry in 1994 and 1997. Her prize-winning collection of 33 poems *With Maya* has been described by the novelist Carl Muller in his review of it as offering 'a concentrated vision of the decay in modern society, and the disintegration behind that imposing facade we pretend'.The title poem of the volume concerns illusion, and discloses, in Muller's view,

> the tantalising experience of the street people who have 'bags of dreams - the wildest ever' - and the stories they weave.

A man fell from the moon last night.
He woke me.

He was a shimmering man.
I ran away.
- tell me another -
Moon man had a woman
she was the bestest ever.
she didn't go with him
she saw me, see, she was with me,
but when I touched her
it was thin air.
Her face was yellow, a golden yellow.

A fantasia of wistfulness:

'I ate chicken and meat and fish and pork
and all that was on the table; and sausages too
Enough for a year.'

'I had a bag of gold coins
someone left it for me under the tree, my tree.'

'I wore a silk sarong, man, last night.
It was shining like fireflies.'

'I had a man, a real gentleman
he drove a red car
I went about in the front seat with him ...
I was his wife.
Married and all.
My servants, fifteen in all, called me madam.

Muller, who finds Eva Ranaweera's poetry 'compelling', and important for its intellectual and emotional background, sees reflected in it the themes that attract aspiring writers of the present day. In 'Shaming' he perceives a poetic expression of the 'cynicism of society' and a mood which 'practically hectors the senses'.

Eva Ranaweera's last book of verse, *Blissfully* (2001) was shortlisted for the Gratiaen Prize in 2001, and contains 'My Listing', a poem which highlights the Sri Lankan custom of particularizing the items in a bride's trousseau. In the background are a daughter's musings on whether her father really loves her, as he prepares to barter her off [in marriage] with a humiliatingly itemized list of goods:

> ...pillow cases six, bed sheets six, kitchen
> towels, towels he goes on magic spell snapping ...
>
> One acre of land in Puttalam with cottage
> orchard of fruits and flowers for packaging abroad
> ... and double storied house in Colombo ...

The poem ends with the question:

> And my name? do I take my name with me
> name I inherited from you my father

Eva Ranaweera is a member of the English Writers Co-operative of Sri Lanka, and recently edited an issue of the Association's magazine, *Channels*.

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Publications

Attake Mal Paravagiya.(Trans. C. Gosden and J. Diandass) Privately published, 1993. Poems

Blissfully. 80 pp. Privately published. Colombo, 2000. Poems *Religion*. Centre for Women's Education, Colombo 1994. Poems

Selected Poems of Eva Ranaweera. Women's Education Centre, Colombo 1987. Poems

'Shame/Women/Gajaman Nona'. In *Third National Convention on Women's Studies* (4 - 7 March 1992. CENWOR, Colombo 1992. Non-Fiction

Some Literary Women of Sri Lanka. Women's Education & Research Centre, Colombo. 1991. Non-Fiction

(ed) *Voice of Women* special issue "Women Writing" (October 2000), 32 pp. Non-Fiction

What will you do do do Clara, what will you do? Centre for Society & Religion, Colombo (1994) Poems

With Maya. 82 pp. Privately published. Colombo, 1997. Poems

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Muller, Carl 'Eva's fresh signature in poetry', review of *With Maya*, in *Sunday Times*, 1 November 1998, p. 2.

Subha Ranaweera

How far can you fly
in your imagination?

asks youthful poet, Subha Shanthi Ranaweera, who had written, as a child, that she had

> a great dream in life. I want to study and enjoy literature more and more, and one day I want to share my findings, appreciation and enjoyment with the world in a book. Until such time I want to enjoy literature more and more, literature [that] is the best companion in my lonely life.

Her dream has been encouraged and even possibly inspired, by her parents: Subha Ranaweera's father is a bi-lingual writer (Sinhala and English) and a translator, her mother a retired graduate teacher. In 1995 Subha graduated from the University of Kelaniya with a BA (General) degree for which the subjects she offered had been English, French and Japanese. Four years later, she published her first book of poems.

Reviewing Subha Ranaweera's *Just Another Star,* Lakshmi de Silva found it to be filled with fresh, forceful and direct poems,

> songs of innocence and experience, an adult looking through a kaleidoscope of sensuous and emotive impressions with a child's honesty and intensity... The result gives the reader a new insight into the world of childhood, the facile agonies and ecstasies of adolescence and the onset of adulthood with all its perplexities and pressures, illuminating in its immediacy. Artfully simple, bitter or whimsical, as in the delightfully sibylline "Colours"

and "I Thought I was, But Really I am", the poems are enjoyable as excursions from the limitations of our habitual views, a chance to venture out on a bridge of empathy towards the young of today, perhaps a step on the journey towards understanding their visions and aspirations.

I Thought I was, but Really I am ...

I thought I was a red rose
But really I am a shoe flower
I thought I was a tower
But really I am a brick
I thought I was a butterfly
But really I am a beetle
And I thought I was a busy street
But really I am an Island.

Then I thought I was an empty balloon
But really I am a milk bottle
I thought I was an ice cream
But really I am a grain of rice
I thought I was an old owl
But really I am a little singing bird.

And lastly I thought I was a closed box
But then I realized I am an open blue sky.

A poet, a short story writer and a translator, Subha Ranaweera is one of several young Sri Lankan women writers from whom much interesting work can be expected in the coming years.

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Publications

Just Another Star. 63 pp. Vidarshana Publishers, Kalubowila, 1999. Poems

Manel Ratnatunga

The novelist Manel (Hewavitharne) Ratnatunga, born in Colombo in 1927 and educated at Visakha Vidyalaya, is the eldest daughter of a Sinhalese family that takes pride in its connection with the Sinhalese Buddhist patriot of the early decades of the 20th century, Anagarika Dharmapala, founder of the Maha Bodhi Society of India in 1891 and the London Buddhist Vihara in 1926.

The writer herself would no doubt claim her distinguished great-uncle as the most powerful influence on her thinking and writing: of her book, *Saga Indonesia*, she affirms that she could understand and feel what Sukarno went through 'because of the blood of Dharmapala in me'. A secondary, yet strong, influence on her development as a writer was Mrs Clara Motwani, Principal of Visakha Vidyalaya, who 'saw to' Manel Ratnatunga's reading.

Manel Ratnatunga began as a writer of short stories. Her writing, both fiction and non-fiction, draws on a wide range of experience, since she has travelled extensively overseas as well as within Sri Lanka, and has lived for extended periods of time in Indonesia and elsewhere, periods that yielded interesting creative results, as may be seen from her books *Syria: What is She?* (1953) and *Saga Indonesia* (1994) a novel which won the Arts Council Award for Fiction in 1995, and was short-listed for the Gratiaen award.

Perhaps best described as a historical novel, *Saga Indonesia,* notes Lakshmi de Silva,

> provides a richly textured and vivid panorama of the history and culture of the land.

Dr de Silva recommended it in her review to students of colonialism and postcolonialism as a highly intelligent exploration of the factors contributing to a political history - Indonesia's - 'chequered by idealism and violence'. Such students may well see links between *Saga Indonesia* and that classic of Indonesian contemporary literature set in an earlier (Dutch colonial) period of Indonesian history, Pramoedya Ananta Toer's novel *This Earth of Mankind;* and even, perhaps, with the original source of Pramoedya's inspiration, Eduard Douwes Dekker's 19th century novel *Max Havelaar* (1860). Pramoedya and Ratnatunga certainly have in common an inclination to combine exotic romance and social analysis in their fiction: in Ratnatunga's novel, the exotic elements include tiger-buffalo fights, and what de Silva memorably terms 'the pleasures of a well-stocked harem, inclusive of an orchestra of talented wives', and the social analysis reveals a peasantry tied down to forced labour in the cultivation of cane, coffee and indigo, overtaxed and exploited by a colonial administration that finds willing collaborators in the local elite or *bupati* class (the Indonesian equivalent of Sri Lanka's mudaliyars, muhandirams and dissavas).

Pramoedya developed his portrait of struggle and modernization in Indonesia through a quartet of novels. Ratnatunga develops hers through 'a fictional framework of [several] generations' in a single work covering the events of two hundred years that leads the reader from feudal times to the present day. She presents the complexities of Indonesian society through the character of Iyem, a peasant girl, who becomes successively a concubine of the Sultan and the wife of a scholarly aristocrat, finally marrying a Chinese shopkeeper.

Throughout her presentation of conflicting personalities and points of view, Ratnatunga sustains an admirably balanced narrative stance: as Lakshmi de Silva notes in her review,

> While [Ratnatunga's] fictional figure Millah sees Sukarno as liberator and martyr ... his position as leader during the Japanese invasion, the concept of Guided Democracy, NASAKOM-Nasionalisme Agama (religion), Komunisme against NECOLISM, preceding the banning of two parties and Press control are deftly highlighted.

'Bold impressionistic strokes', says de Silva, 'create a canvas that is crowded and convincing in its portrayal of the past and the present.' It could be added that in *Saga Indonesia,* Manel Ratnatunga makes a significant contribution, not only to the range of Sri Lankan fiction, but to modern Indonesian literature, enriching the tradition by which, according to James Rush, the English-language novel has become a popular form of writing about Indonesia.

Ranweli Bay Mystery: Story of a Marriage is a tale set in colonial Ceylon in the mid-1930s, a period of which the author has first-hand knowledge, having been an adolescent at the time, and evidently an extremely clear-eyed observer of the social world about her. Sri Lankan codes of behaviour, especially among wealthy upper-class Sinhalese families, are rigorously questioned, as Usha, naive and inexperienced, is linked in an arranged marriage with a bridegroom who is a man of the world. Their wedding, which is conducted with all the splendour judged necessary to people of status, is a dismal failure, the author describing it with an irony that, as fellow novelist Sita Kulatunga noted in a review, 'portends disaster'. This reviewer praises the insight with which the characters are presented; and remarks that despite the fact that Manel Ratnatunga's treatment of the institution of marriage cannot be described as overtly feminist, she encourages her readers to 'think about social institutions and the men and women who build and suffer them'.

Lakshmi de Silva, reviewing this novel, took note of its taut structure, the rapid succession of moods and events which drives the plot, and its setting in a period when

> alternative life-styles were unthinkable: whether a person belonged to the elite, the middle-class, or shabby genteel, they lived in the relentless light of public opinion, known to all their peers and judged by all their peers, in a country of less than six million.

Ratnatunga writes, said de Silva, with 'merciless frankness', exposing social and individual weaknesses, and highlighting at the same time the tendency of society to safeguard appearances and ignore or conceal damaging realities.

Status-conscious Saroja 'shies away' from her sister Usha's revelations regarding her husband's violence and infidelity:

> "Then what do you want? To have your name in the headlines as a bad woman and have the whole country reading all about your quarrels and private life?"

Although it is one of the few novels published in the period under review that provide authentic insights into upper-class life of the years prior to World War II, *Ranweli Bay Mystery* does not set itself up as social history or as a slice of pre-war life in Ceylon. It deserves to be read as fiction, the very different personalities of Saroja and Usha being especially well-conceived and executed, so that the conflicts between these two characters are entirely convincing. We might read Usha as bovine and simple-minded, or as a victim of rampant male chauvinism, but Ratnatunga, while permitting sympathy, does not countenance idealisation or romanticisation of this girl: 'Strong as a young heifer' is, as Lakshmi de Silva points out, an image 'that swiftly creates impressions of freshness, simplicity and docility verging on stupidity'. In contrast, Usha's sister Saroja, self-controlled and decisive, is not to be intimidated.

Equally convincing are Ratnatunga's lively, individualised depictions of Siritunga the astrologer, and of family servants, denizens of the life 'below stairs', without whose loyalty and service the world of their betters (what de Silva terms 'a self-obsessed elite') would stop turning.

Manel Ratnatunga's short stories have appeared in the *Sunday Observer* and in *Asia Magazine*, and have been broadcast on the BBC's World service. She is the author of a radio play which was broadcast by the Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation, and is a member of the English Writers' Cooperative of Sri Lanka.

Publications

Best Loved Folk Tales of Sri Lanka. Sterling Publishers, India 1999. Stories

Folk Tales of Indonesia. Sterling Publishers, India 1983. Stories

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Ranweli Bay Mystery: Story of a Marriage. Privately published with the assistance and sponsorship of the Sri Lanka National Library Services Board, Colombo 1998. Novel.

Saga Indonesia. Quill Press, Australia 1994. Novel

Syria, What is She? Times International, Singapore 1953. Non-Fiction

'The Revolutionary: Memories of a grandniece'. An account of the Anagarika Dharmapala, in "Glimpses of the 1900s', *Sunday Times: Past Times* (2000) issued for the millenium. Non-Fiction

'The Visitor'. Source and date not provided. Short story.

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de Silva, Lakshmi review of *Ranweli Bay Mystery: Story of a Marriage*.

Kulatunga, Sita review of *Ranweli Bay Mystery: Story of a Marriage* in *The Island*, 6 November 1998

Pramoedya, Ananta Toer, *This Earth of Mankind (Bumi Manusia)* trans. Max Lane, Penguin Books 1975

Rush, James R. 'Journeys to Java: Western Fiction about Indonesia 1600 - 1980', in Robin W. Winks and James R. Rush eds., *Asia in Western Fiction* (Manchester 1990), pp. 137 - 158; Rush's essay contains a perceptive discussion of Eduard Douwes Dekker's novel *Max Havelaar* (1860)

Vajiragnana, Venerable Dr Medagama 'London Buddhist Vihara celebrates 75th anniversary', in *Sunday Observer*, 30 September 2001

Faith Ratnayake

Faith Jeanne (Simpson) Ratnayake was born in Britain in 1940, and today holds dual citizenship for the United Kingdom and Sri Lanka. Short story writing is her principal field of literary interest; she also writes poetry, and articles of general interest in the areas of culture and history.

Faith Ratnayake's early education was in the United Kingdom where, having acquired the General Certificate of Education (GCE), she established a basis for her professional occupation as a librarian, taking Diploma Courses in Librarianship and Documentation Science at both the Sheffield School of Librarianship (1963-1964) and the Sri Lanka Library Association, Colombo (1973 - 1976). In 1989 she undertook a program in Agricultural Project Formulation, Appraisal and Management at the National Institute of Business Management, Colombo. Also in 1989, as part of the United Nations Development Program, she participated in a UNDP/DTCP Workshop, taking Certificate courses on Project Design (1994), Horticulture theory/practical (1998 - 2001), completing her final project in June 2001. She is a graduate of the Open University of Sri Lanka, taking computer and journalism courses, and earning a Diploma in English in July 2001.

While English is her first language, Faith Ratnayake also speaks French, Japanese, Sinhala and Italian. Among those who encouraged her early efforts as a writer were her secondary school teachers in Britain; Dr Ryhana Raheem, Dr H. Ratwatte, and Ms Vivimarie Vanderpoorten at the Open University. She receives continuous support and encouragement from her husband (Dr Hema Ratnayake, whose work as Archaeological Director in Sri Lanka from 1981 to 2000 introduced her to Sri Lanka's ancient cities and sites, and remains an important source of her intellectual and literary inspiration); from fellow-members of the English Writers Cooperative and the English Writers Workshop; from Mr Hiran Hewavisenti of the *Lanka Monthly Digest;* from

Dr Roland Silva and Mr Edmund Jayasuriya of the Central Cultural Fund; from Dr Ananda W.P. Guruge; and from Mr H. M. Gunasekera, formerly of the Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation and the BBC.

