

NEWSLETTER

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Incorporated 1984

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Message from the President

Welcome to another issue of Sri Lanka Society newsletter. The world is facing unprecedented times due to COVID-19. As this virus began spreading rapidly in Australia since March 2020, we as Sri Lankans were unable to celebrate our Sri Lankan events such as the Sri Lankan New Year, Easter, Vesak and Ramadan with our family and friends. We were unable to go to churches, Buddhist temples or mosques to celebrate these events. Australia couldn't celebrate ANZAC day which is one of our well celebrated events and to remember those that have fought in the wars to protect the county. The families celebrated these events in their homes and published images through various internet platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, Messenger etc. Thus, it showed the Society has become more creative during the isolation. This has brought families and friends closer together.

We as individuals and as families need to be mindful all the time and adhere to social distancing and practice safe hygiene each day. Australia was in the path of slowing down the virus in June. We as a committee were very excited in organising an event in the third quarter of this year. Unfortunately, due to Victoria showing signs of the virus spreading amongst their community very quickly, we are unable to organise this event as planned. As you know this has led to the Queensland government to close the borders to all travelers from Victoria, NSW states and ACT.

We are optimistic that Queensland will overcome the current situation in couple of months if we all listen and do the right thing as instructed by the relevant authorities. Once these restrictions are relaxed, our committee will organise an event to meet and celebrate with you all.

Until then please practice safe hygiene, social distancing and keep safe.

Namal Wijeratne

Sean Murphy has completed a comedy tour by going to every single Commonwealth nation, including Sri Lanka, in 2018. His team has undertaken a podcast project to revisit each country via audio interviews.

The series is called [*Commonwealth of Dunces*](#) and the following episode(s) might be something you enjoy:

- *Pilaf Marriage*:- Featuring V.J., a Sinhalese drama teacher from Colombo talking about her favourite scary movie, Gharasarapa + how marriages work in SL.

<https://www.podbean.com/eu/pb-bmt6b-dddd51>

He is keen to hear what you think. Always interested in hearing constructive critique as well as any recommendations for future guests.

email yo@mamadojo.co

Esala Perehera

Kandy is the most magnificent, beautiful and interesting city in Sri Lanka. Once a year, they celebrate one of the most important and exciting celebration called 'Esala Perahera'. This festival has been on from the ancient.

The Esala Perahera in Kandy is celebrated to honour the Sacred Tooth Relic, and the four 'guardian' Gods..Vishnu, Kataragama, Natha and goddess Pattini.

This is held on July or August- which is the month that is believed to commemorate teaching given by the Buddha. We celebrate this joyful gathering by a parade. In the parade there's, traditional drummed music, followed by

dancers, jugglers, flute players, fire breathers and lavishly decorated elephants!

The whip-crackers will lead the way through the parade. They hold a 2-meter sliver and golden whip in one hand, and swing harshly. The thick rope makes loud thundering sounds. They swing the whip around their own bodies, without hurting them selves badly. It is also believed that the loud roaring noises of the whips scare away all spirits of evil.

Immediately after the whip crackers, following are the flag bearers. They carry tall, standard flags. (different sized, coloured and has different pictures.) The official called Peramuneralala riding on the first elephant follows next carrying the register of the Sacred Temple of the tooth. The traditional dancers leap and move from one side to another and the drummers drum a catchy beat. They sound so very magical when playing together.

There are more than 200 elaborately decorated elephants in the parade. The most senior tusker is the elephant



Drawing by -Elina Navaratne, year 9, Springfield Anglican College.

chosen to carry the golden casket containing the Sacred Tooth of Buddha. Everyone really admires the elephant's stately walk. Only behind or in front of the elephants, the dancers will dance, play or walk. The custodian of the noble tooth relic "Diyawadana Nilame" walks in a graceful manner behind the elephant that carries the golden casket and dancers.

This bright and colourful procession lasts for ten nights!!

Devli Bolukandure, Age:9

Dancing Classes **(In Collaboration with the Ravibandhu-Samanthi School of Dancing)**

Sri Lanka Society is honoured to be collaborating with the Ravibandhu-Samanthi school of dancing to offer Dancing Classes to the Brisbane youth and children. The classes will be conducted by Eshanie Thajudeen who is a prominent dancer in Brisbane.

The Ravibandhu-Samanthi Dance Ensemble was founded by the dance duo Ravibandhu and Samanthi in 1984. Since its inception the troupe has built up an enviable reputation for innovation and creative work. The company's

unrivalled reputation for its distinctive style of performance and committed ensemble playing was praised world over.

