

THE CEYLON JOURNAL



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Edited by
Avishka Mario Senewiratne



2024



Dedicated to the memory of
Charles Ambrose Lorenz (1829-1871)

Artist, musician, writer, lawyer, statesman, press baron, social reformer, one who coined the word 'Ceylonese', whose works enriched a nation's identity and inspired the formation of
The Ceylon Journal

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avishkamario@gmail.com

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Undated 19th century photograph of **Charles Ambrose Lorenz** from the vintage photography
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No. 295, Biyagama Road, Pattiya, Kelaniya

Contributors

Prof. C. R. de Silva

Professor Emeritus, Old Dominion University, USA, having served as Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs and Dean, College of Arts and Letters at that institution. Formerly Dean of the Faculty of Arts at the University of Peradeniya

Prof. K. D. Paranavitana

BA (Hons) (Peradeniya), PhD (UNSW-Australia), D. Litt (Rajarata University of Sri Lanka)
Former Deputy Director of the Sri Lanka National Archives, Former Professor of Humanities, the Rajarata University of Sri Lanka

Hugh Karunanayake

BA (Peradeniya)
Formerly worked for the private, public and government sector in Sri Lanka and Australia. A respected antiquarian

Dr. Buddika Dassanayake

MBBS (Peradeniya), MD (Colombo), MRCS (Eng)
Senior Lecturer, Department of Surgery, Faculty of Medicine, University of Peradeniya
Honorary General, Hepatobiliary and Transplant Surgeon, Teaching Hospital Peradeniya

Dr. Tharindree Fernando

MBBS (Peradeniya), Sirimavo Bandaranaike Specialised Children's Hospital, Peradeniya

Prof. Sandagomi Coperahewa

BA (Colombo), MA (Lancaster), MPhil (Peradeniya), PhD (Cambridge)
Senior Professor (Chair) of Sinhala & Head, Department of Sinhala, University of Colombo

Malaka Talwatte

BEng (Hons)(Warwick), MSc (Warwick), Chair - George Keyt Foundation

Manohara R. de Silva P. C.

Attorney-at-Law

Avishka Mario Senewiratne

BA (UWS), CPL/IR (CAASL), Independent Researcher, Founder/Editor of *The Ceylon Journal*

Nilantha Perera Palihawadana

BSc (Hons) Civil Engineering, PG. Dip (Project Management), GMICE(UK), Assistant Project Manager – Melbourne

K. K. S. Perera

Senior journalist, Award-winning author, Former Corporate Director.

Capt. Elmo Jayawardena

Formerly Airline Pilot and Instructor of Air Lanka and Singapore Airlines, Award-winning author, and Founder/President of CandleAid Lanka

Dr. Srilal Fernando

MBBS (Cey), MRCP, DPM, MRCPsych, FRANZCP

Consultant Psychiatrist in Melbourne since 1988, formerly Consultant Psychiatrist at General Hospital Kandy, Antiquarian

Ramla Wahab-Salman

BA (Hons) History (Lady Shri Ram College for Women, Delhi), MA History (School of Oriental and African Studies, London). Executive Director of the American Institute for Lankan Studies (AILS) in Colombo

Chandran Rutnam

Film maker and entrepreneur. Chairman of Asian Film locations Services and Asian Aviation Centre.

Ashan de Alwis

LLB (KDU) (reading)

Dr. Kanchanakesi Warnapala

BA (Hons)(Peradeniya), MA(USA), PhD (USA), Head of the Department, Department of English and Linguistics, University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Sri Lanka

*I offer a voice, O Lanka,
I, child of an alien isle,
For my heart has heard thee, and kindled,
Mine eyes have seen thee, and smile;
Take, Foster-Mother, and use it;
Tis but for a little while.*

-W. S. Senior, *Call of Lanka*

Patron's Message



The Ceylon Journal is the result of the realization by a diverse, multi-disciplinary group of professionals that much of the country's rich and vivid history, culture, value base, behaviour and habits of mind remain left to be researched and written about.

It will be necessary to note that this initiative had originated from a highly talented, multi-skilled young person, still in his 20s. This is Avishka Mario Senewiratne. One of his great talents is a natural research orientation, pertaining to this whole field based also on wide reading and the ability to establish relevant connections among disparate material.