Travel, says Faith Ratnayake, is vital to her writing on Sri Lanka's history and culture, which is mostly on ancient Anuradhapura and the Jetavana Conservation Project. Her husband's professional interests have encouraged her own in literature: she has a book pending publication, 'Anuradhapura: The Upward Path', which is a history of the sacred city in English verse. She has also in preparation a volume of prose and poetry on the City of Anuradhapura, to be published by the Educational Publications Division, Ministry of Higher Education, Sri Lanka.

Meditation

Upturned palms placed on lap, *dhyana,*
hands only, arms and torso lost.
Feet placed neatly on folded limbs
The robe delineated in soft folds.
No more is seen of the vanished form
No more, yet the presence is felt, serene
An overwhelming need arises
To place a flower offering in that upturned palm

Faith Ratnayake began her career as a creative writer in 1995 with short contributions to the *Lanka Monthly Digest.* These were largely descriptions of historical or archaeological sites, which she illustrated at first with photographs, then with original poems. An example of the latter is her piece on 'The Mihintale Rock' in *Lanka Monthly Digest,*2, 11 (1996) p.50, which is accompanied by a poem, 'Contemplation: A Forest Monastery (at Kaludiya Pokuna)'. In 1996 she became a founder member of the English Writers' Workshop of Sri Lanka, and from 1997, she began publishing short stories, poems, and articles in *Lanka Woman, Voice of Women,* and *Channels.*

Her writing has attracted several awards, among them a Third Place Award for poetry in the *International Library of Poetry* publication, *Awaken*

to a Dream (1996), a Certificate of Merit for her contribution to the Municipality of Colombo's Golden Jubilee of Independence Essay Competition (1997) and a prize in the English Writers Co-operative of Sri Lanka (1998) Competition for her story, 'The Gift'.

Faith Ratnayake's' bibliographical and editorial skills have served the cause of Sri Lankan literature well. She has helped in the editorial work demanded by *Channels,* assisting Wilfrid Jayasuriya with Vol. 8, No. 2 in 1999, and Ransiri Menike Silva in selecting competition winners for Vol. 9,2 in January 2001. She has been recently working with Anne Ranasinghe and Anthea Senaratne in the preparation of Vol. 10, No. 1 , a cumulative volume, and will herself edit *Channels* Vol. 10, No. 2 in the second half of 2001. She is a life member of both the English Writers Cooperative of Sri Lanka and the English Association of Sri Lanka, and a founder member of the English Writers Workshop of Sri Lanka since its inception in 1996. She is a member of the Text Book Writer's Association of Sri Lanka.

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Publications

"Contemplation: A Forest Monastery (at Kaludiya Pokuna)". In *Lanka Monthly Digest* 2, 11 (June 1996) p. 50. Non-Fiction

"Female Figures". In *Lanka Monthly Digest* 2,7 (February 1996) p. 53. Poem

"Jetavana Stupa". In "100 Words: Memory", *Sunday Times Magazine* 5,1 (1997) p. 28. Non-Fiction

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"The Gift". Prize-winning short story. English Writers Co-operative of Sri Lanka Competition (1998). Published in *Channels,* Vol. 8, No. 1. Short story

'The Half Moon Stone'. In S. Kulatunga, ed. *Channels,* 4, 1, p. 3. Poem

'The Listener'. In R. Wijesinha, ed. *Channels,* 6, 1, pp. 17 - 23. Short story

"The Many Shades of Yellow". In *Awaken to a Dream,* the International Library of Poetry (1997) p. 66. Poem

References

Guruge, Ananda W.P. Foreword to 'Anuradhapura: The Upward Path' (to be published 2001)

Damayanthi Ratwatte

Damayanthi (Ellepola) Ratwatte, younger daughter of D. B. Ellepola and Gladys Panabokke Ellepola, was born in Sri Lanka in 1935. She was educated at Ladies' College, Colombo, where she showed notable ability in Latin and English. In 1954 she entered the University of Ceylon at Peradeniya, graduating in 1957 with a Bachelor of Arts (General) degree for which her subjects had included English and Latin.

While at Peradeniya she had, like her elder sister Ranjini Obeyesekere, shown a distinct talent for the stage, and took part in several productions of the University Dramatic Society, playing Lady Britomart in Jubal's production of Shaw's *Major Barbara*, and directing and acting in one-act plays presented by her Hall of Residence, Sanghamitta. She also had a hand in editing issues of *Thunapaha*, a magazine produced at Sanghamitta Hall.

Dedicated today to a religious, life, the single collection of poems she has published is a small collection of translations into English of *Theri Gi*, poems composed in Pali by Buddhist nuns of ancient times. This is a simply presented volume that indicates her lifelong interest in Buddhist theory and practice, and reflects something in their delicacy of the skill with which she translated Catullus and other Latin poets during her years at Peradeniya.

Publications

Theri Gi. Privately published, date uncertain. Verse translations

References

Dissanayake, Gita 'Theri gatha'. In *Options*,3 (February 1995) pp. 7 - 8

Tharu, Susie and Lalita, K. eds., *Women Writing in India*. 2 vols. Oxford University Press, 1991: Vol. 1, pp. 65 -70

Ranjini Rebera

Ranjini Estelle (Wickramaratne) Rebera, poet and feminist theologian, was born in Nugegoda in 1938, and lived there until she migrated to Australia in 1976.

> One of my strong images from childhood was the number of underprivileged women and children my mother used to feed and clothe. I realise now that this image had gone deeper than the visual surface. I went to work with the YWCA. My work was with the women in the slums around the YWCA building. This was a watershed in my life, it brought me face to face with women who had courage, with women who gave in to exploitation, with women who thought nothing of using their bodies to earn a living and with women who sometimes had no idea as to who was the father of their children ...

Ranjini Rebera is by profession a consultant on communication and gender issues, an educator, and a facilitator in creative processes for reading and studying the Bible, using her skills as a communication consultant to work primarily with women and women's groups on issues related to the role of women in society and the church. She designs workshops in communication strategies for transformation and for equipping women as leaders in Church and Society. An experienced international speaker, and a published writer of distinction, she describes herself as 'enjoying being a woman at this point in history'.

The reader of Ranjini Rebera's poetry realises that a large part of that 'enjoyment' arises from a deeply happy family life and the choice of a career and way of life that have brought the poet a consciousness of being part of a community which is global in the sense that it transcends limitations imposed

on women by race and nationality. 'Kitchentable Community', a poem published in 1997, expresses this well:

Kitchentable Community

Coffee-steam embracing
a ray of sunshine
cold fingers encircling
coffee-warm images.
My kitchen glows
in colour-warm memories.

I remember ....

My mother's kitchen.
Mingling aroma of
condiments, coconut and rice
stainless steel touching earthenware.
The kitchentable a centred altar
laden with mango and papaya
frangipani and woven mats.
The clay water jar receiving
our frustrations, our laughter, our dreams ....
Community rooted
in relational realities.

I remember ....

My own kitchens
coloured by continents and cultures
noodles and sticky rice
mingling with toast and muffins
mixers and microwaves.
Community woven through
shared silences
tear-drenched dislocation

life-giving laughter.
The same ... yet always different.

I remember
the differences,
glowing presence
somewhere deep within
creating wholeness ....
Coffee-steam and sunshine
caress me
call me
to community.
A centred celebration
of life!

Her parents (Estelle and George de Silva-Wickremeratne) and her paternal grandfather encouraged Ranjini Rebera in her early years as a writer, not least by sending her to Methodist College, Colombo, which appears to have had on its staff in the 1950s some of the most gifted teachers in the island. In addition to her studies, she enrolled as an external student at the Trinity College of Music, London, her enjoyment of literature and her talent for music, speech and drama were recognized by her teachers: Marie Fernando, Deloraine Brohier, Marbit Gunesekere and Irene Edirisinghe Wanigaratne were among those who influenced her in her student years. Today the writer is a Licenciate of Trinity College, London (L.T.C.L.) and a Fellow of the same institution (F.T.C.L.).

Later in life came the influence of her husband (Dr Basil A. Rebera), Dr Letty Russell, Dr Musimbi Kanyoro, and many feminist writers and scholars; and the encouragement of women writers from the global networks with whom, the writer says, she has been privileged to work. That work has taken her to many parts of the world: she has visited, or resided in, Switzerland, Britain, the USA, India, Singapore and Thailand, where she has conducted workshops and seminars. Her reputation as an effective speaker and a creative thinker has made it possible for her to visit Latin America, Africa, Europe, and nearly all countries in the Asia-Pacific region.

Feminism, theology and biblical analysis make an unusual and challenging combination when they unite in poetry. Ranjini Rebera's writing is not always as comforting as 'Kitchentable Community' nor as life-affirming as 'My Mother's Rainbow Necklace''('I celebrate my mother's tears/ As a necklace of nurturing love./ I celebrate her gift to me:/ The precious gift of life./ I celebrate all girl-children / Whose mothers, grandmothers, sisters and girl-cousins/ Hold up half the sky! ...') In 'He boarded a bus', a poem written in response to the bombing of a bus by terrorists in Colombo in April 1987, she asks the discomforting question that is in the mind of the woman whose son, coming home from work as he did every day, has died in that tragedy: 'Why?/What did he do?' And in another poem, 'A Woman's Hands', written in Singapore in 1986 and anthologized many times, she probes the ludicrous contradictions that persist today in one of the central areas of Christian religious belief and sacramental worship:

A Woman's Hands

I sit in a pew
waiting.
The Human becomes Divine.
The bread ...
Perhaps kneaded by a woman's hands.
The wine ....
Perhaps women worked in the winery.

But when the Human
becomes Divine
a woman's hands are taboo!
"You shall not touch
the Divine!"

The Divine becomes human.
Penetrates a woman's womb.
(Patriarchy had no place!)
Like soft petals enfolding
a crystal dewdrop,

The seed nestles
in a female form.

"You shall not touch
the Divine!"
The battered body
taken off the cross ...
Women's hands gently
perform burial rites.
The crimson blood
must surely stain those hands.
Women's hands -
caring hands -
touch the Divine!

"You shall not touch the Divine"

Even as you knead the bread
And share the wine ...
I sit in a pew
Waiting ...
Hoping ...
Sharing ...

Ranjini Rebera's many publications relating to theology and biblical analysis have been omitted from the list below, which does, however, include in addition to the titles of published poems, publications written from the perspectives of feminism and social analysis that are relevant to her creative writing.

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Publications

A Partnership of Equals: A Resource Guide for Asian Women. Feminist social analysis. Christian Conference of Asia. Hong Kong, 1995. Non-fiction

A Search for Symbols: An Asian Experiment. Feminist social analysis. Christian Conference of Asia Women's Concerns. Hong Kong, 1990. Non-Fiction

'A Woman's Hands'.In *Women in a Changing World: Ecumenical Decade 1988 - 1998.* World Council of Churches, Geneva. January 1988, p. 78; also in Barbara A. Horner-Ibler, ed., *Ours the Journey.* Friendship Press, New York, 1992, p. 18; in *In God's Image,* 11,1 (1992) AWRC, Malaysia, p. 71; in *Pacific Journal of Theology,* Series II, 7 (1992) pp. 28-29 Poem

'Celebrating Power'. In *In God's Image,* 16, 3. AWRC, Malaysia 1997, p. 16; in Judy Fisher and Janet Wood, eds., *Colours True and Splendid.* National Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia. Sydney 1999, p. 97. Poem

'Emerging Patterns in the Women's Movement in Asia'. Feminist social analysis. *In God's Image.* June-September 1986. Asian Women's Resource Center, Hong Kong, pp.12 - 14. Non-Fiction

Feminism and Changing Images of Power. Feminist social analysis (pamphlet). Women's Resource Center, Auckland, New Zealand 1993. Non-Fiction

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'Power to Change'. Feminist social analysis. In *Common Concerns.* World YWCA, Geneva, September 1998, pp. 4 - 10. Non-Fiction

'Powerless?' In Lynda Katsuno-Ishii and Edna J. Ortez, eds., *Of Rolling Waters and Roaring Wind.* World Council of Churches, Geneva 2000, p. 36. Poem

'Sanctity with Justice for the Home'. Feminist social analysis. In *Women's Link,* Christian Conference of Asia, Hong Kong 1987. Series 127, pp. 6 & 7. Non-Fiction

'The Sinful Woman'. In Masao Takenaka and Ron O'Grady, eds., *The Bible through Asian Eyes.* Pace Publishing, New Zealand, 1991, p. 102. Poem

(ed) *We Cannot Dream Alone: A Story of Women in Development.* Feminist social analysis. World Council of Churches, Geneva. 1990. Non-Fiction

'Women's Identity in Leadership'. Feminist social analysis. In *Affirming Difference, Celebrating Wholeness - A Partnership of Equals.* Christian Conference of Asia. Hong Kong 1995, pp. 77 - 97. Non-Fiction

'Women's Identity in the Home'. Feminist social analysis. In *Affirming Difference, Celebrating Wholeness - A Partnership of Equals.* Christian Conference of Asia. Hong Kong 1995, pp. 43 - 6. Non-Fiction

Karen Roberts

Born in Colombo in 1965, novelist Karen Marisa Judith Roberts now lives in the USA and works as Creative Director of an advertising agency in California. Her father (Tony Roberts, a retired copywriter), whom she describes as 'a wonderful (if lazy) satirical writer', greatly encouraged her love of reading, and the talented actor, poet and journalist Richard de Zoysa introduced her to Shakespeare,

> for which I will always be grateful. [Richard] taught me to understand what the language meant and not to be intimidated by it.

Contemporary writers whom she admires, and who have influenced her as a writer include the novelists Anita Desai, Carl Muller and Michael Ondaatje.

Educated at St Lawrence's School, Wellawatte (from Montessori through to Ordinary Levels), Karen Roberts transferred to Muslim Ladies' College, Bambalapitiya to study at Advanced Level. She was eighteen years old in 'Black July' 1983, when the race riots occurred in which Sinhalese mobs were incited by elements connected with the Government then in power to torture and kill Tamil residents of Colombo and torch their homes. The peaceful Colombo suburb in which she lived with her family at the time is fictionalised as 'Araliya Gardens' in her extremely moving novel *July*, in which the deteriorating relationships between ethnic communities that had up to that time lived in amity and friendship, and the terrifying events of 1983 that resulted from uncontrolled communalism are recorded by a young writer on whose mind and memory they had obviously made impressions so powerful that it took the writing of a novel to exorcise them. *July* has been

translated into Dutch Portuguese, Spanish and Greek.