"At the heart of our work is the utmost sincerity and excitement of the performer's physical presence, enhanced by technical mastery and artistic rendering and a compelling union between dancer and the audience. Our humble attempt is to touch that unseen world of emotion and imagination."

RAVIBANDHU-SAMANTHI.

Ravibandhu Vidyapathy is the eldest son of Kalashoori Somabandhu Vidyapathy, the well-known classical painter, sculptor and Sri Lanka's pioneer costume and décor designer for dance and ballet; and Malathi Somabandhu, the reputed Kandyen dancer and the daughter of great dance Guru Algama Kiriganitha.

Ravibandhu studied Classical Kandyen dance under the legendary dancers, Great Gurus Chitrasena and Vajira and traditional drumming under the renowned percussionists Guru Piyasara Shilpadhpathi and Guru Punchiguru.

Dancing Classes

Clayfield United Church Hall

170 Bonney Avenue, Clayfield

Sunday 11th Oct 2020



Time - 3:30-4:30 pm
Cost - \$10 per class

In Collaboration with the Ravibandhu-Samanthi Dance Academy
Organised by the Sri Lanka Society of Queensland



Teacher - Eshanie Thajudeen

Please contact:
Eshanie - 0415 461613
Gothami - 0421 635 353
Chamitha - 0430 047 664

Drumming classes will begin at a later date.

Ravibandhu is also an acclaimed Kathakali actor-dancer and has also studied painting, sculpture, costume and stage décor designing from his father, Somabandhu Vidyapathy. Today, Ravibandhu is a Kandyen dancer par excellence and a veteran choreographer whose work spans through a wide range of styles such as traditional

choreographies, full-length ballets of linear narrative style, contemporary dance pieces and short ballets of thematic & abstract styles. As a modern stage dancer, he has won much accolade for his dramatic performances. In 1997, he introduced a new drum called 'Kala Beraya' to the Sri Lankan field of music and has immensely contributed for the development of progressive drumming art of Sri Lanka. As a musician, Ravibandhu has travelled extensively and introduced traditional Sri Lankan drums and music to audiences worldwide. He is an internationally known percussionist, an accomplished hand on a variety of Sri Lankan and Indian drums including the Gatabera, Pakhavaj and Tabla. Ravibandhu has also added new dimensions to traditional drumming by fusing them with other styles of world music such as Jazz, Western Classical and Indian Classical.

The Appreciations he has received include:

2019 - National Honours - Kala Keerthi Award

2017 - Ada Derana Sri Lankan of the Year - Entertainment Classical Award

1996/1997 – Bunka (Cultural) Award for Dancing from Japanese Embassy

This year the Kandy Esela Perehera was telecast live so that people could view it from their homes due to spectators not being allowed due to the Covid pandemic. Mr. Ravibandhu Vidyapathy was the special guest for the English commentary for the final day of the Randoli and impressed us with his knowledge of the traditions and the dances. For those interested, it is now available for viewing on YouTube. The link is given below - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GtB89BluB3Q&t=6127s>

The classes will be taught by Eshanie Thajudeen. Eshanie is an old girl of Lindsay Girls' School and Borella Devi Balika Vidyalaya, who took her first dancing steps at the age of six under the guidance of Channa Wijewardhana and Upuli Panibharatha at the Channa-Upuli Dancing Academy, Sarasavipaya. Her dancing was then perfected by Shirani De Costa at Lindsay where she was a prominent member of the School Dancing Troup. She has taken part in many competitions, representing her School at All Island level and brought credit to her Alma-mater.

During her Tertiary studies she joined hands with Professor Mudiyanse Dissanayake and commissioned herself as a professional Sri Lankan Traditional Dancer by performing her debut or the Traditional "Ves Bandheema" under the guidance of Professor Mudiyanse Dissanayake. Not limiting herself only for Sri Lankan Traditional Dancing, she took part in Malay Dancing and choregraphing them for Confederation of Sri Lanka Malays (COSLAM), the umbrella body for Malay Community Clubs in Sri Lanka and was awarded the DARMASISWA Scholarship for Traditional Indonesian Dancing at the University of Yogyakarta, offered by the Government of Indonesia.

Academically, she holds a B.Sc. (Hons) degree in Information Technology granted by Sri Lanka Institute of Information Technology (SLIIT).



Coping with COVID-19

For many of us, the year 2020 looks very different to what we imagined. The coronavirus pandemic has swept in and changed life as we knew it. This may have meant changes to employment or job prospects, separation from family, loss of connection with the community, struggling to juggle working from home or learning from home, and of course the ongoing uncertainty about the future. For many of us, this has meant coping with increased stressors in our lives, with fewer ways to access our normal supports.

