Interviews with Tissa Kariyawasam and Hope O’Neil Todd on Aspects of Culture in Sri Lanka

Le Roy Robinson

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He graduated from the University of Peradeniya in 1964 with Honors in Sinhala and with Ceylon History and Archaeology as complementary subjects.

From 1964 to 1967 he taught classical Sinhala prose literature and modern poetry at the University of Colombo. In 1967 he joined the faculty at Sri Jayawardenapura University.

In 1968 he received a Master’s degree from the University of Peradeniya. His Master’s thesis was “Demonological Rituals and Society : A Study of Four Main Rituals in the Low Country Area”. In 1973 he was awarded a Ph. D. from the University of London, England, His doctoral dissertation was “Religious Activities and the Development of a New Poetical Tradition in Sinhalese from 1852 to 1906”.

From 1981 to 1986 he was Director of the Institute of Aesthetic Studies at the University of Kelaniya, Colombo, the only state
sponsored institute in Sri Lanka where music, dancing, art and sculpture are taught for the degree of Bachelor of Fine Arts.

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ROBINSON: You said you directed your own modern adaptation of John de Silva's *Siri Sangabo* of 1903 at the Sixth Asian Festival of the Arts in Hong Kong. Would you please outline at least the main story of this drama?

KARIYAWASAM: Yes, I will. But first let me at least mention the names of a few other people who were involved in the production, which we first did at Tower Hall. I was assisted by Chandi Gunatilaka. W. D. Amaradeva was Music Director. He composed the theme music and two good set pieces, one when the king is being poisoned, the other when the royal elephant arrives searching for the king. S. Panibharata was Dance Director. He based his choreography of all the dances on local folk dances. The costumes and decor were by Somabandu Vidyapati. Vijaya Nandasiri and Victor Vickremage alternated in playing the part of King Sangabo.

Sanghatissa, Sangabo and Gothabhaya were three kings of Sri Lanka during the period from 243 to 262 A. D. As for *Siri Sangabo*, it has a story that in the early 1900s had a great influence on the national consciousness of the Sinhalese people. It was one of many stories at the time that re-awakened what you may call national consciousness. It's the story of a king, Sangabo, who accepts kingship on the behest of the

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people. But because of his deep religious beliefs, he gives up his throne to his brother in order to live the life of an ascetic again. The brother fears the People will call the former king back to the throne. So the brother offers gold to anyone who can bring Sangabo's head to him. There are many problems. Sangabo's has himself beheaded. This is his act of selfimmolation for the good of the people.

ROBINSON: Would you please give us some idea of what your adaptation of John de Silva's original play consisted of?

KARIYAWASAM: When John de Silva's Sirisangabo was produced in 1903 it was a lengthy play that ran for more than three hours. When Henry Jayasena produced it with more than 60 actors on the stage it also ran for more than three hours. They both did a Nurti style play. Henry Jayasena followed authenticity of genre in his production and he was assisted by a veteran Tower Hall actor named Romulus de Silva. I did not want to follow this genre, which is undramatic. I wanted to emphasize the theatrical quality of the story. I used fewer than 20 actors and actresses, and the play ran only for an hour and thirty minutes without an intermission. The Nurti plays lacked theatrical quality, and they were mixed with nationalistic and religious feelings, all of which I omitted to suit modern audiences. They do not come to the theatre to appreciate old times nationalistic discourses. Also I got rid of all the comic scenes, which supplied the time to change the background scenery. The scene changes were limited to only three. Historically, Nurti originated from a hybrid form brought to this country long ago. It's a mixture of songs, music and dancing not directed towards any dramatic climax. The language in Nurti is hybrid too. I thought of a dramatic form
as a shortened version that would highlight only the essential events and characters to reach the climax. I had one other thing in mind: I was doing the play in Hong Kong for a foreign audience. So I adjusted the dances and put them into the Royal court to suit the atmosphere.

ROBINSON: How did you deal with this story in performance?
KARIYAWASAM: We performed the play in three acts. In Act I, three Mahiyangana princes, Sangabo, Sanghatissa and Gothabhaya, join a procession to Anuradhapura. A soothsayer predicts each prince will become king of Sri Lanka in turn. In Act II, in the palace of Anuradhapura, Sanghatissa and Gothabhaya conspire and kill King Vijaya-Kumara. Sanghatissa becomes king. But Gothabhaya poisons him to death. The people urge Sangabo to become king. He does so with reluctance. Act II ends with his coronation. In Act III a red-eyed demon named Raktakshi devastates the land. To propitiate him, rituals are performed. Siri Sangabo performs Satyakriya. The king of the demons, whose name is Vesamuni, orders the red-eyed demon to leave the land. King Sangabo becomes even more popular among the people. Then Gothabhaya wants the throne. Sangabo becomes an ascetic in the forest. The ending of the story you already know. The play ends with a song of benediction.