'I love travel says Karen Roberts, who makes a point of visiting Nuwara Eliya every time she goes 'home' to Sri Lanka. Her love of Sri Lanka's hill-country emerges in her first novel, *The Flower Boy*, which celebrates life on a tea plantation as it was lived before the Second World War, and tells the story of an unlikely friendship between two small children: the daughter of a British planter and the son of one of his domestic servants. Karen Roberts does not make the mistake of falsifying the unwritten 'rules' governing race relations at the time in order to give her book a happy ending, much as the romantically-minded reader might wish for it. What she does do is to evoke in unforgettable detail the magical beauty of the landscape that surrounds her young characters, and enter with sympathy and understanding into the pains and pleasures that attend the process of growing up with and among colonial realities. *The Flower Boy* has been translated into Greek, Spanish, Catalan, Dutch and Portuguese.

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Publications

July. Weidenfeld & Nicholson, UK. 2001. Novel

The Flower Boy. Orion, UK; Random House, USA. 1999. Novel

Dipti Saravanamuttu

Dipti Saravanamuttu, poet and fiction writer, was born in Sri Lanka in 1960. She attended Bishop's College, Colombo before she left the island for Australia with her parents, Chandran and Agnes Saravanamuttu, in 1972. There she attended school and university in Sydney. Mrs Harris, a teacher at Gordon Primary School, and Mrs O'Reilly, a teacher at Killara High School, encouraged her writing.

In 1982, she worked on a small newspaper, *Girls Own*, writing news stories and doing layout, and also worked as a clerk with the Commonwealth Public Service in Sydney. But she had begun writing poetry, and read her poems at the Sydney Biennale and at Writers Week at the Adelaide Festival. In 1983 she tried her hand at film-script writing, and co-authored a 10-minute script entitled *Devrim*. This was in Turkish with English sub-titles, and dramatized the dilemma of a young migrant woman who has to leave a situation of domestic violence. *Devrim* was one of ten films chosen to represent Australian women's films at the United Nations "Decade of Women" Conference in Nairobi in 1984.

In 1984, Dipti Saravanamuttu continued to write for film, becoming co-author of a 50-minute film script *Yasemin* while donating her services as a childcare worker to Elsie Women's Refuge in Glebe, Sydney. In the following year she worked as a journalist on *Tribune*, a Sydney newspaper, concentrating on women's issues and migrant welfare topics, but also writing film reviews and articles on international and current affairs.

In 1985 she returned to English studies, graduating with a First Class Honours degree in English from Sydney University in 1988: a year of achievement for this writer, which saw her thesis (on the British poet Geoffrey Hill) receive the top research mark of its year, and the publication of her first volume of poetry, *Statistic for the New World*. She began postgraduate study with a Commonwealth Postgraduate scholarship, while running an informal poetry workshop at Sydney University.

In 1989, awarded the Arthur Macquarie Travelling Scholarship (a Sydney University scholarship awarded to a poet or sculptor to allow them to undertake study and/or travel overseas), Dipti Saravanamuttu enrolled as a postgraduate at Queen Mary and Westfield College, University of London, while working, with the encouragement of her friends and acquaintances, and influenced by her reading of several Australian poets, on her second book, *Language of the Icons*.

From 1990 to 1991, she was a tutor at Queen Mary and Westfield College, assisting on an inter-collegiate course on "Women, Feminism and Writing". The latter involved weekly lecture/seminars held at Birkbeck College, and the topics covered were Literary Theory (with an emphasis on current feminist theory), Women's Writing, and Women's Writing World-Wide, which included writing in English by American, Indian, Canadian, Australian and African women. Returning to Australia in 1992, she worked as a tutor, coaching private students in English as a Second Language, while preparing *Language of the Icons*, her second book of poems, for publication.

Dipti Saravanamuttu spent the best part of 1993/1994 working on a book of prose poems for Papyrus Press, while engaging in part-time childcare work, and in 1994/1995 undertook attendant care work for Care at Home, an organisation that looks after elderly and disabled clients. After a year as a Public Relations Representative, she resumed postgraduate studies in Melbourne, where she is currently writing a thesis on Spirituality and Identity in Australian Landscape Poetry, as well as publishing review articles and her poetry.

Dipti Saravanamuttu has published two books of poetry, *Statistic for the New World* (1988) and *Language of the Icons* (1993). Her most recent book is a work of interlinked prose and poetry titled *Dancing from the Edge of Darkness* (2000). The poems in *Statistic ...* were published in Australia between 1981 and 1988, those in *Icons* between 1988 and 1993.

The poem from *Icons* from which I have selected an extract for presentation in this survey is closely related to Dipti Saravanamuttu's poetic sensibility. It seems to me to communicate an authentic impression of her personality and her experience, in the conversational tone adopted, and in the tug-of-war that can be sensed here between theory and creativity. Very few of her poems have reference to Asian icons or to Sri Lanka, a country which she has not visited for nearly twenty-four years. 'Landscape Art' seems to me, however, to be a poem to which most Sri Lankan readers would respond sympathetically, not least because it takes as its 'backdrop' events that are all too fresh in our own memories.

Landscape art

In '88, the Sri Lankan civil war
is your permanent backdrop
to reading eighteenth century novels
and theorising the (gendered) subject.
'Sinhalese subversives ... Tamil terrorists'
someone reads to the meeting, from
a conservative newspaper.
Listening to this stuff feels like
an exercise in learning how
the enemy thinks -
'Rhetorical indoctrination' you say
grimly, and everyone laughs.

You realise it can't be said exactly,
how it is to be here, stuck
between carnage, and theoretical commitment.
You'll do without Saturday night -
(drunks and lovers everywhere) but
some things never let up, as if
still wanting someone who's dead.
It's not so much altruism as
that you can't resist paradox, ever ...

The Sri Lankan security forces are absolved
of any blame for the kidnap
and murder of my cousin Richard.
More feasibly, Kristeva explains
that the celebration of love
as absence, as in the Song of Songs
had its earliest expression in Tamil
devotional poetry of longing
for the return of Krishna;
the truth-principle, pacifier,
translucent god with the sky-blue skin.

You're gratified to discover
that the tradition exists, even if
you write yourself out of it.
When Kristeva gets her style right
she's very methodical and precise
while hinting unmistakably
of strongly emotional elements.
You're as determined about
other people's freedom as ever
but on mapping these
mostly personal songlines
you know for certain
there's no such demon-dance
across her lucky heart.

Despite her impressive academic successes, Dipti Saravanamuttu regards herself primarily as a poet. Recognised as one of the most talented and interesting poets of the present generation in Australia, her writing has been rewarded by several writers' grants in 1984, 1994 and 2000.

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Publications

Dancing from the Edge of Darkness. Papyrus Publishing, Melbourne 2000. Poems and Stories

Language of the Icons. Angus & Robertson, Sydney 1993

These poems were first published in the following journals and magazines: *Hermes, Southerly, Scripsi, Salt, Meanjin, Otis Rush, Scarp* and *Overland.* They were also included in the following anthologies: John Leonard, ed., *Australian Verse: An Oxford Anthology,* Oxford University Press 1998; Michael Brennan and Peter Minter, eds., *Calyx: 30 Contemporary Australian Poets.* Paper Bark Press, Sydney 2000. Poems

Statistic for the New World. Rochfort Street Press,Sydney 1988.

These poems were first published in the following journals and magazines: *Overland, Hermes, Scripsi, Angry Women, Compass, Gay Information, Neos, P76, Surfers Paradise, Migrant 7, Post neo, Poetry Australia, Writers in the Park: The Book 1985/1986, Syllable, Outrider,*and *Otis Rush.* They have also been included in the following anthologies: Susan Hampton and Kate Llewellyn, eds., *The Penguin Book of Australian Women Poets.* Penguin Books, Sydney 1986; Jennifer Strauss, ed., *The Book of Australian Love Poems.* Oxford University Press, Melbourne 1993. Poems

Rita Sebastian

Rita Sebastian began her career in journalism as a sub-editor of the *Daily Mirror* (run by the Times of Ceylon), and subsequently became the Editor of the *Sunday Times.* Her position, says Eva Ranaweera, who interviewed her in 1991, was unacceptable to many in a society that did not believe a woman capable of heading anything more demanding than a woman's paper.

> Whenever an invitation to a function was extended to the *Sunday Times,* she was asked over and over again if she would connect [the caller] with the Editor. A gentle reminder that it was the Editor speaking rarely satisfied the person at the other end of the line.

Rita Sebastian's creative work began with the writing and publishing of *The Night of the Devil Bird,* a volume of stories that takes its title from a novella which begins the collection of eight prose pieces, each of the other seven being less than five pages in length. The novella is in essence the story of a love affair across the lines of race, religion and class, the two young people involved being Ananda, son of a Sinhalese shop-keeper on an up-country estate, and Saroja, the daughter of a Hindu Tamil family of workers on the same estate. Sebastian's story, however, is no romantic tale of star-crossed lovers: the barriers that keep Ananda and Saroja apart are the institutionalised structures of a colonial commercial enterprise that is now conducted in a 'free' and independent nation, the industry that produces Ceylon's famous tea. The first chapter bluntly details the essential features of a tea estate worker's existence: poverty, cramped quarters, lack of privacy, inadequate clothing, poor quality rations, unremitting routine, long hours of back-breaking work. Saroja's family lives its life according to an unchanging ritual:

> There was no clock in the house, but they knew exactly when it was time to leave for work. It was like having a built-in clock that regulated their every movement.
>
> Saroja put her brother's share of roti on to his plate, kept the tea warm on the dying embers of the fire, and got ready. The weather was often bitingly cold. Her saree wrapped tightly around her slim body would not keep off the chill creeping up her bones. A thick long-sleeved cardigan was buttoned down the front. Her father had bought the cardigan for her. It had cost him Rs. 20. It wasn't new. It had frayed at the neckline and the sleeve edges. But what did it matter. It kept her warm. Over her saree and round her waist she secured a piece of sacking. They all did to protect their clothing while they worked.

The wicker basket of the tea-plucker, so frequently pictured in brilliant colour in tourist brochures, is the badge of Saroja's oppression:

> Over her head went a short length of material tied like a scarf. She picked up the wicker basket from the corner of the room, balanced it comfortably on her back and secured the string attached to it on to her head, just above the forehead. Calling to Valli from the adjoining lineroom she stepped outside.

Ananda sees life from a quite different point of view. As a member of a majority community, the Sinhalese, he can afford to regard life as 'a challenge':

> At no time had he been the outsider. In both village and town he had seen the different communities live and work together. Of course there were the isolated instances of racial conflict but they were few and far between ...

Ananda is even able to 'easily shrug ... off' that time, almost ten years ago, when 'there had been a lot of arson and looting and killing': it had been an 'isolated instance'. His love for Saroja is strong enough, he believes, to surmount all obstacles. The story ends on an ostensibly happy and hopeful note, as the lovers are united, but too many ominous notes have been struck in the course of the story to allow the reader to share Ananda's optimism.

For reasons that were never explained, and remain unclear, distribution of *The Night of the Devil Bird* was stopped by order of the government then in power, and the book 'kept in cold storage' for over a year.

Rita Sebastian's second book was a novel, which avoided the political problem of race and focused instead on a human situation. *A Father for my Son* tells the story of a tourist in Sri Lanka who receives hospitality in a rural household, and betrays the trust placed in him by his hosts and their young daughter. 'It is written,' writes Eva Ranaweera, 'in a gentle style, and the characters that emerge are also gentle people'.

Rita Sebastian's non-literary writing includes a study of the impact of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka which, she believes, has been felt mostly by women. But, writes Leelangi Wanasundera, summarising this essay in *Women of Sri Lanka: An Annotated Bibliography* (see **General Bibliography**),

> the 'war' has also meant a radical transformation of the traditional roles of women as wives and mothers, as women have been recruited to serve in the 'liberation army' of the Tamil Tigers. In several battles, the 'Freedom of Birds' as the women's wing is called, have been as deadly as their male counterparts. The guns have become symbolic of liberation. On the positive side ... the conflict has erased some of the rigid caste barriers of the past; it has also seen the emergence of several women's groups gathering members from all walks of society in a common effort to protest against the disappearance of large numbers of young people, and to rehabilitate women who have lost their husbands, and promote amity between the communities.

Rita Sebastian has had her literary work published both in Sri Lanka and overseas. Her short stories have been broadcast by the Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation, and have appeared in Sri Lankan newspapers.

Publications

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'Ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka: The ecological and political consequences'. In *Development Dialogue 2* pp. 141 - 149. Non-Fiction

The Night of the Devil Bird and Other Stories. Niloo Bhatt, Colombo (n.d.) 59 pp. Short stories

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Maureen Seneviratne

A journalist by profession and a broadcaster, Maureen Frances (Milhuisen) Seneviratne was educated at Holy Family Convent in Colombo, and joined the editorial staff of the *Ceylon Observer* at the age of 17. Now retired from journalism, she chairs P.E.A.C.E., a non-governmental organization set up in Colombo for the Protection of the Environment And Children Everywhere. Much - though fortunately, not all - of this author's energy has been channelled in recent years into preparing and distributing P.E.A.C.E. publications advocating the protection of children's rights. (An example of this initiative is her book *Wednesday's Children: Some Case Studies of Sexually Exploited Children.*)

Maureen Seneviratne grew up in a home environment that was 'full of fiery discussions'. Her father (George Vincent Milhuisen) and her mother (Leah Catherine Muller Milhuisen) were both keen readers, and encouraged their daughter to read and write from a very young age. Reverend Mother M. Annunciation, the Principal of Holy Family Convent, Bambalapitiya, for 35 years (1929 - 1964), 'spotted what she called a talent and greatly encouraged me to write: I owe a great deal to her': Maureen wrote her first story at the age of ten. Reverend Mother M. Annunciation was, writes Maureen Seneviratne,

> an extraordinary woman by any standards ... She was my friend and mentor - and I was only 14 years old when she told me to 'concentrate on writing: your pen should be your livelihood'! She followed it up by putting me on the School Magazine Committee in 1947, the first mag to be brought out since 1941.

Also among the teachers at the Convent who influenced her were Daya de Silva (a graduate of Cornell University) and Eileen Dissanayaka Perera (an

English Honours graduate of the University of Ceylon, now Eileen de Silva and a poet in her own right).

The author's passionate interest in history, especially Sri Lanka's history, has resulted in such books as *Some Women of the Mahavamsa* (1969) and *Madam Prime Minister,* a biography of Sri Lanka's and the world's first woman Prime Mnister, Sirimavo Ratwatte Dias Bandaranaike (1973) and most recently, *The Island Story*. The last was published at a time, as Lalitha Witanachhchi noted in a review, when history had been dropped from the school syllabus: 'What passes as history is a fastforward run of events without the examination of their causes or their results'. *The Island Story,* well researched yet attractively informal in style, was intended to appeal to children, and give them an overview of Sri Lanka's cultural heritage.

Maureen Seneviratne's balanced perspective on history was particularly welcome when, at a time of ethnic and racial division in the country as a whole, it had come to seem impossible for Sri Lankans to write or think of the past without taking the 'side' of one ethnic group or the other. 'History teaches many lessons, and if those lessons are not learnt the consequences can be tragic,' wrote Witanachchi in her review, welcoming Maureen Seneviratne's short but fair-minded history.

