

A Tribute:
“Tall, muscular and handsome
Sauris de Silva: this is Ruhunu Dancing”

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The following are two emails sent to me (in Canada) by Dr. Ananda Guruge (from California) who had apparently come into contact with my father, which came as a total surprise to me. E-mail dated Jan. 25 2013, with a subject heading, ‘An extract from my novel on C W W Kannangara’:

The boost given to Kandyan Dancing had a repercussion. A hint to what was happening was in a letter to Karuna from her father. Mr. Gurusinha had been at a meeting in the temple when a speaker had criticized the Minister and me as ungrateful people who had forgotten from where they came and how much the Southern Province in general and Galle in particular had helped them to be where they were now. He had not understood fully what the speaker was driving at because someone had distracted him. Karuna had been asked to tell me to find out what the grievance was. As the meeting had been at the temple, I wrote a letter to Venerable Welivitiye Punnasara Nayaka Thera requesting him to find out why we were criticized and by whom.

I had a reply almost by return post. The speaker had been a teacher of Mahinda College. The reason why we were criticized was that the children in Hikkaduwa, Dikwella and Hungama were being taught Kandyan Dancing while Ruhunu Dancing which was endemic to the Southern Province was totally neglected. The Nayaka Thera had ended the letter with a humorous comment: “There is nothing to worry. I don’t think anyone understood what he was talking about. He spoke in Munidasa Cumaranatunga’s elegant ‘Subasa,’ which was as archaic as the language of rock inscriptions of the Polonnaruwa Period!”

When the Minister was informed, he took it very seriously, “Dayasinha, we deserve to be attacked. We never thought of Ruhunu Dancing and we must rectify the situation.”

As he was rushing to a meeting of the State Council, he could not give me any further instructions. But as I walked behind him to the Council Chamber, I suggested to him that his friend Mr. D. M. Rajapaksa, the Member for Hambantota, might give us some idea about whom to involve.

Returning from the meeting, the Minister gave me a chit, saying “D. M. asks us to get in touch with this person as we cannot find a better exponent of Ruhunu Dancing than

him anywhere in the Southern Province. He also said that he is reputed as the most effective and hence sought-after exorcist in the region. His Bali and Tovil ceremonies with Devol Dancing are known to have healed many people. D. M. has seen his Kolam performances and says that they are funny. Ask Kapukotuwa to interview him.”

Written in bold capitals was “Sauris de Silva, Tangalle. Government School, Tangalle”.

Later the same day, I was to receive another email, appending “another couple of paragraphs”:

The recently appointed Clerk to the Executive Committee – the first professional educator to hold that post after two Civil Servants – was Mr. T. D. Jayasuriya who began his career as Circuit Inspector of Hambantota and had been recommended by Mr. D. M. Rajapaksa. He was renowned as a maverick, whose legendary escapades in the Southern Province had won him many admirers. I consulted him about Sauris de Silva and the kind of interview that should be arranged for him.

“Please ask him to come with his drum and also a drummer. I will be there myself,” he said.

Tall, muscular and handsome Sauris de Silva appeared for his interview with a drummer and was received by T. D. Jayasuriya, Kapukotuwa and me. The Clerk knew him from his days in Hambantota and was keen to convince Kapukotuwa that the Ruhunu Dance deserves to be promoted as much as Kandyan Dancing. “What is Ruhunu Dancing?” was Kapukotuwa’s question.

“Let us hear how you beat the drum,” Jayasuriya asked Sauris. It was a melodious beat.

“Now can you sing?” Sauris sang a Kolam song, which made us laugh.

“Can you do one of your typical dances?”

The drummer was called in and Sauris in his white cloth and banian did a rhythmic dance. When he finished, Mr. Jayasuriya told Mr. Kapukotuwa, “Kapukotuwa, this is Ruhunu Dancing.”

Thus did the program of performing arts of the Central School develop on an all-Island basis with Sauris de Silva, J. Sedaraman, Kalinga Obeywansa, Panibharata and Makuluolwa.