ROBINSON: Do you have any comment on Henry Jayasena's version of Siri Sangabo as compared with yours?
KARIYAWASAM: As I said, Henry did a Nurti play. He imitated the same pattern that John de Silva and de Silva's followers used from the first decade of this century. Henry was not in a position to change the script. I had that freedom. Henry had to suit a spectacle to a large crowd. Our foreign trip did
not allow such a spectacle.

ROBINSON: You said before that John de Silva followed a theatrical style introduced into Sri Lanka in the 1880s by the Hindustan Dramatic Company of Bombay. Would you say more about that Indian influence?

KARIYAWASAM: John de Silva had already done a play based on the Indian classic Ramayana in 1866. Then, in the 1870s, some Parsees living in Bombay started theatrical companies. One of these societies, the Hindustan Dramatic Company, came to Colombo in May 1877. They performed Inder Sabha. That’s the Court of Indra. Indra was the king of heaven or the lord of heaven. This play became popular here for many reasons. It was a story about human beings and fairies. Hindustani music was played. Mechanical devices were used to enact ascending to heaven, cloud movements, and descending into the earth. There were women performers. The proscenium stage was used. There were gas lights. There were spectacular drop scenes. The play was not long.

ROBINSON: Was John de Silva the only local playwright to be influenced by this model, as you call it?

KARIYAWASAM: No. Before de Silva, there was C. Don Bastian. He was a compositor at the Government Printing Office. He later changed his name to Jayaweera Bandara. His son, who is still living, and his grandchildren, too, are known as Jayaweera Bandara. C. Don Bastian was able to trace his ancestry to a warrior by the name of Jayaweera Bandara during the Sitawaka period of Sri Lankan history. During the last quarter of the 19th century, some leaders here changed their names or added names to the family names. Anyway, C. Don Bastian was fascinated by this type of drama. In December
1877 he imitated its form in his own play *The Adventures of Rolina*. This genre became known as Nurti or Teetar. These words are corruptions of Nutya in Sanskrit and, course, theatre in English. The Nurtis were later mixed with Nadagamas. Then, later, contemporary social problems were introduced into dramatizations using comedy and songs.

ROBINSON: Would you give a brief summary of *The Adventures of Rolina*?

KARIYAWASAM: A prince named Harsor journeys to various countries. He buys a flying stallion. While flying, he sees a princess named Rolina in a mansion. Love springs up between the two of them. Demons come and separate them. Rolina disguises herself as a beggar woman and goes in search of the prince. On the way she meets another prince, Robert, who falls in love with her, but she does not respond to him. A hermit assists Prince Harsor and Princess Rolina to meet again. They live happily ever after.

ROBINSON: Would you also go into some of the history of Tower Hall Theatre?

KARIYAWASAM: That's a history of almost 100 years, but briefly... There were other theatres in the Colombo area in the early part of this century. About 23. But most of them were corrugated iron sheds or tents. Impermanent structures, you know. The stages were small. The gaslights heated them up like ovens. Breathing was difficult. John de Silva and others urged the Municipal Council to put up a theatre. But actually a businessman named Ganegoda Appuhamilage Don Hendrick Seneviratne was persuaded by his friends in the hotel business and in the entertainment business to put up a theatre. Tower Hall Theatre's opening ceremony was on December
16, 1911. The first production staged there was Charles Dias Amaratunga's *Pandukhabhaya*. Amaratunga was also an attorney like John de Silva. He was the son-in-law of G. A. D. H. Seneviratne.

ROBINSON: Did Seneviratne make money out of Tower Hall?

KARIYAWASAM: Seneviratnewas a shrewd businessman. He started life from scratch. When the plays were shown at Tower Hall Theatre, he ran a hotel, too, across the road. After opening Tower Hall, he was able to close down all the other, temporary, theatres in Colombo.

ROBINSON: Would you give a brief summary of *Pandukhabhaya*?