Her abiding interest in history, and the fact that as a journalist she has for fifty years been close to political events and commented on them in the nation's newspapers with insight and acuity, has given this author a well-deserved reputation for accurate, honest and outspoken reporting that is rare at the present time among journalists working in Sri Lanka's highly politicized and ethnically divided society. She is one of the very few Sri Lankan writers who have not been forced by the island's lack these days of good publishing houses to publish their work privately:

> I have not paid for the printing of any [of my published books] ...In some ways I have been very lucky because from the very beginning I enjoy writing (anything, even a caption). I have a good readership, I am not interested in fame, I don't use my pen or computer or whatever to destroy others ... I have had a hard struggle throughout, and have had to build up from nothing on several occasions, but I am not angry or vicious about it.

For some years (in the early 1980s), Maureen Seneviratne conducted a Creative English Writing course, which she devised herself, encouraged in this initiative by Mano Muthukrishna-Candappa (see entry in this survey on Sharadha de Saram). The fiction-writers James Goonawardene and Punyakante Wijenaike were among those who lent their services as 'Resource Persons' to this course, which provided a 2-hour weekly session, with a different Resource Person present every week. Among those who enrolled in the course were many who later went on to careers in journalism, radio and television. The course played an important part in shaping Maureen Seneviratne's own career as a creative writer: while her writing on Sri Lankan history and places of historic interest had been published earlier (in 1979), her award-winning short stories, essays, and children's stories began to appear from 1984 onwards.

When *New Ceylon Writing* announced its readiness to publish the work of creative writers in English in 1970, Maureen Seneviratne was one of the first to respond, not only by submitting her own writing for publication, but with practical assistance. As one of the founding spirits of the English Writers Co-operative, Maureen Seneviratne helped to establish *Channels*, and continues to take an interest in the initiatives of the Cooperative. Her writing in both fiction and non-fiction focusses strongly today on issues of social justice, human rights, and the rights of women and children. Her stories and essays have been published in Australia, Canada, Germany, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Singapore, Sri Lanka and the United Kingdom. She has scripted features and written short stories and drama for local radio, and her short stories were broadcast over the BBC's 'World Short Story' program for several years. Her collection of stories, *Mists on a Lake,* won the Sri Lanka Arts Council Award for English Fiction in 1984 and the Sri Lanka National Library Service Award for English Fiction in 1986. In 1989 the Sri Lanka Arts Council Award for English Non-Fiction was awarded to her for *Sound of Echoes*. She has the distinction of being a recipient of a Hellman-Hammet Grant in 1995, this recognition from the Human Rights Watch Free Expression Project having

been earned by her work and writings on humanitarian and Human Rights issues.

In a recently published book, *A Lasting Storm: Sri Lanka 1948 - 2001*, the genres of autobiography, fiction, and history melt into one another as the author surveys the modern 'story' of her homeland and links it tellingly to the events of her own life. Maureen Seneviratne began writing this book primarily for the enlightenment of her grandchildren who had begun to ask *Why is it all war and death in our country? ... From the time we were born it has been war, death and bombs! War! War! So many uncles we know have died. Why this War?*

The book has been described by Goolbai Gunasekera as a book 'of contemporary history' that seeks answers to the question: how, when there is no 'personal animosity' against any ethnic group, 'are we so divided politically?' Carol Aloysius, somewhat mystifyingly, sees *A Lasting Storm* as a 'full length novel' that springs from the writer's own sense of 'overwhelming guilt that ... she and others of her ilk who lived in the same period of time when history was being written in this country, were somehow responsible for the events that transformed this once peaceful serene paradise into its present bloody, war torn state'.

Her only agenda, as Carol Aloysius observes, is 'to set the record straight on the events that had led to the present sorry state of our country'. Such an objective committed her to the survey of a wide range of events; and although small in size (165 pages), *A Lasting Storm* takes its reader back to the hopeful, heady atmosphere of 1948, when Sri Lanka (then Ceylon) became a free nation, before moving to the bloody 'ethnic cleansing' of 1958, the assassination of Prime Minister S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike in 1959, the youth insurrection of 1971 and, by way of the 'Black July' of racial violence that Sri Lanka experienced in 1983, and the eighteen years of ethnic civil war that resulted from it, to the present day. It demonstrates the writer's remarkable ability to look beneath the surface of events and discern the processes that have created the Sri Lankan society of the twentyfirst century. The economy with which the book is written and the reliability and balance of the author's approach to her controversial subject are signs of her maturity as a writer.

Very appropriately to a society that has become heavily politicized over the years since Independence, the events and processes with which Maureen Seneviratne deals in *A Lasting Storm* are political. Her ability to maintain a balanced perspective on causes and results, while at the same time writing with feeling of her personal experience of each event as it happened, is truly admirable. Not least among the virtues of this fascinating book is its usefulness as a reliable 'background' to a good deal of the writing covered in this survey: notably to the poetry of Jean Arasanayagam and the fiction of Karen Roberts.

Maureen Seneviratne's *Collected Short Stories* was published in 1999. A volume of *Selected Essays*, published in 2001, brings together her weekly contributions to public debate in newspapers and journals. Some of these 'essays'are autobiographical, others revisit some of Sri Lanka's ancient and modern sites of interest, all are informed by the writer's love of her country, and her pride in its richly multicultural heritage. One of these essays, extracted below, looks back with anger and passion to Sri Lanka's Independence Day fifty years ago, and brings forcefully home to readers - especially readers of her generation - their own responsibility for Sri Lanka's recent sorry history:

> Young students from the Colombo schools had been selected to give a drill display to mark the historic Independence Day; and were we not proud and passionate, the chosen ones, that morning in our white-spick-and-span and ties and ribbons of various hues representing our respective schools. We were young and joyous and the world seemed newly awake for us, the skies bright blue, not a cloud in them ... and that is how it all began.
>
> Did we in our 'intoxicating youth' sufficiently look into the reality of things that first Independence Day? We, the Class of '48 ... were simply very young, very merry and thought we were wise - but were not. We were not ... We marched in our folly to tear up the very fabric of our society ... and we listened to the leaders who were concerned only with their own survival in high places of power ... We who were very young and very merry in that momentous dawn of 1948, what have we been guilty of?

Of frittering away the opportunities we had. Of leaving it all to elders who were not always betters ... Of the folly of sheer acquiescence. Of unconcern, of unforgivable indifference to the gross injustices being perpetrated on minorities in this land ... And now, how are we paid for our foolish passion? By the ceaseless death of the young men. ('The Passion of Fools', 1998)

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Publications

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Ransiri Menike Silva

Born in Colombo in 1935, short story writer Ransiri Menike Silva had her early education at Dharmarajah College, Kandy, and Anuruddha College, Nawalapitiya. From 1944 to 1948 she was a student at Sivali Vidyalaya, Ratnapura, transferring in 1948 to Visakha Vidyalaya, Bambalapitiya. She was encouraged in her writing by her brothers, Tissa and Somasiri Devendra, by her friend and contemporary at Visakha, Lakshmi de Silva, and by her former teacher Mrs Agnes Abeyesekera.

Winner (with her story 'The Barber Shop') of the First Prize in an all-island short story competition sponsored by the English Association of Sri Lanka in 1990, Ransiri Menike Silva is a member of the English Writers Co-operative of Sri Lanka, and editor of a recent issue (Vol. 9, No. 2) of its publication *Channels*. Besides short stories, she has contributed many articles on topics of current interest to *Satyn* and to the business magazine, *Lanka Monthly Digest*.

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Eileen Siriwardhana

Eileen Siriwardhana writes in Sinhala and English, and is the author of several novels, short stories, poems and translations. (Among the English works she has translated into Sinhala are Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* and Alberto Moravia's *Roman Tales*). An eminent educationist, and former Principal of Visakha Vidyalaya, Colombo, she was the first winner of the D.R. Wijewardena Award for Fiction in 1984. The national honour for contribution to literature and the arts, "Kala Keerthi", was conferred on her in 1989.

The film version of Eileen Siriwardhana's first novel "Ahasin Polowata", subtitled "White Flowers for the Dead", directed by Lester James Peries, won the Akhnaton Award for Best Film at the International Film Festival in Cairo in 1978. Her latest novel, "Kshemabhumiya", has also been filmed.

Lakshmi de Silva, in her preface to *Realisation*, notes that many of Eileen Siriwardhana's poems focus on motherhood, love, and on religious experiences 'bordering on the mystic'. Her view that Siriwardhana's poetry, 'with its imaginative and reflective tendencies', directs the reader's mind towards tranquillity is echoed in an interesting review of the book by Sandadas Coperahewa, which takes the step (unusual in English-language literary criticism) of analysing the poet's work according to the enumeration by the Buddha of four types of poets:

> According to the enumeration [made by the Buddha in the course of a tribute he paid to Ven. Vangisa Thero, a scholar-poet whom he regarded as endowed with intuitive poetic ability], there are four types: Cinta Kavi (reflective poets), Suta Kavi (auditive poets), Atta Kavi (realistic poets) and Patibhana

Kavi (intuitive poets)...
In realistic poetry, things are represented as they really are, with a completely objective attitude, honestly. Reflective types are characterized by quiet thought and contemplative mood: they belong to the meditative type...

Coperahewa advances the view that Eileen Siriwardhana's poems, 'which exhibit robust memories of everyday life-patterns, manifesting powers of observation and perception', could be classified as 'Reflective', 'Sensitive' and 'Realistic'. He suggests that the poet's work is characterised by an 'over-riding necessity for self-analysis', and attributes this quality to her knowledge and awareness of Buddhist philosophy.

Coperahewa's further perception that her poetry conveys experience of 'a reality surpassing normal human understanding or an experience of a mystic aura' appears to link Eileen Siriwardhana's work with that of certain other contemporary Sri Lankan women writers (see entries on Erika Dias, Suvimalee Karunaratna, Damayanthi Ratwatte, and Ranjini Rebera).

Publications

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Charmaine Solomon

'Cooking is no less an act of love than writing a sonnet,' is the opinion of one of Sri Lanka's most internationally known female authors, the cookery writer Charmaine Solomon, whose *Complete Asian Cookbook* is famous around the world, and may be found in kitchens from Vladivostok to Vancouver.

The official reason/ excuse (if one needs to be provided) for the inclusion of Solomon in a survey of this kind is that she is not only a dedicated and gifted writer who represents through her books one of the most celebrated and revered of her homeland's arts, the art of cooking, and one whose publications have inspired other Sri Lankan women authors (see Yasmine Gooneratne's novel *A Change of Skies*, in which the heroine Jean Mundy adopts the celebrated Charmaine Solomon as her role model). Solomon is also a poet. She took the unusual step twenty years ago of publishing a book that combined her verse with her favourite family recipes: the result, titled *Love and a Wooden Spoon*, was published in Australia in 1981, and has been reprinted many times since then.

A poem titled 'Christmas' that ends this unusual book conveys a good idea of the nature of Charmaine Solomon's poetry, which consistently focuses on the links between family values, good cooking, and the pleasures of friendship:

Christmas time. The frantic to and fro-ing.
Party time. People coming, going.
The search for gifts, the money overspent,
and still the hard reality of mortgages and rent
and the inevitability of next month's bills.

Hangovers and digestive pills.
The weary thought, "It's only once a year, thank God."
Thank God indeed. We couldn't stand the pace of such
frenetic merriment too often or too much.

This is Christmas? It doesn't have to be,
and peace on earth can start inside of me
if I shut out the world's commercial din,
open my mind to let the Christ Child in.
While music blares in shops ablaze with light,
listen to the message of that dark and silent night.
Exchanging gifts, I must not fail to take
the Gift above all other gifts He gave for our sake,
to hear the strains of carols from afar
and look beyond the tinsel to the Star.

Most readers would agree, however, that Charmaine Solomon's most valuable contribution to the literature of Sri Lanka lies in her prose. Her essays on the culinary traditions of Asia, composed with verve and imagination, have the emotional range and atmospheric power of poetry for any reader who appreciates good cooking. A worthy successor to the celebrated Elizabeth David who reformed and revolutionised British cooking after World War I, her magnificent chapter on the cuisine of Sri Lanka is capable of bringing nostalgic tears to the eyes of all but the most profoundly alienated of expatriates.

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Publications

Love and a Wooden Spoon. Child & Henry Publishing Pty Ltd., Australia) 1981. Poems/autobiography

The Complete Asian Cookbook. Paul Hamlyn Pty Ltd., London 1976. Non-Fiction

Yasmin Tambiah

Born in 1961 in Colombo, Yasmin Vasanthini Tambiah writes as a poet, although her preferred art form, prose-poetry (as she terms it) may not qualify her for that nomination in a conventional way. Her professional training (see below) is in the field of Medieval European History, and her current occupation, apart from writing poetry, is researching the interplay of gender, sexuality, law and citizenship in a post-colonial context.

Yasmin Tambiah is the child of a Tamil/Sinhala marriage (the family home of her father, Dr Reginald Thangarajah Tambiah, Medical Officer, Sri Lanka Army, is in Jaffna; that of her mother, Sumana Mallika Amaranayake Hettiarachchi, Tutor in Public Health, in Makola). She was educated at Methodist College, Colombo, where she won the Ethel Eagle Memorial Prize for English Essay three years running (1976 - 1978); and subsequently at Smith College, Massachusetts (1980 - 1982, 1983 - 1984), the University of Sussex, UK (1982 - 1983), State University of New York (1985 - 1986), and Yale University, New Haven (1986 - 1994). She graduated with an Arts degree (B.A.) from Smith College in 1984, and received her doctoral degree (PhD.) from Yale in 1996. Her parents had a home in Colombo until 2000, when they moved to Australia:

> My parents and three siblings gradually dissolved their locational ties with Sri Lanka after 1983. But, with the exception of one brother, I don't know whether the rest of us (including me) have "arrived", in a definitive way, somewhere else.

Among the teachers who encouraged Yasmin Tambiah's writing at Methodist College were Marbit Gunasekera and Renee Perera. Writers who influenced her later creative endeavours were Michelle Cliff, Irena Klepfisz, and Adrienne Rich. The writers who actively encouraged her as a writer include Cheryl Clarke, Joan Nestle, and Dr Radhika Coomaraswamy

(Director of the International Centre for Ethnic Studies in Colombo), who gave Yasmin her first appointment following her graduation, and also encouraged her creative writing.

Travel is an important part of Yasmin Tambiah's life ('I travel wherever my work and favourite people draw me - Australia, Britain, India, Spain, Sri Lanka, Trinidad and the USA') and it often informs her creative writing 'in unexpected ways':

> I was in Spain in 1992, conducting archival research for a doctoral dissertation, and the research material as well as being a person of colour in continental Europe impelled certain pieces of creative writing.