So, what can you do? At times of stress, the first and most helpful thing to do, can be simply to get back to the basics and focus on the things that are in your control. Whatever your circumstances, these are a few things to keep in mind in navigating this unusual time:

- 1) **Establish a regular routine:** It is important to maintain a regular routine around sleep, mealtimes, and exercise, as well as clear boundaries between ‘work time’ and ‘home time’ especially if working from home. This can help to maintain a sense of normalcy and predictability of day-to-day life and can also be enormously helpful for your physical and emotional well-being.
- 2) **Get active:** Having come through a period where our usual ways of exercising were not as available during lockdown, it is easy to lose good exercise habits we may have had. Resuming, or looking for new ways to exercise (whether that be going for walks, taking online yoga or fitness classes, or re-joining the gym) is key, as physical activity plays an important role in helping the body to manage stress.
- 3) **Stay connected:** At a time when connecting with others may be difficult due to physical



distancing, changes to community activities, and restrictions around travel, it is vital that we find other ways to connect socially with others. This may require flexibility and creativity on your part (e.g. socially-distanced outings, use of technology, even going back to letter-writing!); however, establishing ways to carry us through this ‘new normal’, can help to ease the burden of loneliness and disconnection.

- 4) **Stay kind:** With stress running high during the lockdown period and beyond, many families are reporting higher levels of tension within their households. Trying to bring an attitude of kindness and understanding to your close relationships can really shift the feeling within the house to a more positive and supportive one. Seeking opportunities to engage in acts of kindness or generosity to others, even strangers, can also be a wonderful way to take positive action in a way that is in your control.
- 5) **Stay present:** Focusing the mind on the present can help to manage feelings of worry or uncertainty – this may involve mindfulness meditation practice or simply doing a routine task or a pleasant activity mindfully (i.e. with your attention focused on what is occurring in the present moment). A variety of mindfulness resources can easily be found online.
- 6) **Limit news intake:** It can be tempting to try and manage our feelings of worry by staying up to date with all the latest news. However, being bombarded by it every waking hour—through the TV, radio, and social media—can quickly become overwhelming and counterproductive. Try and set aside a specific time in the day where you check the news and intentionally disconnect from it at other times, putting your focus elsewhere.



- 7) **Acknowledge loss:** Although it is easy to dismiss what we in QLD are experiencing as minor in comparison to elsewhere in Australia or the world, it is okay – and important – to also take the time to recognise the losses that we have experienced. There is not one of us who has not been impacted in some way, whether it be through the loss of experiences, travel plans, opportunities, community events, routines, or support systems – and in the worst cases, the loss of life.

Making space to allow any feelings of grief or disappointment, anger or frustration, loneliness or loss, can be an important part of coping with these experiences in a healthy way. Balancing this with a regular gratitude practice can also be enormously beneficial in moving through these difficult times.

- 8) **Seek help:** If you are finding that you or a loved one is still struggling, it is a good idea to consider seeking further help from a professional. Talking to your GP is a good first point of contact; they may consider referring you to see someone such as a psychologist for support. Financial assistance through Medicare is available, to ensure accessibility of this support for all.



Further options for support include:

Beyond Blue (Ph: 1800 512 348) -

<https://coronavirus.beyondblue.org.au/>

Lifeline (Ph: 13 11 14) - <https://www.lifeline.org.au/get-help/information-and-support/covid-19/>

COVID-19 Support Line for Older Australians, their families and carers – Ph: 1800 171 866

Niyara Gunewardena
Clinical Psychologist (BSc Hons, MCLinPsych)
Red Robin Psychology, Ipswich

Stay Safe

ALTERNATIVES TO HANDSHAKES, HUGS, HIGH FIVES AND HONGI



THE WAVE



THE HAND ON HEART



NAMASTE



NZSL: HOW ARE YOU?



THE 'HI-BROWS'



THE 'ALL GOOD' NOD



THE 'EAST COAST WAVE'



THE 'WHAT A WORLD EH?'

From: *Theconversation.com*

Racial discrimination and your rights

In Australia it is against the law to do something in public based on the race, colour, national or ethnic origin of a person or group of people which is likely to offend, insult, humiliate or intimidate. This type of behaviour is classified as racial hatred.