He has written several articles pertaining to several persons both local and foreign, who had lived within the last two hundred years in this country, and who had contributed in meaningful ways to shape the country, adding to its diversity and richness. He has also written about iconic old houses and mansions with fascinating histories. His great concern in our nation's interest necessitated him to endeavour on this venture.

The group he has gathered to go on this journey of exploration include a diversity of ages and varied experiences from the young to much older persons, who have bonded as a team, with a common belief that what is being envisaged in this journal is of great importance, and requires further discovery, research and publication, as an important contribution to public education and awareness.

The articles appearing in the journal will mainly be by persons with distinctions in their fields. The pages of the journal will also be open to younger persons of talent, who could make relevant contributions from different perspectives.

The editorial board intends to build up an article bank to ensure future sustainability. The journal is not a donnish academic journal. The writings are aimed at the intelligent professional and student who while adding to their knowledge would gradually realize the value of the uniquely rich and diverse culture of their country and take pride in it.

Desamanya M. D. D. Pieris

B.A. (University of Ceylon - Peradeniya), D. Litt (Honoris Causa) University of Colombo, D. Litt (Honoris Causa) University of Westminster, UK, Senior Honorary Fellow of the Postgraduate Institute of Medicine, Sri Lanka, Distinguished Senior Fellow of the Institute of Security Studies, Sri Lanka, Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Management, UK, Formerly of the Ceylon Civil Service and Sri Lanka Administrative Service

Introduction

“I was convinced that Ceylon is the cradle of the human race because everybody there looks an original. All other nations are obviously mass produced.”

– George Bernard Shaw, in a letter to Jawaharlal Nehru, 1948

It was only a few months ago that I came across a scarce book at one of the second-hand bookshops in Maradana. The book, by B. R. Blazé, was called *The life of Lorenz*. Though I had heard of the man once labelled by some newspapers as the ‘Greatest Ceylonese of the 19th century’¹, I did not know all the details of the most illustrious and diverse life of Charles Ambrose Lorenz. He was a young man when he first started a much-promising Journal called *Young Ceylon* in 1850. Lorenz and some of his most erudite friends at the Colombo Academy (Royal College) were the pioneers of this journal. Its purpose was to shape some sort of identity for the natives of the country during the daunting days that followed the 1848 rebellion. I was intrigued by the sense of heritage and romance emanating from the articles in *Young Ceylon*. It ranged from history, literature, folklore, music, drama, social reform and a wide range of subjects on Ceylon (as Sri Lanka was then called). This is what deeply inspired me.

Lorenz and his friends published *Young Ceylon* at a time when literacy levels were relatively low and only a small percentage of the population was considered an educated class. It was an even smaller fraction that could read English. Nevertheless, the impact the journal had in creating a strong sense of identity among the population was significant. The British felt challenged as there rose among the people a strong band of Ceylonese with a great sense of national identity. They began to play a major role in the Legislative Councils. Indeed, the pen had achieved what the sword could never achieve in colonial Ceylon. The British respected and reckoned the rich heritage of the country. Most of their civil servants, including George Turnour, J. W. Bennet, James Emerson Tennent, J. P. Lewis, C. J. R. Le Mesurier, Hugh Nevill and H. C. P. Bell made immense contributions by documenting historical narratives and stories while also giving valuable accounts of events and offering their own perspectives on the country and its people. For centuries before that the Lankan story was preserved by many chronicles, verses, inscriptions and palm leaf manuscripts. By the dawn of the twentieth century, Sri Lanka was well established in its identity and historical awareness. With the establishment of the University system, more scholars emerged in a variety of fields covering a wide gamut of subjects. We have benefited immensely from academics ranging from Dr. G. C. Mendis to Prof. K. M. de Silva. Their contributions in the recent past have amplified the story of Sri Lanka by leaps and bounds. Learned contributions by scholars such as Fr. S. G. Perera SJ and Sir Paul E. Pieris have enriched our country’s story, too.