KARIYAWASAM: Pandukhabhaya is also the name of a Sinhala king. He reigned during the 3rd century B.C. Chitra and her brothers, children of king Panduvasadeva, are playing in the Royal Garden at Anuradhapura. They are approached by a Brahmin priest from India. He predicts that someday a prince will be born to Chitra and will kill all his maternal uncles and ascend to the throne. Hearing this prediction, the king separates Chitra from her brothers and puts her in a secluded house. Chitra becomes friendly with a prince named Diga Gamini. When their child is born, he is sent out of the house to a village. He encounters various difficulties caused by his uncles but at every instance he is saved. He becomes Pandukabhaya, the king of Sri Lanka.

ROBINSON: I suppose other foreign theatre groups came to Sri Lanka at the turn of the century.

KARIYAWASAM: At that time many foreign theatrical groups performed in Sri Lanka. Including opera companies and circuses. Allen Wilkie’s Shakespeare Dramatic Company visited here in early 1912 and staged *Hamlet* and *Romeo and Juliet*.
and other plays. By the way, C. Don Bastian had done a version of *Romeo and Juliet* in the Nurti style about twenty years earlier. More important, the Parsee Rippon Drama Company opened at Tower Hall Theatre. Their repertory included Indian dramas and Shakespeare and even Sinhala dramas. They were very popular. In fact, they temporarily eclipsed local Sinhala theatre?

ROBINSON: What did local theatrical interests do then?

KARIYAWASAM: Sinhala dramatists responded to this competitive challenge by producing plays all around the island. In the main cities of the country: Kandy, Galle, Matara, Weligama, Moratuwa, Dehiwala, Matale Gampola, Panadura, Mannar, Kurunegala, Negombo... In an effort to keep Sinhala drama alive, Sinhala dramatists resorted to two techniques to resist drama from abroad. They made their plays as didactic as possible. And they inculcated anti-foreign attitudes. Nationalism. Nationalism in a sense meant attacks against foreign elements. At the beginning of the century, novelists such as Piyadasa Sirisena did the same thing. By foreign elements I mean Christianity, foreign clothes, foreign foods, foreign manners and foreign customs were criticized. As for Tower Hall Theatre, a group called Sri Lanka Natya Sabha performed there. *Harischandra. Jemila. Swarnatilaka*. Many other plays. So Tower Hall Theatre became what someone has called the hub of modern Sinhala drama.

ROBINSON: Was didacticism unusual in Sri Lanka theatre at that time?

KARIYAWASAM: Traditionally, most literatures in Asis were didactic. Four things were expected from literature. Dharma, religious utterances. Artha, didactic sayings about life.
Kama, sensuous feelings. Moksha, final bliss of life through religion. Upadesa was the term attached to this didacticism. When somebody referred to literature, didacticism was always meant. That’s why at the beginning of the 20th century, readers reacted against new literary forms like novels and short stories.

ROBINSON: Would you give brief summaries of a couple of the plays you just mentioned?

KARIYAWASAM: Harischandra is a king who believes in truth. Vishama Muni comes to earth and tells King Harischandra he is in debt after playing dice with a friend and needs money. The king gives him all his wealth, but it is not enough. The king then offers his wife and child to Nachchetre, Vishama Muni’s attendant. The king’s child dies. The gods resurrect the dead child. The king and his family live happily ever after.

Swarnatilaka is a beautiful young outcaste woman. A prudent Brahmin scholar falls in love with her. His students become angry with their teacher’s new wife. They think they will help the teacher by killing his wife. They try their best to kill her by sending an elephant toward her. Later they burn down the teacher’s house with Swarnatilaka inside. The teacher becomes insane. The play, based on a religious tale, was written by R. John Perera.

ROBINSON: John de Silva turned to the Ramayana early in his career as a playwright. Was the Ramayana so well known in Sri Lanka at that time?

KARIYAWASAM: Actually Ramayana was not translated into Sinhala until the last quarter of the 19th century, and then only in parts. But in most countries of Asia the influence of Ramayana and Mahabharata can be seen in theatre and in
folk rituals. In Sri Lanka, during the 19th century, Totagamuwe Rahula, a poet from Kotte, elucidated some elements of the *Ramayana*. In one of the Sandesa, messenger poems, of the same period, there is mention of the *Ramayana*. But the full impact of the *Ramayana* story here can be seen in the hill country ritual called Kohomba Kankariya. When King Panduvasadeva was afflicted with various diseases, he was cured by three Mala kings who performed the Kohomba Kankariya ritual for the first time. These three kings were the sons of Sita, the heroine of the *Ramayana*, who is the wife of Rama. The Sita Pati story is one scene enacted by the exorcists during the ritual. In some places the god Upulvan is described as the husband of Sita, and their children are considered the three Mala kings. Rama is one incarnation of Vishnu. Vishnu's sons are called Vali Yak, and to this day the exorcists of the Vishnu Devale in Kandy perform a seven-day ritual called the Vali Yak Dance. To invoke the blessings of these Vali Demons and to get rid of all the evils that gathered during the Perahera procession and the festival at the Temple of the Tooth. So there is some connection between the *Ramayana* and the folk cults of Sri Lanka.