If you are the victim of racist behaviour –

- If you are assaulted or threatened with violence, contact the police. In an emergency or life threatening situation, call Triple Zero (000) and ask for police. If you need police assistance, but there is no immediate danger, call the Police Assistance Line (131 444).
- If there is no violence involved, and if it's safe to do so, you may want to deal with the situation yourself by raising it directly with the person or people involved.
- If direct contact does not resolve the situation, or you do not feel comfortable doing this, you can make a complaint to the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC). To lodge a complaint with the AHRC, visit www.humanrights.gov.au/complaints or call the AHRC's National Information Service on 1300 656 419 or 02 9284 9888.

The power of bystanders

When people who witness racism speak out against it, this makes the person being targeted feel supported, and can make the person being racist reconsider their behaviour. Don't put yourself at risk. But if it is safe to do so, speak up and stand with the victim. Even a simple gesture can be powerful.

If you see racist behaviour you can:

- Speak up — call it out as racism, let the perpetrator know it is not acceptable.
- Support the victim — stand next to the person being targeted and ask them if they are ok
- Take evidence — record the incident on your phone, take a photo of the perpetrator and report it to authorities



View the Australian Human Rights Commission tips for bystanders.

News from Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka's New Cabinet sworn in

A new Cabinet consisting of a total of 28 ministries and 40 state ministries were sworn in before President Gotabaya Rajapaksa.

New Cabinet:

1. The President holds the portfolios of Defence ministry.
2. Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa - Minister of Finance, Minister of Urban Development & Housing, Minister of Buddha Sasana, Religious & Cultural Affairs
3. GL Pieris – Minister of Education
4. Nimal Siripala De Silva - Minister Labour
5. Pavithra Wanniarachchi – Minister of Health
6. Dinesh Gunawardena – Minister of Foreign Affairs
7. Keheliya Rambukwella - Minister of Mass Media
8. Douglas Devananda- Minister of Fisheries
9. Gamini Lokuge - Minister of Transport
10. Bandula Gunawardena - Minister of Trade Development

11. RMCB Ratnayake- Minister of Wildlife, Forest Conservation
12. Janaka Bandara - Minister of State Services
13. Chamal Rajapaksa - Minister of Irrigation Development
14. Dullas Alahapperuma - Minister of Power and Electricity
15. Wimal Weerawansa - Minister of Industry Development
16. Johnston Fernando - Minister of Roads and Highways
17. Mahinda Amaraweera - Minister of Environment

18. SM Chandrasena - Minister of Land Development
19. Mahindananda Aluthgamage - Minister of Agriculture
20. Vasudeva Nanayakkara - Minister of Water Supply
21. Udaya Gammanpilla - Minister of Energy
22. Dr. Ramesh Pathirana - Minister of Plantations
23. Prasanna Ranathunga - Minister of Tourism
24. Rohitha Abeygunwardena - Minister of Ports and Naval
25. Namal Rajapaksa - Minister of Youth and Sports
26. Ali Sabry - Ministry of Justice

Sri Lanka's most famous children's books author Sybil Wettasinghe dies at 92

Her works were widely read in her native Sri Lanka as well as in countries as far afield as Denmark and Japan.



Sri Lankan artist, illustrator and writer Sybil Wettasinghe died of complications related to old age in the early hours of July 1. Born near the southern city of Galle in 1927, the children's book writer was a national icon in Sri Lanka. Her most famous work *Kuda Hora* (*The Umbrella Thief*), published in 1956, was translated into nine languages including Norwegian, Chinese, Japanese and Tamil.

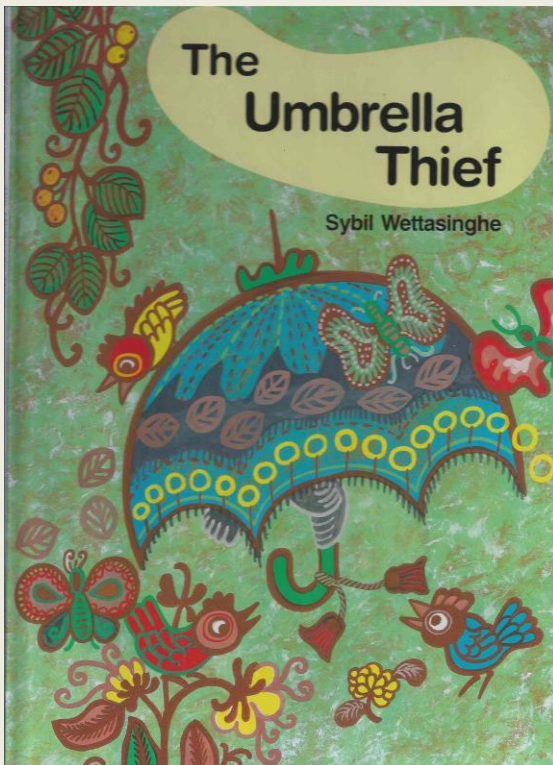
Wettasinghe began her career as a journalist and joined the Sinhalese-language *Lankadeepa* at the age of 17. Her work became famous across the island when she joined *Janatha*, a part of Sri Lanka's large media house *Lake House Publications*.