Winner of the Astraea Lesbian Writers Award (Astraea Foundation, New York) in 1991, she has made many contributions to magazines, journals and anthologies. Naomi Holoch and Joan Nestle, joint editors of one of the anthologies, *The Vintage Book of International Lesbian Fiction* (1999), considered Yasmin Tambiah's prose poem "The Civil War" (reproduced below, with its American spelling altered to conform with English orthographic practice) 'a unique contribution to [their] volume'. Holoch and Nestle asked - and answered - some of the questions that Yasmin Tambiah's work is likely to elicit from many readers in Sri Lanka:

> How does a lesbian writer sustain herself in the face of complex and contradictory national histories and personal choices? In what ways does language both confine and allow for expression of the imagination? Through the use of vivid detail coupled with analytical language that here takes on an immediacy far removed from academic musings, Tambiah gives voice to crucial struggles that reach beyond national frontiers. (p. 127)

The Civil War

September 1984: Three months since I returned to Sri Lanka with an American college degree. The civil war has spilled beyond the Northern Province. Metal gates to my parents' house still bear the dents of rock-throwing mobs. There are axe marks on the wooden doors. New plaster hides a ceiling charred by a burning tyre. Embattled elsewhere I relive the horror of July 1983 through my siblings' eyes. It is difficult to articulate the deep loss within, the negation of familiar fictions, the awareness that exile in one's own country is even less bearable than at a distance. It is a loss compounded by my family's fear.

February 1985: Carrying the national ID card is mandatory. It will protect me from arbitrary arrest, they say. But the civil war has spilled beyond the Northern Province. Authorities have collapsed many identities into a Tamil last name. The card does not attest that I am also Sinhalese, speak no Tamil, and dream in English. It is silent on conflicting loyalties and the struggle to recover myself from colonialisms. I am reduced to someone else's definition, terrorized into keeping boundaries I neither constructed nor consented to.

December 1985: Four months in North America. White graduate classmates are puzzled that a twentieth-century South Asian might share the experiences of a Medieval Jew. Their imagination stops at my brown skin. There has always been a civil war beyond the Northern Province. Those at risk cannot afford ignorance. I have learnt to recognize the languages of domination and gather a community of resistance for a dangerous journey toward necessary transformations.(1988 - 1990)

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Publications

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"The Civil War". In *Conditions Seventeen* (New York, 1990), p. 102; also in Naomi Holoch and Joan Nestle, eds., *The Vintage Book of International Lesbian Fiction* (New York: Vintage/Random House, 1999) pp. 127 - 8. Short story

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"Transl(iter)ation I". In Naomi Holoch and Joan Nestle, eds., *The Vintage Book of International Lesbian Fiction* (New York: Vintage/Random House, 1999) pp. 129 - 30. Short story

"Transl(iter)ation II". In Naomi Holoch and Joan Nestle, eds., *The Vintage Book of International Lesbian Fiction* (New York: Vintage/Random House, 1999) pp. 130 - 31. Short story

Hasanthi Tennekoon

Hasanthi Tennekoon was educated at Visakha Vidyalaya. She is the author of *Mischievous Animals*, a book of illustrated stories, one of which, 'The Battle of the Ants', was published in *New Ceylon Writing 5* in 1984, when she was fifteen years old.

Her stories, which resemble Sinhala folk tales and the animal fables of Aesop in their brevity, simplicity and liveliness of presentation, usually make a moral point. 'The Battle of the Ants' is no exception. Neither Red Ant nor Black Ant, who meet on a 'single line of thread stretched between two bushes', will give way to the other. Argument is tried first, and when it fails, war is declared: compromise seems to be out of the question. Battling for their right of way, each insect loses the 'prize' he has been carrying, a pumpkin-seed and a dry crust of bread.

It is a story that, though simple in itself and simply told, resonated effectively at the time of its publication, the year following the race riots of 1983 which, as this survey indicates, have had a profound effect on the thinking of all Sri Lankan writers. In 2000, after eighteen weary years of ethnic strife, the moral lesson of Hasanthi Tennekoon's story is clearer than ever: *Only by being unselfish can heavy losses be averted.*

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Publications

Mischievous Animals. Privately published, Colombo 1984. Stories

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Jeanne Thwaites

Jeanne Cambrai (Daniel) Thwaites was born in Kandy in 1929, and holds triple nationality for Sri Lanka, the UK, and the USA, having lived in each of these three countries for extended periods of time. Her mother, Bertha Van Langenberg Daniel, and her uncle, Arthur Van Langenberg, were multi-talented members of 'a very talented family': they

> literally had every kind of talent, even athletic ability and wit. Arthur turned me on to the classics when he gave me *The Idiot* by Dostoevsky when I was seventeen.

It has been said (only partly in jest) of Arthur Van Langenberg, actor, director, story-teller *par excellence*, and man of the cinema and theatre, that in his day he influenced every creative person in the country.

An important focus of Jeanne Thwaites's literary admiration is the medieval English poet, Geoffrey Chaucer. Enchanted by *The Canterbury Tales* from an early age, she continues to regard Chaucer as '(with Shakespeare) the finest writer in English ever'. She particularly admires Chaucer's versatility - 'different people tell the stories in completely different voices'. Chaucer's 'simple story telling, always with a powerful undercurrent, is awesome, and I would like to write with that skill'.

Jeanne Thwaites's father, R.Y. Daniel, was an Oxford-educated scholar of the Western Classics, and a member of Ceylon's Civil Service. A prolific letter-writer, he wrote his privately circulated autobiography, 'A Letter to my Children', when he was 79. His admiration for his mother, a strong-minded Irishwoman, made R.Y. Daniel insist that his daughters should 'be strong, like her'. His daughter believes that he was 'initially attracted to [Bertha Van Langenberg] because 'she was such a powerhouse. He did not

like wimpy women'.

Of her early life, Jeanne Thwaites writes:

> We were a multi-cultural and multi-lingual family. My father was both colonised (Lankan) and a coloniser (CCS), within a caste/class society (English), yet never discussed class differences in daily life. We were the victims of racial prejudice from the English, yet we were very English in lifestyle ourselves. The resulting duality seems to colour my life and work. I seem to straddle subjects rather than take sides.

Growing up in a family of cultured and liberal views in the Ceylon of the 1930s, Jeanne Daniel only encountered sexist discrimination when she left Ceylon at the age of nineteen for Britain and the USA. There, she found,

> men treated women as jokes back then. They openly ridiculed us. Women also treated each other as second class citizens. My Scottish mother- in-law, for example, ridiculed me when I said I understood the theory of relativity after reading Life Magazine's explanation of it. She did not feel it was possible for women to understand such things.

Jeanne Daniel's first ten years of education were spent at the Presentation Convent in Kodaikanal, South India:

> Ten months in school, two months at home for ten years, starting [at the age of] six!

One gifted teacher who stands out in her memory was 'a Brahman' whom his students called 'Professor': '

> He was a brilliant maths teacher who told us stories of [Lord Krishna] if we finished our work early. He was teaching us Hinduism in an Irish Catholic convent! ... I was to learn later [that] our other education was full of misinformation and prejudice. On the other hand, we learned how to act like self-assured gentlewomen, and to speak clearly with an English accent - that has got me through difficult situations at times.

Early experiments in creative writing arose, as they so often do, from the habit of reading. While at school in South India, Jeanne Thwaites became 'a compulsive reader':

> I learned how to conceal a book under my arm or in my bloomers. I ... also [became] an expert burglar ... and broke into other girls' desks when they were on walks, to read their *Girls' Crystal Magazines*. These were forbidden reading, so no one could report a stolen magazine, or voice their relief when it reappeared as mysteriously.

She found secret hiding-places in the school where she could pursue her forbidden passion: a remote section of the school wall where she could sit hidden from view, the school bathroom ('hiding my book on the water tank when someone banged on the door'), and a 'crawlspace' under a staircase in which she had discovered two locked cupboards containing books, 'mostly Victorian adventure non-fiction'.

A school-mate at Kodaikanal was the first to turn Jeanne Thwaites' thoughts to serious creative writing:

> [Mhora] had a phenomenal memory, and after lights-out repeated whole chapters of books like *Little Women* and *Black Beauty* as if she were reading. She could [imitate] the different styles of famous writers, and while this earned her top marks every time I kept thinking about whether she knew what she was doing. She was shocked to hear I never re-read anything I wrote, so I first thought about self-editing and also about personal writing styles because of Mhora . . .

When she left school, it was to begin work as a secretary, but Jeanne Thwaites's main career, which started in 1965, was as a professional photographer. She also worked as a teacher and lecturer, conducting one-day photography seminars and workshops, and tutoring students in English at all levels: graduate students, disabled students, and remedial students. She had, however, always been strongly attracted to writing, and made 'some

unsuccessful tries' in her twenties. Her first venture into print was a text for *Mother & Child*, a photo-essay showing the women and children of Ceylon published by A.S. Barnes. Advised by a New York literary agent that she could make more money at writing than at photography, she secured some light-weight paperback book contracts, more than half of which have not been published due chiefly to changes of editorial policy. At the age of 58 she closed her studio and joined the Peace Corps, working in the Philippines, an experience she found 'truly torturous':

> One problem was that I kept expecting the sweetness of the Sri Lankan people in villages, and found instead harshness and cruelty.

Quitting the Peace Corps after six months in order to study at Laney College, she studied for a year and a half before transferring to the University of California, Berkeley.

Here Jeanne Thwaites met several well-known writers who taught at Berkeley, among them Maxine Hong Kingston, Ishmael Reed and Leonard Michaels, the last of whom she regards as one of America's best short story writers:

> [Michaels] most of all, helped me drop a tendency to trivialize what I was saying. My break-through was a short story, 'The Train to India'. He threw the manuscript at me and said, "That's it. You've got it!"

A year later, Jeanne Thwaites won several prizes for prose literature, including the Eisner Prize for a work in progress. 'My entry included 'The Train to India'. I was the first student to win [the Eisner Prize] two years in succession.' Awarded International and National Newspaper awards for the best Special Edition of a newspaper (the *Aqui Santa Maria Times*) in 1974, she reviewed books for four years for the King Features Syndicate, owned by the Hearst combine, and in 1993, having completed her Master's degree in English at the University of California, she came to Sri Lanka on a Fulbright Scholarship to study diaries and private writings belonging to the time of the British Raj.

Writing under three names (Jeanne Thwaites, Jeanne Cambrai and James Haight) Jeanne Thwaites is the author of several publications. Her output includes articles, essays, and reviews (of most of which she has kept no record), a collection of short stories titled *It's a Sunny Day on the Moon* (which includes 'The Train to India', and with which she won the 1998 Gratiaen Prize), a memoir, and a murder mystery set in Sri Lanka (in press). The astonishing variety of her stories, their ability to cheer, move, appall, surprise, and amuse the reader (and sometimes to do all these things at once) is both impressive and refreshing. Encountering her prize-winning collection of stories during the last weeks of working on this survey, I found myself filled with regret when the rapidly thinning pages indicated that the pleasure of reading them had, in the natural course of things, to come to an end.

In his Foreword to *It's A Sunny Day on the Moon*, Professor Thiru Kandiah (a judge on the Gratiaen panel in 1998) remarked on the 'consummate artistry' with which Jeanne Thwaites harnesses a natural literary talent that is then

> drawn out and applied to a wide range of happenings, emotions and experiences to bring them and the diverse characters involved in them immediately and convincingly alive. We encounter the most ordinary of happenings and people in these stories. But we are led by deliciously textured language and by turns of words, phrases and events which again and again surprise us ... to experience them with a sense of wonder and freshness even as our minds remain acutely sensible of their complexities. More, we begin to see these old and familiar things as we have never seen them before, so that we discover, for the first time as it were, what it was that we thought we had always known about them.

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Publications

'Blue Dress'. In *Good News*, Oakland, CA., USA 1992. Short story

'Brown Shoes'. Read over the BBC World Service Radio, London, UK 1995. Short story

Horses of the West. Photo-essay on horses of Central California. A.S. Barnes, New York 1968. (Jeanne Thwaites). Non-Fiction

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Once is Enough. Manor Books, New York 1973. (Jeanne Cambrai). Non-fiction

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(Jeanne Thwaites. Photographs by Thwaites illustrate this anthol ogy). Non-Fiction

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Starting and Succeeding in Your Own Photography Studio. Writers Digest Books, Ohio 1984 (Jeanne Thwaites) Non-Fiction

'The Need for Cottage Industries in Sri Lanka'. Article published in an European magazine to encourage donations to the Good Shepherd Order, date uncertain) Non-Fiction

'The Train To India'. In *Three Penny Review*, Berkeley, CA., USA 1991. Short story/ Autobiography

'Uncle Cyril's War'. In *Amerasia Journal*, Los Angeles, CA.,USA 1992. Short story/ Autobiography

'Women Ranchers'. Article in *The Western Horseman* (date uncertain). Non-Fiction

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Kandiah, Thiru Foreword to *It's a Sunny Day on the Moon* (1999) pp. 11 - 15

Sybil Wettasinghe

Author and illustrator of over a hundred books for children, Sybil (de Silva) Wettasinghe was born in Panadura, Sri Lanka, in 1928. She was educated at Gintota, at a Buddhist co-educational school before transferring to Holy Family Convent, Bambalapitiya, where her imaginative mind, her sense of humour, and her remarkable talents as an artist were recognized and encouraged. 'Mrs Eileen de Silva influenced me as a writer. [So did] Sita Jayawardena'.

Family members and others who encouraged or influenced Sybil Wettasinghe include her husband Don Dharmapala Wettasinghe, H.D. Sugathapala, D.B. Dhanapala, and Denzil Peiris.

The national and international awards she has received for her work are almost beyond counting. They include State Literary Awards in 1971, 1984, 1991, 1994 and 1997; the Isobel Hutton Award for her Asian children's story, 'Vesak Lantern' (1965); third prize in the Noma Concours Picture Book Illustration Competition (1982); Japan's special prize for the Best Foreign Children's Book (1986); a prize for her illustrations to a story, 'Hoity the Fox', awarded by the Ministry of Education and Culture of Japan (1994); an Honourable Mention at the Biennale of Illustrations, Bratislava, for 'Deeptha Lama Maga', a children's Bible (1993); a Zonta Award for Women of Achievement (1993); the Sarvodaya Trust Fund award for literature and art (1995).

Sybil Wettasinghe's professionalism and expertise in her field have been widely recognised and honoured abroad. In 1983 she was awarded a British Council Visitorship, and read a paper on writing for children at the Council, travelling in the same year for 3 months on a scholarship awarded by the Blutenberg International Youth and Children's Library, receiving in addition a visitorship from the Cultural Ministry of East Berlin. She served

as a jury member at the Teheran Internation Biennale of Illustrations in 1993, and of the Noma Concours Picture Book Illustrations Competition in 1990, 1992, 1994 and 1996. She served as a member of the planning committee and Editorial Board of the Asian Cultural Centre (UNESCO) for books on ecology Trees, Water and Earth. She was commissioned by ACCU to conduct children's book-publishing workshops in Laos and the South Pacific in 199- and 1998, and was invited to East Berlin to serve on the International Board of the Congress on Books for Children in 1994. She was invited to New Delhi in 2000 for the World Book Fair Seminar, where she presented a paper on Children's Literature in Sri Lanka; and to the Norway Literature Festival in 2000 to introduce her writing to an international audience. She was invited to New Delhi in February 2001 to present a paper on Picture Book Illustrating for Children at the Indo-Austrian seminar on Picture Books for Children.