ROBINSON: Why do "evils" gather at Perahera?

KARIYAWASAM: It's the belief that we collect Vas or evils during any ritual. There are three types of Vas. Evil eye, ās vaha. Evil mouth, kata vaha. Evil breath, ho vaha. Ās is eye. Kata is mouth. Ho is breathing. During the ritual or during the procession we collect evil in these three ways. When we see a beautifully costumed and gaily decorated dancer in a procession or in a spectacular dance sequence or hear the sweet thundering of drums by drummers, we exclaim unnecessary
words as compliments. What a dance! How nice it is! When these expressions are spoken, by a breath, then that will affect the drummer or the dancer. If he has a sweet voice, somebody will say he's like a lark singing. That is more than enough to collect Vas. Sometimes without the knowledge of the drummer or the dancer, unnecessary words will be uttered in places such as near shrines. This will collect Vas. All these evils are collected and destroyed during the Vali Yak Dance at the Vishnu Devale.

ROBINSON: What was the influence of Buddhism on early drama in Sri Lanka?

KARIYAWASAM: Buddhism had little impact on the development of drama in Sri Lanka. Buddhism has helped a great deal in the development of other art forms such as painting or sculpture or prose and verse, but not drama.

ROBINSON: What about Sanskrit drama?

KARIYAWASAM: When literature in Sri Lanka reached a developed stage in the 12th century, Sanskrit dramatic literature and performance had already perished in India. But we have evidence that Sinhala writers were acquainted with Sanskrit dramatic literature rather early. In the 12th century, for example, Gurulogomi quoted from the Ratnavali Natika of Sri Harsha. The Sanskrit term Nandi, meaning invocation, is used in Kohomba Kankariya. In Sasada Vata, a 12th century poem whose author is not definitely known, Sanskrit terms for high ranking people are used. Later, of course, John de Silva, again, produced his translations of Sanskrit plays, Sakuntala, Ratnavali, Nagananda. By the way, according to the Sri Lankan tradition, the person who writes a work like Sasada Vata is not the essential factor. The work itself is.
ROBINSON : How is Kohomba Kanariya translated into English?

KARIYAWASAM : Kohomba refers to the Margosa tree. The Kohomba Deyyo or Kohomba God is born under a Margosa tree. Kankariya is a ritual in the name of that deity.

ROBINSON : Would you describe the ritual itself in a little detail?

KARIYAWASAM : The Kohomba Kankariya is performed mainly in the hill country. It’s a ritual of prosperity. It has five episodes called Yakkam. These are presented in dramatic form.

The Vedi Yakkama—Vedi refers to a primitive tribe here called Veddhas—invites 36 Veddah demons believed to have caused diseases, purifies them through ablutions and food and drink offerings, and then sends them away.

The Ura Yakkama—Ura is boar—depicts the killing of a boar that has devastated the picturesque park of King Malas, known as Nanda. There is a ritual apportionment of the animal’s flesh among those who help in the performance of the Kankariya.

The Naya Yakkama depicts the collection of rice and other ingredients necessary for an offering of alms to the Maha Guru. And the Kuda Guru. Guru is teacher, as you know. Maha is elder and Kuda is younger.

The Boru Yakkama—Boru means lies—depicts the uttering of veiled references as to the way leading to the arena where the Kankariya takes place.

The Maha Yakkama—here, Maha means big—relates the origins of the ritual. Connected with ancient kings of Sri Lanka, King Vijaya and King Panduvasadeva.

In these interludes there are impersonations, dramatic dialogues, make up, stage props, costumes, mime and acting.
ROBINSON: You've been referring to hill country ritual dramas. Was there any folk drama in the low country?

KARIYAWASAM: In the low country coastal areas there's a form of folk drama called Kolam. It's a narrative theatre. Masks are used. Certain local administrators supposed to be guilty of malpractices are satirized and held up to ridicule.