International acclaim

Kuda Hora was first published in the children's page of *Janatha* in 1952. The story became a massive success in Sri Lanka and was translated into English, Korean and other foreign languages. In 1987, the Japanese translation won the Japanese Library Association Award as the most popular children's book.

A talented illustrator, Wettasinghe would regularly hold exhibitions in Japan, where she continued to receive awards for her books. In 2012, she was awarded the Nikkei Asian Prize for Culture. Her books were also popular in Scandinavia and were translated into Swedish and Danish.

In Sri Lanka, she was awarded the Vishwa Prasadini Award for Art and Children's Literature by Prime Minister Sirimao Bandaranaike in 1996. In 2004, she was also awarded the Kala Keerthi, an national honour that is awarded for extraordinary achievements in the fine and performing arts.



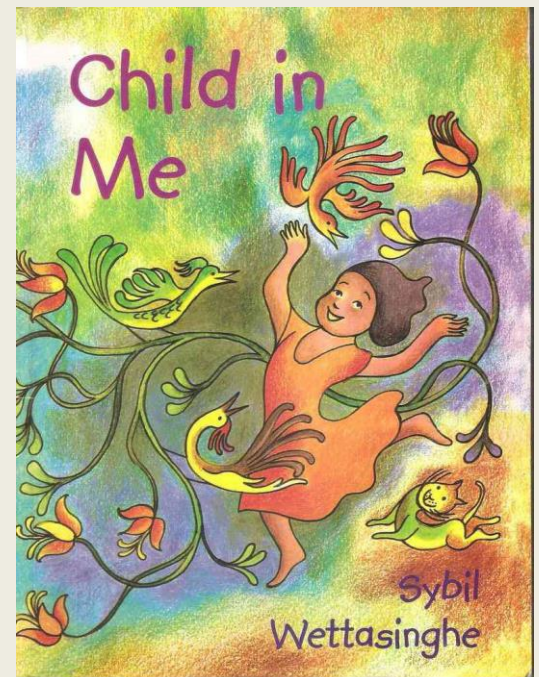
Although Wettasinghe primarily focused on children's literature, she released a collection of short stories for adults in 2012 titled *My Giddi Aunty*. The stories were written in the 1950s and 60s and lost for a few decades.

The child in her

It was primarily her love for children and the desire to bring out the inner child in herself that was a driving factor for Wettasinghe. Her autobiography, titled *Eternally Yours*, describes her childhood in rural southern Sri Lanka and her family's move to Colombo when she was a teenager. She ends it with an illustration and an accompanying message that reads, "Keep a child in your heart for eternal life."

In long conversations with this writer, she often spoke of how birthday celebrations organised by the government were her sole reminder that she was pushing 90 years, and that she took pride in feeling like a child.

Among her famous children's stories are "Vesak Lantern", which won the Isabel Hutton Prize for Asian Women Writers for Children in 1965, "Hoity the Fox", "Palingu", "Run



Love for India

Although Wettasinghe's books and stories never got the kind of attention they deserved in India, the writer had a special love for the country. She regularly recalled her first visit to Calcutta in the 1960s, when she was thrilled to see young women in "flowing saris who looked like flowers on an Indian landscape."

A follower of the Buddha's principles, Wettasinghe went on pilgrimages to Sarnath, Bodh Gaya, Lumbini and Kushi Nagar, describing these voyages with a particular degree of joy.

It was her heartfelt desire to complete a new book with illustrations of the life of the Buddha and present it to the Indian Prime Minister when he visited Sri Lanka for Buddha Purnima a few years ago, but it was not to be.

Wettasinghe would listen to Pali chants and Buddhist sermons late into the evenings and wake up early before the first rays of dawn entered her home in the leafy and peaceful town of Nugegoda, which is just outside Colombo city limits. Her husband Don Dharmapala Wettasinghe, whom she married in 1955, was the editor of Chief of Lake House Publications. He died in 1988. Sybil Wettasinghe is survived by her three children and five grandchildren.

[Ajay Kamalakaran](#)

Ajay Kamalakaran is a journalist and writer based in Mumbai. His Twitter handle is @ajaykamalakaran.

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