It is no surprise to discover that travel is 'an important part' of Sybil Wettasinghe's professional life. She goes to schools all over the island (except, these days, the North and East) in order to make readership surveys and meet her young readers. She has contributed writing and illustrations to journals and magazines in New Delhi (1998, 1999) and Singapore (1993, 1994); and to the Asian Book Development *Newsletter* (1999). She is a member of the Sri Lanka section of the International Board of Books for Young People (IBBY), and has served as its President for five years from 1990 to 1995, serving also as Secretary of the Sri Lanka Children's Book Trust.

The most famous of her books, and also the best-loved in Sri Lanka and elsewhere, is probably *The Umbrella Thief*, which has been published in 12 countries: Japan, China, Korea, Singapore, Thailand, Hong Kong, Guam, the Philippines, Norway, Sweden, Denmark and the USA. As a writer and creative artist who has worked as a newspaper journalist for 25 years (1952 - 1977), attached to the English and Sinhala newspapers of the Associated Newspapers of Ceylon, Ltd., Sybil Wettasinghe's work is, as she says herself, 'difficult to classify' or categorise by genre. I have not attempted to do so here, preferring instead to let her remarkable record speak for itself, and on its own terms.

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Prianthi Wickramasuriya

Born in Sri Lanka in 1958, Prianthi Sunimal Perera Wickramasuriya is a writer of short stories and poems who works as a system analyst cum programmer at the University of Kelaniya's Computer Centre.

Deciding around the age of twelve that she wanted to write stories, Prianthi Wickramasuriya did not at first receive much encouragement from a mother who appears to have been more concerned with grammatical and orthographic errors in her daughter's 'scribblings' than with their literary quality. Matters improved around 1994 when, at Mrs Wickramasuriya's suggestion, a story was 'typed' on the family computer and sent to *Lanka Woman*, which to the author's surprise, accepted and published it. 'Since then, I have not looked back'.

Her primary school years were spent at St Paul's Girls School, Waragoda, Kelaniya, after which Prianthi Wickramasuriya transferred to Musaeus College, Colombo, moving thereafter between three of Colombo's principal Buddhist girls' schools, Sujatha Vidyalaya, Visakha Vidyalaya, and (once again) Musaeus College before gaining admission to the University of Kelaniya to study mathematics, Further Mathematics and Physics. She graduated with a BSc. degree in 1983 and, following a period of four years during which she combined a temporary tutorship in the Mathematics Department with permanent employment as a computer programmer, she gained a British ODA scholarship to study for an MSc. degree at De Montfort University in Leicester.

One of those talented and dedicated writers who have been denied publication by the sad state of publishing in Sri Lanka today, Prianthi Wickramasuriya has a sheaf of unpublished short stories and poems of considerable quality to which she is constantly adding new work. A high point in her career up to date was reached when her short story, 'An Old-Fashioned Bookshop!' achieved publication in D.C.R.A. Goonetilleke (ed) *Sri Lankan Literature in English* (1998).

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Publications

'An Old-Fashioned Bookshop!' In D.C.R.A. Goonetilleke, ed., *Sri Lankan Literature in English 1948 - 1988*. Department of Cultural Affairs, Colombo 1998. Short story

Stories published in *Lanka Woman*.1994 et seq. (details not available). Short stories

Punyakante Wijenaike

Author of over a hundred published short stories, one of which ('Possession') was adapted into a Sinhala teledrama by Somaweera Senanayake, and of several novels, one of which (*Giraya*) was adapted into a teledrama by the film-maker Lester James Peries, Punyakante Malathi (Kotelawala) Wijenaike is one of the few English-language writers of Sri Lanka whose fiction has bridged the island's language gap.

Born in Colombo in 1933, strongly influenced in her outlook and ideas by her parents (especially her father Justin Kotelawala, a business man), and married at eighteen to a husband (Ananda Mahanaga Wijenaike) who encouraged her literary interests, she began writing fiction in the early 1960s: she has been writing continuously for nearly forty years. She was educated at Visakha Vidyalaya, Bambalapitiya, and at Bishop's College, Colombo, and regards Pauline Hensman, the gifted and idealistic teacher of English to the senior classes at Bishop's, as a major influence in her writing life. J.L.C. Rodrigo, Classics Professor at the University of Ceylon, reviewed her first book in favourable terms, and Denzil Peiris of the Lake House Group of Newspapers encouraged her to go on writing and publishing. Also recalled with gratitude is the encouragement given her by V.O. de Alwis. The author who, above all, has influenced her writing is the American novelist Pearl Buck, elements of whose well-known novel *The Good Earth* (made into a film starring the actor Paul Muni) are easily recognisable within the rural Sri Lankan setting of Wijenaike's first novel, *The Waiting Earth*.

The world outside Sri Lanka 'has no connection with my work,' says the author, whose story 'Retreat', published in *New Ceylon Writing* in 1970, brought her work for the first time to the attention of readers outside Sri Lanka only in 1971. Although she had lived most of her life in Colombo, Wijenaike's first tales took up traditional village themes. Sri Lanka was

undergoing a post-Independence cultural resurgence at the time which laid emphasis on the health and wholeness of rural ways of life, but Wijenaike's choice of rural settings for her stories, and rural characters with which to people them was not a fashionable affectation on her part. Following her marriage and her entry into the social life of the city ("Life began after leaving school," she says), her contact with rural life was necessarily maintained indirectly and at second-hand, as it is with most urban writers. It remains, however, a powerful source of Wijenaike's inspiration, drawing its strength from the warm relationships possible between village people and their rural landlords under the old Sri Lankan feudal system of social organisation. The wit that salts 'The Tree Spirit' is authentic village humour, the domestic life sketched in *The Waiting Earth* is as genuine in its restrictions and insensitivity as it is faithful to the smallest details of everyday living arrangements.

Wijenaike's first collection of stories, *The Third Woman* (1963) came to its first reviewer, J.L.C. Rodrigo, as

> a breath of fresh air: original, with considerable merit, eminently readable. (She) might have spent all her days among the folk, so real is her understanding of them all - the cultivators and carpenters, the hopper-women and servant-girls - whom she so sympathetically depicts. They are real and they are alive. Her prose ... is crystal clear, free of artifice and the affectations of style. There is, they say, a prose for every occasion. Here is clearly the prose for stories of rural Ceylon.

An American critic, John Halverson, resident in Sri Lanka at the time of the book's publication, fancifully but aptly compared the stories to 'Ratnapura gems',

> in style simple but sharp and lucid, in subject matter minute, restricted entirely to village and provincial life, but radiant with inner light. Her world is a woman's world. She is a restrained writer in both style and content. The quiet suffering, endurance and courage, the joys and sorrows of the peasant, the poignancy of the elemental - these are her concern; the moving depiction of these aspects of life is her achievement.

Halverson compared Wijenaike to the American writer Willa Cather, whom she resembled, he believed, in 'universalising completely provincial lives'.

Punyakante Wijenaike's emergence in 1966 as a novelist surprised a Sri Lankan reading public which was not prepared to expect anything of value in the way of serious fiction from someone - especially a woman - of wealthy background and an affluent way of life. The reaction to *The Waiting Earth* even of J.L.C. Rodrigo, who had reviewed her first book so favourably, was typical in its implied suggestion that rich society women cannot possibly have what it takes to be good writers:

> *The Waiting Earth* is a remarkable book, and one which we would hardly have expected from the social and educational background of the writer. It shows a [rare] depth of insight and a maturity of wisdom. Most of her years she has passed in Colombo 7, [a suburb] unfortunately identified with cocktails and canapes, and the mannerisms of London, Paris and New York. From these affectations she has shaken herself free. A good story, clearly told, living and breathing characters, picturesque writing and ... the chance of a really good cry.

Rodrigo's allusion to 'Colombo 7' and its 'cocktails and canapes' sums up the life-style of the rich, who were presumed (by those who did not happen to live in that well-heeled suburb) to spend their time playing tennis and socialising at the Women's International Club, swimming at the Colombo Swimming Club, and participating in an endless round of cocktail parties and fashion shows. 'The chance of a really good cry' is another put-down, directed this time at sentimental 'women's novels'. Despite the reviewer's evidently kindly intentions, his comments are a clear indication that Wijenaike, a pioneer burdened with irrelevant stereotypes relating to social class and gender, would need to create the taste by which her work could some day be properly judged in her own country.

Fortunately, recognition came unexpectedly from abroad. Alastair Niven, a British academic with interests in Commonwealth and Post-colonial literature, was one of the overseas critics to whom I introduced Wijenaike's

work at ACLALS Conferences in 1971 and 1977. Very much impressed by her writing, he devoted an essay to it in *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, finding in its author 'an imagination of astonishing range', and in *The Waiting Earth* itself 'an unflattering portrait of the mindless cruelty which can prevail in a rural society'. Noting that Wijenaike's world 'does not fundamentally question the authority of the gods', Niven believed the excellence of the novel to lie in 'passages of unaffected prose which lucidly analyse states of mind'.

Intensely private in her life and in her writing ("I am happiest when I am alone. I made this discovery at an early age"), Punyakante Wijenaike inherited the leisure and affluence into which she was born from her grandfather, described by her in her memoir of her childhood and adolescence, *A Way of Life* (1987) as a member of `a large middle class family with little means' who, with studiousness and dedication built himself a distinguished career as a surgeon, and acquired wealth through marriage with a rich wife. An essentially simple man in his personal tastes and manner of living, but needing `perhaps to keep up with his new neighbours' who inhabited mansions nearby, the author's grandfather designed to his own specifications in 1920 the imposing Colombo residence decorated with `pillars and hallways', furnished within with imported fittings, carpets and ornaments, and outside with stables and garages for the family's numerous horses and cars, in which Punyakante Wijenaike was born.

A Way of Life depicts a lonely child in a wealthy household in the city, isolated from her parents and her siblings, seeking satisfaction through escape into imagination and fancy. The life she led as child and adolescent in this 'massive, sprawling, strong' house in which, despite its opulence, she seems to have been unhappy and ill at ease in her relationships with her parents (who appear in Wijenaike's account of them to have been a rich, fashionable, pleasure-loving couple leading separate, intensely crowded social lives with little time to spare for their shy and introspective daughter), encouraged her to live in a world of her own creation: 'Imaginary characters were my playmates most of the time'. Many hours were spent by her as a child in the company of domestic servants, and in listening to their stories she accumulated, perhaps unconsciously, much of the material for her early fiction.

The house in which she grew up appears to have played an important part in setting the mood and atmosphere of Wijenaike's fiction. Although the house itself is modified in the novel *Giraya* (1971) to suit a rural location and an older architectural style, and stripped of its imported bric-a-brac to render it appropriate to the tastes and habits of a feudal aristocracy scornful of the 'new money' of the city, the claustrophobic atmosphere it generates in which the novel's aristocratic characters live out their unhappy and twisted existences is recognisably similar to that which blighted the author's childhood:

> I turn and face the *walauwe*. In daylight it looks worn and crumbling. The white trellis-work below the gutters has rotted away and only stumps remain like old decayed teeth. The gutters themselves are rusty and full of holes, so that they turn into spouts during the rainy season. Distemper has peeled off the damp walls and the broken windows have been carelessly patched up or held together with cardboard, string and nails ... The rounded pillars that support the roof over the porch bears signs of age and neglect, and the wooden trellis running along the length of the front verandah needs a coat of paint. The family crest stamped on the face of the porch is covered with a fungus.(p. 17)

Despite such oblique criticism of Sri Lankan feudalism as this passage appears to convey, and despite the fact that she is writing in an increasingly politicised society, Punyakante Wijenaike's writing avoids overtly political themes. On the contrary, even in such works as *The Rebel* and *The Enemy Within*, which are set in periods of extreme political violence, her concern is consistently with the human, the intimate and the personal. The intensely claustrophobic atmosphere that pervades most of her fiction illustrates her sensitivity, as Edwin Ariyadasa has said of its effect in *Giraya*, to 'the helplessness of a group of men and women enmeshed in the web of an outmoded social system'.

Wijenaike remarked to Alastair Niven, who interviewed her in 1975:

> Lots of people think I've had an easy life. But life is a tragedy. It has good moments, but time is always passing. I try to analyse why I'm not really happy. But life remains a depression.

In the face of that 'depression', writing comes to this author as 'a relief of sorts'. It has become over the years 'a way of life':

> If I don't write even a few lines for the day, I feel the day is uncompleted. Financially it is of no profit. Rewards - moneywise - are few. So I do not think I can call [my writing] a 'profession'. Its rewards lie in the purpose and meaning it has brought into my life, the enrichment of life itself. In attempting to see or hear or 'feel' through other people I have trained myelf to look beyond myself and my immediate world.

Although Alastair Niven considered Punyakante Wijenaike in 1977 to be 'one of the most under-estimated fiction writers currently at work in the English language', the last twenty years have improved that situation of critical neglect. In one of the first local critiques to take Wijenaike's work seriously, Ryhana Raheem and Siromi Fernando observed in 1979 that an interest in village life

> predominantly characterises Punyakante Wijenaike's writings. It is an interest which is a curious ambivalent mixture of instinctive sympathy for, and detachment from, a way of life that is almost as strange to the city-born writer as Samoa was to Margaret Mead. As a woman, her interest in this way of life centres on the undercurrents that make the pattern of this life. Her gaze falls on the trivia that occur and recur in village society - the births, the wooings, the marriages, the deaths.

In the best stories in *The Third Woman* they noted that 'psychological realism of character and action happily coincide to create a meaningful and closely wrought pattern of significance'.

'Ukku and Ukkurala', a story of a mahout's love for his elephant, and 'Siripinahamy', a tale of an old beggar woman's love for her stray, outcast

dogs, reveal (say Fernando and Raheem)

> her ability to hint at the underlying, often tragic forces that belie humanity's attempt to better itself. It is a pessimistic view, expressed through the relationships that constitute a person's life. As a woman, she embodies this concern by portraying not the abstract, but the little, seemingly trivial domestic decisions and actions that contribute to the pattern of life.

Fernando and Raheem's discussion of Punyakante Wijenaike's work up to 1979 is the most discerning analysis of it that has come under my observation. They discriminate tellingly between the 'quiet strength' of Wijenaike's first novel, *The Waiting Earth*, and the 'unnecessary melodrama and inconsistency of plot and character' that flaw her second, *Giraya*, and demonstrate how and why the realistic picture of village life presented in the former 'shows the development of the author, as does her successful portrayal of more complex characters':

> In a Sri Lankan village, the houses, the village shop, the fields and the village well form important focal points of village life. In [*The Waiting Earth*], ... Wijenaike creates a constant movement between these and other locations, thus recreating the sense of activity and life that goes on in a Sri Lankan village. [As a result], the village emerges from its shadowy remoteness to become a more real and dynamic world.

The character of Sellohamy in this first novel wins the critics' unqualified admiration.

Punyakante Wijenaike claims no 'high endeavour' and no 'moralising'. She writes, she has said, in order to entertain her readers. 'The characters and the incidents in my books are real to me' (Preface to *The Waiting Earth*); and it seems her intention to make them as real as possible for her readers. Striving towards greater and greater realism, she avoids the traps of 'literary' or merely decorative writing, and in her stories (though with less success in her novels) she reflects the nuances of Sinhala idiom and speech-rhythms in English. Her interest focuses steadily on character, its unpredictable vagaries, its hidden and unproclaimed strengths, and its human variety. Her best stories pursue this interest, as may be seen in 'The Retreat', a tale which focuses on the ignorant resentment of an illiterate monk when light, learning and true Buddhist principle invade his sanctuary in the person of a young scholar; in the folk-quality of 'The Tree Spirit' and 'The Promise', tales which rest on contrasts of character in the first, and a subtle exposition of craft in the second; and 'The Visitor', a tale of mystery and weird occurrences which carries a gem in its heart, Wijenaike's indirect exposure of her narrator's vanities and sexual frustration.