Elements similar to those I've already mentioned can be seen in rituals such as Suniyam Kapilla, Destruction of the Sorcery, or Rata Yakuma or Riddy Yapaya, the Ritual of Seven Barren Queens, both of which I also mentioned earlier. And in rituals performed in honor of the Goddess Pattini, Goddess of Charity, for example, Gam Maduwa and Devol Maduwa. Devol is the name of a god. Gama means village, and madu is a hall. Both of these are ceremonies related to agriculture, and they were performed in many parts of Sri Lanka. The drama varies according to the interests of the people in different areas. The sea coast people prefer more episodes related to fishing, for example.

ROBINSON: Please describe Nadagama.

KARIYAWASAM: Nadagama is a form of folk play too. It's performed in the open air. It has an all male cast. As in Greek drama, a narrator introduces characters. Where necessary, the narrator explains the time or place or action of the narrative events. Sometimes the narrator explains who is on stage when some convention or other is not being followed. There is a chorus to support the narrator. There are two drummers and a harmonium player.

Nadagama came to Sri Lanka with the Tamils of South India. In the Northern and Eastern provinces there was a genre of Natakam or Kuttu plays among Tamils. Such as
Nattu Kuttu, Kaman Kuttu, Vadi Modi, Ten Modi. The South Indian Natakam was introduced into Sri Lanka when some local rulers, Sinhalese kings of Kandy, established relations with South Indian royal families to bring over princesses as royal consorts of Sinhalese kings. That was very early in the 17th century. Also Indian performers visited Kandy, and Nadagama had royal patronage.

ROBINSON: So then Sinhalese and Tamils were “mixed” early in Sri Lankan history?

KARIYAWASAM: Yes, the Sinhala and Tamil people were mixed from early periods of our history. Some Tamil kings ruled the country. They have been described in the Chronicles of Sri Lanka. During the period of Kotte in the 15th century, some Tamils were married to members of the royal families.

ROBINSON: When was Nadagama introduced to ordinary Sinhala audiences?

KARIYAWASAM: The first modern attempt at introducing Nadagama to Sinhalese was made in 1824. Pillippu Sinho, a Roman Catholic, a blacksmith by trade, wrote the Ehelepola Nadagama or the Sinhalese Nadagama. He also produced it. This Ehelepola or Ahalepola Nadagama deals with the surrender of the last king of this country to the British in 1815. It concerns the king’s betrayal by his prime minister, Ahalepola.

Let me briefly refer to other works by Pillippu Sinho. One, Sulambavati Nadagama, is about a queen, Sulambavati, who is infatuated by a deformed person; the story deals with their secret love. Another, Sthakkiyar Nadagama, is the story of a Catholic saint. Matalan Kathara is the story of a hero. Helena Nadagama is the story of Saint Helen. Juseput Nadagama relates to the story of Jesus Christ.
ROBINSON: So not all Sinhala Nadagamas were based on local history.

KARIYAWASAM: The early Nadagama stories in Sinhala were imaginary ones. With European settings. Later some Jataka tales were also dramatized in this form. As for performance, the number of characters was few. The songs were based on Carnatic music. The audience sat on the ground. Those who sat in front had to pay an admission fee. In time this levy was extended to others as well. As you know, Ediriweera Sarachchandra’s *Maname* of 1956 is in the Nadagama tradition. In the 1960s many experiments were made in dramatic style, and Nadagama and Nurti and Kolam and Tovil and Sokari became a source of inspiration for a revivalist drama.

ROBINSON: Changing the subject, would you mind going into the contemporary Tamil drama in Sri Lanka?

KARIYAWASAM: Let me start with 25 years ago or so. The Tamils in Sri Lanka had a long heritage of folk plays, as I suggested, but local Tamil playwrights ignored this traditional treasure and imitated their counterparts. In the 1950s Professor K. Kanapathipillai translated some foreign plays into Tamil for production by the Tamil Society in the University of Peradeniya. Sometimes they were able to show these plays in Colombo and in Jaffna too. In 1956, after the election victory of S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike, the Tamil newspaper *Thinkaran* advocated unity between the Sinhala and Tamil communities. Its editor, Dr. Kanagasabhapathy Kailasapathy, wrote that the Sri Lankan Tamils and the Sinhalese should go hand in hand in the development of their culture. This idea saw results in Dr. Subramaniam Vithiananthan’s creations at the University of Peradeniya. *Ravanesan* (The
Mighty Ravana), Kannan Por (The Battle of Kannan), Nondi Nadagama (The Drama of the Crippled), to name three. He followed the traditional Tamil folk drama. He challenged the existing Tamil drama groups in the country. A powerful folk drama tradition came out of Jaffna.