Sri Lanka had been known by several different names among ancient visitors from other lands throughout history. Taprobane, Serendib and Ceylon are the most popular in this long list. Much has of course been written about this country and its people. However, the gaps to be filled remain vast. It is no understatement that our island nation, Sri Lanka, possesses an array of dimensions that have found the greatest interest of not only its inhabitants but also of those from foreign lands. The vast and varied facets of the culture and heritage of Sri Lanka are unique and for over two millennia, many nations from the West and the East were intrigued by these very diverse aspects of Sri Lanka. Perhaps, it is an impossible task to capture the full tapestry of this marveled island nation. Undertaking a comprehensive study of the country and its capabilities could be likened to measuring the water of the ocean; one could never get at its true length and breadth. However, just as how diverse the Lankan story, so are the people’s interest. Everyone has a story from their perspective. This is what inspired me to establish *The Ceylon Journal*.

One of the first people to whom I mentioned this idea was Desamanya M. D. D. Pieris, a

¹ See *Ceylon Morning Leader* and *Ceylon Daily News*, July 9, 1929

distinguished Civil Servant and a true son of Sri Lanka. He endorsed it, and soon a team of like minds from various fields such as academia, law, journalism, advertising, information technology, business and finance were invited to form an editorial team. Notably, this team had a generational reach, with some as young as 21 and others touching their 80s! The perspectives offered by each one of them essentially contributed to the creation of a larger and more comprehensive vision for *The Ceylon Journal*. Collectively, we decided that the **purpose of *The Ceylon Journal* is to delve into our past and explore our rich heritage to enrich our identity and inspire our people to create a better Sri Lanka.**

Accordingly, it is our firm belief that this journal would build a bridge between the subject matters of the past to the present milieu. We encourage our writers to marshal the ‘tool’ of history in such a way that their narrative may deliver a true, fair and appealing account of their relevant research based on reliable and justifiable sources. Utilizing history as a cross-cutting theme, our writers are to bring forth a narrative contextualized to understand the trends of today and make fruitful decisions for tomorrow.

While we have used the term ‘Ceylon’ in our journal, we do not reflect a colonial perspective in our content. It must be said that in our current Constitution, this country is referred to as the “Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka (Ceylon)”. I believe ‘Ceylon’ associates itself with a rich history and with memories that linger of a nation with an outstanding civilization behind it. Nevertheless, *The Ceylon Journal* strives to deliver a wider outlook of Sri Lanka in its totality, and yet some of our writings may serve to sharpen and legitimize identities, apart from even questioning/interrogating some actions, individuals, and events of the past. The articles in the journal will be written by well-known scholars and some newcomers with the knowledge and passion for the subject they write. *The Ceylon Journal* is not intended to be a donnish academic journal with lengthy research papers. Neither will it be short articles. It will be a serious work but written in a style that will appeal to the general discerning reader. We encourage our writers to write on subjects that are less discussed and would be of great interest to the specialists as well as the non-specialists. Our editorial team will strive to maintain this balance. Another unique aspect of *The Ceylon Journal* will be in the inclusion of rare illustrations, art, photographs, engravings as well as maps. Perhaps, some of these would reach the public in printed form for the first time.

The Ceylon Journal will cover the facets that shape the identity of a country. These include history, archaeology, art, architecture, music, language, law, sociology, natural history, wildlife, culinary history, folklore and many other subjects unique to Sri Lanka. *The Ceylon Journal* would not publish material that would either be prejudicial to any religious belief or would be likely to create ethnic disharmony. Nor would it promote anything with political overtones. The journal is, rather, an all-embracing, independent endeavour that would stand for inclusivity, pluralism, tolerance while fostering an intelligent national discourse on our nation’s past, present and future. The writers have been given the freedom to write freely based on credible sources and to present their material in a manner that does not violate or compromise our above-stated policies and beliefs.

If people, places and historical periods of Sri Lanka hold a fascination for you, or if you have some interest in policies, processes and practices of persons and institutions that form a complex and rich society, you would find this journal to be a source of information and enlightenment as well as entertainment. The wealth of information on Sri Lanka published in this journal is unique and diverse. It may appeal to your cultured, aesthetic, and critical-thinking mind. Importantly, it will help you to gain a better understanding of Sri Lanka and its topography, as well as gain valuable insights into its people, past and present. To that end, *The Ceylon Journal* endeavours to weave a mosaic of true Lankan fables and facets that would shape the country’s identity. As one who strives to know more about Sri Lanka and cares for its future, this journal is for you.

Avishka Mario Senewiratne

*July 2, 2024
Kelaniya, Sri Lanka*

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