Wijenaike takes the subjects for her stories from the contemporary life around her, and in recent years has focused her attention, though not always with complete success, on social issues. *The Rebel*, for instance, is a tale set during the time of the youth insurgency of 1971, and the writer's difficulty in creatively imagining the sensibility of young people from a social class so removed from her own makes itself very evident: she cannot draw here on the rural background which is, comparatively, much more familiar to her. Still, the experiment was worth making; and the fact that Wijenaike learns from her failed experiments becomes evident in her most recent novella, *An Enemy Within* (1999).

On 31 January 1996, the Central Bank building in the heart of the business district in the city of Colombo, was partially destroyed by terrorists in a raid by suicide bombers of the LTTE. As Carl Muller described the incident, hundreds of people lost their connection with the ground 'as the floors broke away, the mezzanines disappeared, [and] the escapes jammed'. Although small-scale in comparison with the terrorist attack on the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York that occurred on 11 September 2001 (and hardly noticed by the world's media at the time) the significance of this act of destruction is certainly comparable to the New York disaster in terms of the psychological trauma and economic damage it caused in a society that had already lived through eighteen years of terrorism and ethnic warfare. Many people were injured, many lives were lost.

'An Enemy Within', a novella published three years after the Central Bank bombing, renders this national disaster in fictional terms. It gives its name to a volume containing four other short pieces: a novella titled 'Falling in Line'; two short stories, 'Duminda' and 'Anutta'; and a verse. The fact that the author's brother was among those who were physically injured in the resulting chaos, may well have contributed to Wijenaike's sensitive and moving account of it in 'An Enemy Within'. Wijenaike chooses to work through the experiences and recollections of both the 'enemies' (the three 'black tigers' on their suicide mission) and their 'targets' (the victims who, by chance or circumstance, happened to be in the area at the time and either died or were maimed as a result of it.

It is an ambitious structure, and Wijenaike shows herself capable of handling it effectively. That hers is a balanced view is indicated in her presentation of Mrs Gunasekera, the widowed mother of Renuka, a working girl who died in the bomb blast. Mrs Gunasekera's reaction is emotional: she convinces herself (as many otherwise sensible and rational Sinhalese people did at the time) that Tamils in Colombo had advance knowledge of the LTTE attack, and therefore, unlike the Sinhalese, were able to avoid being in the city at the crucial moment. Mrs Gunasekere's instinct is to go out and kill her Tamil neighbours. Luckily for all concerned, she remembers in time that Thurairajah, one of those same neighbours and a Tamil colleague of her dead daughter's, had travelled to work in the same vehicle as Renuka and had died in the explosion.

Such balanced and mature handling of the emotionally-charged states of mind which constantly skew race- and class-relations in present day Sri Lanka represents a distinct advance on Wijenaike's outlook and practice in *The Rebel*.

Carl Muller, reviewing this book, remarked that

> Punyakante has lived again the torment, the hell of that terrible Wednesday ... Here [is] a new kind of writing - a literary act of redemption, for the author also seems to die within its covers, becoming one with the horrors, the deaths, the sins of this country, dying with the dead if only to save us from horrors yet to come.

While Muller dwelled on the emotional power of 'this superb book', Tissa Jayatilaka analysed its structure (an episodic novella, sandwiched between a short story -'Duminda' - and another novella - 'Falling into Line'), and praised the author's technical skill in 'presenting the tragedy through the delineation of the trauma and travails of several non-combatant citizens caught in the cross-fire of political violence':

> In the several episodes of woe presented in [*An Enemy Within*], time past and time present criss-cross, merge and mesh in such a manner as to give the reader the feeling that time, like the hands on the clock-tower at Janadipathi Mawatha after the bomb, is standing still.

Jayatilaka regards this juxtaposition of the past and the present in the lives of the afflicted as 'cleverly and effectively done', and added that 'It adds a welcome depth to Wijenaike's technique'.

Critical reactions to Sri Lanka's most prolific English-language writer are still somewhat mixed. Despite his praise of Wijenaike's ability to convey atmosphere and to 'express vividly the physical [and] emotional tragedy arising out of political bestiality', Tissa Jayatilake detects in her work 'a lack of harmony between her thoughts and her words' (1999). 'Punyakante Wijenaike does not appear to be deeply versed in literature or literary criticism,' D. C.R.A. Goonetilleke noted in 1991, conceding however, that 'she is a natural and original writer'. Including her story 'The Third Woman' in an anthology of new writing from Sri Lanka that he edited for Penguin India, he wrote of it that

> she gets inside the skin of the peasants and powerfully suggests a theme - unmotivated evil - whose import is not limited to the peasantry. The loose domestic relations depicted in [this] story have an actual basis in the 'upcountry' areas of Sri Lanka. What the narrator regards as his everlasting love for his mistress is

> shown up by the writer's irony (operating beyond the narrator's consciousness) as infatuation. The story is sombre, but it is not cynical or despairing. It is informed by Wijenaike's compassion, her main strength as a writer.

Tissa Jayatilaka (1999) perceives Wijenaike's strength to lie elsewhere: in the 'good plot and sound characterisation' which mark her most successful works. His criticism is directed to the 'infelicities of expression' which, from time to time, undoubtedly prevent her writing from achieving its potential. Sri Lanka's need for good publishing houses that could provide writers with professional literary editing is certainly evident when Wijenaike's published fiction is compared with novels and stories from other parts of the postcolonial world. Jayatilaka pinpoints this when he states that she

> has the potential to produce a major and significant work of fiction. She is ... capable of plumbing the sombre depths of human experience and exploring the dark passions lurking within us. Regrettably at most times, the language in Wijenaike's fiction does not rise to the level that her creative imagination does.

In addition to her several published volumes of short stories, Punyakante Wijenaike has published over a hundred stories in newspapers, journals and anthologies in Sri Lanka and overseas. They have been broadcast locally as well as on the BBC Overseas Service. Journals and magazines in which her work has appeared include *Commonwealth Currents, Journal of Indian Writing* (1988); *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* (1977); *New Ceylon Writing, Khotpahha* (Russia, 1964), *Kunapipi, Esteem Magazine, World of Buddhism, Voice of Women, Asia/Pacific Literature for Young People* (1993), *Four Hemispheres* (anthology of stories from around the world) 1971; *Phoenix, Navasilu, Channels,* and *Options.*

Her stories have also been included in the following anthologies: Y. Gooneratne, ed., *Stories from Sri Lanka.* Heinemann Hong Kong (1979); D.C.R.A. Goonetilleke, ed., *Sri Lankan Literature in English 1948 - 1998;* D.C.R.A. Goonetilleke, ed., *Penguin New Writing on Sri Lanka* (1996); D.C.R.A. Goonetilleke, ed.,*Modern Sri Lankan Stories* (1996); A. Halpe, ed., *Contemporary Sri Lankan Short Stories* (1990); A. Rutherford, L. Jensen, S. Chew, eds., *Into the Nineties: Post-Colonial Women's Writing* (1994); J. Thieme, ed., *Contemporary Commonwealth Fiction* (1989); R. Wijesinha, ed., *A Selection of Sri Lankan Stories in English* (1992); R. Wijesinha, ed., *Breaking Bounds* (1998)

In 1985 Punyakante Wijenaike received a 'Woman of Achievement' Award, and in 1988 the Government of Sri Lanka conferred on her the national honour of 'Kala Suri Class I'. She served on the judging panel for the Commonwealth Writers Prize (Eurasia) in 1989, and in 1993 chaired the judging panel for the Gratiaen Award in Sri Lanka. She has served on the Jury for the President's Award to Sinhalese cinema, and is a member of the Arts Council panel. She is a member of the Sri Lanka branch of the Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies, and of both the English Writers' Co-operative of Sri Lanka (on behalf of which she has edited *Channels*) and the Sri Lanka English Writers' Workshop. In 1994, her novel *Amulet* won the Gratiaen Award, and in 1996 she was joint winner of the Commonwealth Short Story competition for Radio for Sri Lanka.

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Kamala Wijeratne

The Smell of Araliya, Kamala Wijeratne's first book of poems, was published in Kandy in 1983. Born in Ulapone, Kandy, she received her education in Kandy and Gampola, and graduated from the University of Ceylon, Peradeniya with a General BA degree, English being one of her subjects. She has a Diploma in Education and a Master's degree in Education from the same University.

After teaching for over twenty years, she joined the Teacher Training College, Penideniya, as a Lecturer in English, and later worked at the National Institute of Education. She is a writer of plays, poetry and short stories, is a member of the English Writers Cooperative of Sri Lanka, and has edited *Channels*. Her output has suffered, however, according to Eva Ranaweera who interviewed her in 1991, from a lack of both time and financial means:

> [Her] writing is done mainly at night after house chores are completed. Her family was not encouraging [to her creative interests, being] critical of the money spent on printing ... She finds sales of her work difficult to handle and sadly admits that she cannot make a living out of her writing ... Problems of domestic chores and ... economic struggles have retarded her growth as a writer. There is no professional body to handle her publications and [their] distribution.

It is hardly surprising, given these circumstances, that Kamala Wijeratne titled a collection of her poems published in 1988 *That One Talent*, quoting Milton's sonnet of near-despair, 'On His Blindness'.

The poem which represents her in this survey was written in Colombo in July 1983 and takes the form of a letter to a neighbour who emigrated to the West, following the burning of her house during the race riots of 'Black July'. The poem interestingly links together such burdens of the householder's life as 'the water bill [and] the errant tenant' with those other 'trammels that unleash the beast in man' and have, in the case of her friend, led to the destruction of her home. 'Dear Mabs' was published in *New Ceylon Writing 5* in 1984.

Dear Mabs

Dear Mabs
Can you remember
the last time we met
over the ashes
and the smoking debris
of what was once your home?

Painfully you built it
year after year
adding bit by bit
as your resources permitted
and filled it with your presence
to give it the feeling of home.

That grim day
under the mournful splatter of rain
your hand felt clammy to my touch
your brow when I kissed it was stone-cold
but the tears that sprang to my eyes
brought no answering wetness to your own
you did not lament or protest.

I hung down my head
in misery and shame
the weight of history made my shoulders sag
its pages heavy with the grim saga of our war-torn races.
But you did not droop

for dispossession had made you free
free of the water bill, the errant tenant
and all trammels that unleash the beast in man.

You held your head erect
and there was grace in your bearing
you gave your two hands
one to the daughter
one to the ageing mother
and supporting both
you set forth
your face to the west.

You did not tell me
where you would begin all over again
whether you would pick up
and how you would go on.

I lingered on, the smoke choking me
I remembered that drawing room
the twilight filtering through the west window
the fading sunlight a rainbow on the pane
How you used to talk on as the shadows deepened around us
I listened and there were moments
when we did not speak at all
but sat companionably side by side
and let the night come down on us.

For hours I stood there
aimless, alone and benumbed
Shaking off the dull paralysis
I saw the charred skeletal walls
and the shadow that stretched over the mountain side
and the fear of the cemetery was on me.

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Christine Wilson

Christine Frances (Spittel) Wilson, writer and painter, is an author of Dutch Burgher origin. She is the daughter of Dr Richard Lionel Spittel and Claribel Frances van Dort Spittel, and is, like her distinguished father (physician, surgeon, anthropologist and classical scholar) a novelist. Born in Colombo, she was educated at Bishop's College, Colombo, and subsequently at Roedean, in Brighton (UK), where a sympathetic teacher, 'Miss Mellanby, always encouraged me to write'.

From an early age Christine Spittel travelled extensively in Britain and Europe with her parents, visiting 'the great cities, their museums, theatres and historical sites'. In the company of her husband, Major Alistair McNeil Wilson, she has additionally visited countries all over the world: Africa, Asia, Australia, Canada, the Caribbean, Korea, Japan, the Philippines, New Zealand, South America, and the USA. 'We always searched for things of interest, away from the tourist track'.

The travels with which Christine Wilson is most closely associated in the public mind, however, are the expeditions she undertook with her father and her husband, and often on her own, to locations all over Sri Lanka. 'Jungles, Veddah country, [going] with them in search of their old caves and seeing how they lived) communities of *rodiyas* and *kinnarayas*, were visited regularly, as were the National Parks, in which we took a great interest'.

"Take me with you on your jungle trips," Christine Spittel begged her father,

> who was forever going on twice-yearly missions to his Veddas ... He took me on the toughest Vedda trip he ever made. For the first time I felt every tentacle of my being sentient, quivering. Sights, sounds, feelings, [the senses of] hearing, touching, smelling, [the emotions of] fear and joy were more alive than they had ever been.

Dr Spittel's 'missions' to the Aboriginal people of Sri Lanka, whom he made the special subject of scientific study and also of his fiction, introduced his daughter to a strange and unforgettable world that overlaid the stories by 'Andersen, Grimm and the rest, all carefully chosen, voraciously read', that had been the staple of her childhood reading. It was a world that moved to the beat 'of true stories of a forgotten race told by my father, a frail man with dreams in his eyes':

> I see firelight touch strange figures crouched round my father, bare bodies floured with jungle dust, darting eyes aware of infinitesimal jungle sounds. "Veddas", he says to me, "hunters of wild food". I accept, not knowing, listen to a voice mesmeric with picture-evoking words that make me see, feel the pulse of a jungle I long to visit.
>
> He imitates the timid cry of a mouse deer; draws a quick sketch of it, makes me imagine an elephant as it breaks through a wall of trees and out of sight. In the wild lands I know there are bear, leopard ... I have seen their pictures.
>
> "How would you describe them?" he asks. "Now you tell us a story."
>
> A rush of breathless words flood from me. I'm stuck. And then, "Bunting?" my parents ask. From this grew my own stories. Written on scraps of paper, anywhere, any time.

'Home' for Christine Wilson was 'a library rich with books on Sri Lanka, the classics, new writing':

> I followed my father's habit of jotting notes in a special notebook; pencilled passages that struck me; delved into Encyclopedias, fragments from the Greeks, Romans; I learned to travel with a searching eye, and write about it for the

newspapers ... I sat with a Baby Corona outside a tent and wrote. My articles and stories were published, but gradually the pupil was getting restless.

I was up against the writer of a number of published books. Now when his pencil slashed my work, I grew rebellious, yet troubled. What now?

A distinguished Professor in Scotland set me straight.

"Write what you know, and feel," he said. "Forget the articles. Write a novel set in your island. Write fearlessly. It's a lonely journey."

Besides her parents, those who encouraged Christine Wilson in her career as a novelist included Stuart Wavell, a BBC producer; Shaun Mandy, a writer and editor of the *Times of India*; and Edward Scouller, a literary professor and lecturer in Glasgow. While in Scotland in 1948, she had enrolled in Edward Scouller's Second Year course in Creative Writing in Glasgow and had won First and Second Awards for her short stories. (The 'articles' Scouller advised her to 'forget' were the numerous contributions to magazines and journals such as the *Times of India*, *Times of Ceylon*, and the *Daily News* that had occupied her time, details of which are now irretrievably lost.) She joined the Glasgow Writers Group and began to write creatively: today, her interest in creative writing as strong as ever, she is a member of the English Writers Workshop in Colombo, and the English Writers Cooperative.

Taking Scouller's advice, Christine Spittel began to write of 'home':

I wrote of courage. Of a whole industry that was born on land that had lain fallow through a millenium. I wrote of a Paradise, the Hortons of 1944, which I knew the people of another day would never see as it had been then. All my books were set in Sri Lanka. I have no idea what my publishers felt about Colonialism; the books were accepted.

Her best-known work of fiction is *The Bitter Berry* (1957), a romance set in colonial Sri Lanka (then Ceylon). Its principal characters are drawn from the British planting community of the hill country, and the 'bitter berry' of the title is, of course, the coffee berry, the cultivation of which attracted many Europeans to Sri Lanka, eager to make their fortune -

"I'm a property owner, Tom. Eight hundred acres of the sweetest land man ever saw. Coffee! Coffee in Ceylon, where money is to be had for the asking, and the sun shines all day ...

As it happened, the sun clouded over and the money dried up when Ceylon's coffee estates were blighted by *hemileia vastatrix*. Some of the planters, facing ruin, planted tea instead, and established the world-renowned tea industry that has been the island's principal source of revenue for the better part of he twentieth century. Sara Courtenay, looking back over her years in the sland, remembers the early pioneering days of coffee-planting, and reflects that there might have been a mysterious 'power' about coffee, a power

that made men forget that anything existed beyond the terrain it reigned over; that offered them in return for its promise of wealth the denial of home and children, plain comfort and the amenities of civilisation, infinite hardship and solitude, sweat, toil and lifeblood.

Behind her stretched the twenty or thirty long years of planting in this country, with its despairs and its frustrations. She saw the bearded pioneers in their jungle-surrounded mud-and-wattle cabins - an endless chain of men dying of dysentery and fevers, cholera and ... loneliness. She saw others grow rich beyond their wildest dreams, and others still, selling up and returning home with their dreams shattered.

She and Tom and their generation had risen, phoenix-like from the ashes of that previous generation of pioneers; yet in essence, their lives repeated the pattern of the first. What of the next generation?

What, indeed. A novel such as Karen Roberts's *Flower Boy* takes up the question and answers it, significantly not with the 'voice' of the European planter but that of the indigene.

The Bitter Berry has found a new generation of readers since its reprinting in 1999. Although he claimed to detect a 'faint' resemblance to the British popular novelist Barbara Cartland in Christine Wilson's diction, Carl Muller praised her for the careful research that has gone into the writing of this 'period' novel, and yet is carried so lightly; for sustaining her reader's interest in the plot; for her love of detail; and for 'her way of matching ravage and serenity'.

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Lalitha Witanachchi

Born in 1927 in Bandarawela (birthplace of her mother, Gunaseeli Lankatilleke), Lalitha (Karalliadde) Witanachchi was initially encouraged to study and write by the male elders in her family, notably her grandfather (John Christopher Lankatilleke) and her father (A.B. Karalliadde, Kachcheri Mudaliyar). She was educated at Girls' High School, Badulla (1932 - 1935), and at Hillwood College, Kandy (1937 - 1945), benefiting from the active encouragement of several teachers, among them Mrs Isabella Innes, who came to Hillwood from Edinburgh University; Miss Mary Dorothy Rigg, principal of Hillwood and a graduate of London University, who taught the senior forms and helped Lalitha edit the school magazine in 1943 and 1944; Miss Kathleen Tyler, who taught geography and encouraged Lalitha to read; and Mrs Lance Fernando, who taught English in the junior forms before her marriage, and maintains her interest in the writing of a talented student. In later years, the scholar and translator Lakshmi de Silva has proved a constant source of encouragement.

As a school girl, Lalitha won prizes for English continuously from 1937 to 1945, and Literature prizes from 1940 to 1945, before entering the University of Ceylon in 1946, winning the University Entrance Exhibition for that year. She graduated with a BA Honours degree in Geography in 1950, later taking a Diploma in Education in 1963 at the University of Ceylon in Peradeniya, choosing English Methodology as her specialization. She taught English and Geography at various schools in Sri Lanka from 1950 to 1980 before spending two years (1980 - 1982) in Nigeria as Senior Lecturer of English and Geography at Haliru Abdu Teacher's College in Sokoto. On her return to Sri Lanka, she worked as a feature-writer and sub-editor until 1994 at Lake House, Colombo, occasionally contributing to the *Daily News* portrayals of people and experiences encountered during her years in Africa. One of her assignments

at Lake House was her editorship (as 'Aunt Lali') of the Junior Page of the *Daily News*.

Lalitha Witanachchi's career as a writer has grown naturally out of her Buddhist background, her educational and professional training, and also out of the places to which her work as a teacher has taken her. Repeated visits to Karalliadde (her father's birthplace), the sacred city of Anuradhapura, where she spent part of her childhood and five years after her marriage in 1951, and to which she returned to teach at Anuradhapura Central College, and her experience of Nigeria, have all provided her with material for her writing.

Several interesting journalistic pieces have come from her sojourn in Africa and Austria: these include 'Two sons, far faraway' (1981), 'Wednesday's Wife' (1986) and 'Girl among the Dahlias'.

In an article published in 1992, Lalitha Witanachchi described the manner in which a novel by Charles Dickens became the foundation of Senior School Certificate study in a Sinhala-speaking school in the North Central Province of Sri Lanka:

> The text [the students] should have done these past ten months was *A Tale of Two Cities*. I began to read: "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times. It was the age of wisdom. It was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity. It was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us ..."
>
> I then asked the class: "Can anyone give the meaning of `despair'?"
>
> There was no answer.
>
> "The meaning of `incredulity'?"

Still no answer. The silence was complete. I asked the class in Sinhala whether they had done this chapter, and one bright boy with a mischievous glint said months ago the teacher had read parts of the book but that he had been transferred, and they had not done anything more.

Their exercise books showed that not many exercises had been done after May when the master had been transferred, but what little grammar he had done had been done with great care. This was a plus point ...

There was not much time to waste. I decided I would leave out the first chapter and get on with the story. Far into the night I used to read the book and decide what parts should be left out and what parts should be explained.

Dictation, transcription, *precis* writing and summaries were all based on this text. By this means I knew the children would become familiar with their text. It was hard work every day but each day I felt that my students knew that if we both worked together and if they did the exercises I gave them, they would soon master the book.

("My Days at Anuradhapura Central")

Her stories for children draw without sentimentality on the rural way of life Lalitha Witanachchi knew in her own childhood. They end on consistently happy and positive notes, while truthfully indicating the changes that modernity has brought. In 'The Return of the Sparrows', a story included in *Rays of Sunshine and Other Stories for Children*), a fourteen-year-old village boy working as a domestic servant in a high-rise building in the city watches a television documentary about the building of the Victoria Dam in the Dumbara Valley, and suddenly realizes that he is seeing images of his ancestral village of Teldeniya, soon to be inundated by the flood-waters of Victoria. With his employers' permission, he takes his leave for the New Year early, and returns to the village he has not seen for two years. When the bus breaks journey in Kandy, Siyatu spends nearly all his salary on gifts for his family: 'All this cost money, but he couldn't go home empty-handed, especially for the New Year':

> He was excited as the bus took him nearer home. He went past Digane. He noticed that the passengers were suddenly quiet. Not one of them uttered a word. He looked out of the window. He could not believe his eyes. All the trees were cut down, and all the houses were broken as if there had been a terrible earthquake.
>
> "All this area will be submerged when the reservoir fills up," said someone near him. Panic seized [Siyatu]. Would his own home be destroyed like this? And where could his people go? A fierce pang of pain shot through his heart.

This story, which could have ended on a tragic note of despair and loss, ends positively, as Siyatu meets his family again, finds that they have coped resourcefully with the inevitable changes brought upon them by a technological age, and is reunited with them in a foreshadowing of the New Year celebrations to come:

> It was Siyatu's turn to give his gifts. He opened his bag and gave the [chintz] cloth to his mother, the sarongs to his father and grandfather, and the dress to his sister. They were very pleased.
>
> He knelt before each one of them, and offered the sheaf of betel, and received their blessings.
>
> His grandfather touched his head gently and said, "Now I can die in peace for the sparrows have returned to their nest."

As the last sentence of the story indicates, the tale takes its title from that familiar image of rural life, the clay pot which Sri Lankans place on the outer wall of their homes, in city and country alike, to attract the house-sparrows (symbols of prosperity) who will, they hope, build their nest and rear their young in it.

Little Bamboo, a Buddhist story for children, is a moral tale about friendship and service as trees in a forest grove in Halloluwa learn to co-exist and delight in each others' indiviuality. Somewhat reminiscent of G.K. Chesterton's much anthologized poem 'The Happy Tree', but happily devoid of that poem's tragic ending in which the 'happy tree' is chosen by evilminded men to become the cross on which Christ will be crucified, Lalitha Witanachchi's story of a bamboo that weeps, neglected by her companions, until she is felled and made into a Vesak lantern to illuminate the joyful celebrations of the Buddha's birth ends on a tranquil, happy note.

Lalitha Witanachchi's story 'The Truth' won first prize in the *New Ceylon Writing* short story competition of 1984. Written out of the sorrow and shame that assailed many Sinhalese writers during the anti-Tamil pogroms of 'Black July' 1983, it has been translated into German, French and Italian, and has been subsequently published in the Swiss journal, *Wenderkreis*. This early success was followed by many others: Lalitha Witanachchi has also won the 1992 Esmond Wickremasinghe Award for Outstanding Journalistic Writing in English for 'My days at Anuradhapura Central', an article published in the *Daily News* of 25 May 1992; a State Award for Short Stories (National Arts Council, 1992); and a State Award for Children's Stories (the Arts Council of Sri Lanka, 1993). In 1993 her volume of short stories, *The Wind Blows Over the Hills,* was judged co-winner (with Carl Muller's *The Jam Fruit Tree*) of the first Gratiaen Award for Outstanding English Writing.

The eight stories in this prize-winning book show, writes Lakshmi de Silva in her Foreword,

> an impressive variety of moods and styles. 'The Truth', generated by the riots of 1983 and 'The Tip of the Iceberg' by the insurrection of 1971 respectively record and analyse the history of two outbursts of violence; the latter is noteworthy because it does not focus on violence, but more chillingly on the forces that impel it. It is once again the author's awareness of impulses that run beneath, yet close to the surface which makes 'A Matter of Pride and Prejudice' masterly in its subtlety; it is a spare hint in a cosy domestic setting of the disruptive and destructive power of regional loyalties. In our cultural context, the pot of milk overflowing on the hearth, symbol of abundant prosperity and gladness, and milk flowing wasted in the river are inescapable associations clustering around the seemingly slight ... story with its harmless act of violence.
>
> A contrast to these stories ... may be found in the second spring (or perhaps Indian summer) of a graduate teacher in 'The Horoscope' and the narration of a mysterious brief encounter in 'The Open Door'; the 'Tale of Gawwa the House Builder' is touching but toughly realistic, while 'The Cock that crowed too loud', with its vivid evocation of Nigerian life and landscape presents the richly comic dilemma of a Buddhist faced with the killing of a fowl soon to be doomed to the pot.

One of Lalitha Witanachchi's stories, 'The Paddy Bird', focuses upon the changes that overtake a quiet Kandyan village with the building of the Victoria Dam. As Lakshmi de Silva observed when reviewing the collection in which this story appeared, the author is aware that 'different times are simultaneously operative in the island', that values conflict - those of the conservatives to whom the Dam symbolizes 'this erosion of [rural] culture and ways of life' being opposed by those who take a longer view - 'that is what our great kings did a thousand years ago'. The same reviewer found that the book as a whole,

> whether at the level of individual or communal life, is satisfying because it has the texture of reality.

Lalitha Witanachchi describes herself as a creative writer who writes for pleasure in her free time. She considers short story writing to be her forte, but writes poetry as well. Her poems include 'Ganta the Stranger', 'Requiem for a Valley' (written for Karalliadde village, when it was inundated by the waters of the Victoria Dam), 'The Shepherd Boy', verses to commemorate events in her family life, among them 'Upa Paramitha' (dedicated to her son who donated a kidney to his brother, thereby saving his life), 'Reflections in my Garden' (a memorial poem on the death of her husband Douglas

Dharmadasa Witanachchi), and 'Song of Freedom' (written for the Lankans in Soto to be sung on Independence Day, the four stanzas of which are reproduced below):

Song of Freedom

The drums shall beat in Lanka
Where peace and justice reigns,
No more do fetters bind us,
No more are we in chains,
As hand in hand together,
We take our stand again,
To rise up as one nation,
in the isle of Taprobane.
Chorus:
Then let us march together,
From distant shore to shore,
Where each man knows his brother,
Not strangers any more.
Where each man knows his brother,
Not strangers any more.

Let's sing of our dear homeland,
Her rivers, lakes and streams,
Her forests and her woodlands,
The land of all our dreams.
A land of great compassion,
A land of righteousness,
Of diverse faiths, whose people
Tread on the paths of peace.
Ch.

From vale and plain and mountain,
Freedom bells shall ring
And every crystal fountain
A song of joy shall sing.

Of an undivided nation,
A people dignified,
Of hope and inspiration,
No race or creed divide.
Ch.

From church and mosque and temple
From every woodland shrine,
A free and peaceful people
For unity shall strive,
In the island of Sri Lanka,
Set in the deep blue sea,
A land of swaying palm trees,
A land where men are free.
Ch.

As editor of the *Daily News* Junior Page, Lalitha Witanachchi wrote a weekly letter, poems and stories for children, editing also the 'Poya Page' and 'Letters to the Editor', writing occasional feature articles and reviews of current publications, including successive numbers of *Channels*, the creative writing journal published by the English Writers Co-operative of Sri Lanka (two of which are listed among her publications below). She is a trustee of the Children's Book Trust.

Lalitha Witanachchi's significant non-fiction publications include *Customs and Rituals of Sinhala Buddhists* (privately published), 'The changing landscape of the Mahaweli' (in C. Aloysius, ed., *Observer Pictorial 1996*); 'My days at Anuradhapura Central' (published in S. Urugodawatte (ed) *C.W.W. Kannangara Felicitation Volume: The Story of Free Education*, Past Pupils Associations of Sri Lanka Central Colleges, 1992, p. 33); 'The Spirit of Vesak' (in *The Buddhist Vesak Annual 1999* Vol. LXIX, No. 1 (Colombo YMBA, 1999, p. 37; 'When Avuruddha smiled among the dandelions', a feature article about Vesak celebrations of the past in her home province of Uva (published in *The Island*, on 12 April 1998, p. 7); and 'The Postman's Ring', a moving account of the effect upon her family of an episode in her father the Mudaliyar's official life, when the impending execution of a

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