ROBINSON: Did the Sri Lankan Tamils and the Sinhalese go hand in hand as far as culture is concerned?

KARIYAWASAM: During the time of Dr. Kartigesu Sivathamby there was considerable unity between Sinhala and Tamil Drama Panels in the National Arts Council. The Tamil Panel was comprised of various Tamil scholars. Dr. Sivathamby was the chairman. He declared his main intention was to develop the Tamil folk tradition espoused by Professor Vithiananthan, who had been his teacher. Sivathamby also wanted a touch of the modern in Tamil drama. He’s now the head of the Tamil Department at the University of Jaffna. He’s also in charge of Fine Arts there. He’s conducted workshops in teachers training colleges too.


ROBINSON: Would you please describe a couple of these plays?

KARIYAWASAM: Vilippu means awareness or new life. The play is based on the problem of unemployment. The consciousness
of the unemployed is transformed into an understanding of their social problem. *Porattam* is the struggle or the strike. It’s a study of estate trade unions in the country. The motivating force of the play is the relationship between Sinhalese and Tamil workers. The play advocates their unity. Another play, Kalay Selvam’s *Sirukkiyam Perukkiyam*, is a study in poverty and its dehumanization. In the theme of the play social phenomena are determined by individuals not by social forces. After the takeover of the tea estates --plantations-- by the government, a worker and his wife go to the capital seeking their fortune. The husband becomes a ragpicker and the wife a prostitute. (The title of this play in English is *The Ragpicker and His Courtesan Wife*.) She tries her best to give up prostitution, but when she comes back to the husband, though he sympathizes with her, he does not want to accept her back. She’s left alone and abandoned on the streets.

ROBINSON: Have the Tamil Panels and Sinhala Panels ever done anything together?

KARIYAWASAM: In 1976 both the Sinhala Drama Panel and the Tamil Drama Panel got together to do a bi-lingual drama festival that gave both Sinhala and Tamil audiences a chance to intermingle. After that, this Sinhala-Tamil unity was lost to hatred and animosity. And the Tamils started on their own way, with less association with the Sinhala Panel.

As I was saying about Tamil drama, also in the 1970s, one of Professor Vithianandan’s pupils, S. Maunguru, produced *Sangharam* (The Fight), following the Vadamodi style. Maunguru has produced children’s plays, and he experiments with Bharata Natya, Manipuri, Kathak, and Kathakali. These are systems of Indian dance. *Rigorous*

ROBINSON: Has there been much Tamil activity in theatre in the 1980s?

KARIYAWASAM: Yes. In 1980 Francis Gnanam produced *Enough of Waiting*. K. Balendra, Nirmala Nithianandan, and Tarciciyas formed the Performance Arts Society, a group of lovers of art and music and dancing and drama. S. Sathgurunathan produced a play for the Liberal Group at Jaffna University. *The Bodies Were Soil Stained*. This is a propagandistic play. Some of the Tamil writings of this period deal with Marxist teachings and the suffering of the Tamil people. But they were presented not artistically but as pieces of political propaganda. Presently many Tamil writers and producers who were in and around Colombo either went to Jaffna or left Sri Lanka.

ROBINSON: Politics seems to have a big effect on theatre in Sri Lanka.

KARIYAWASAM: You can say that since the early 1970s politics has played a heavy role in the cultural life of Sri Lanka as a whole. In 1970, for example, the Drama Panel— it had six members—was removed. A farcial situation. There were people, political stooges, who agitated for their removal. And the newly appointed minister did it. The funny part of it was the members had been appointed by the same government a long time before. Then came the insurrection of 1971. Curfew was declared. It was in force for more than nine
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months. Gatherings were not so advisable. Youth activities, theatre activities, came to a halt. School halls were not provided for rehearsals.

ROBINSON: Can you explain this situation in a little more detail?

KARIYAWASAM: When a government comes into power here, certain political-minded people want everything to be changed. In this case, they were ignorant of the fact that all the six were appointed by Sri Lanka Freedom Party governments. H. D. Sugathapala, and Charles Abeysekera were on the Panel from 1959 during Mrs. Bandaranaike's time. R. de S. Thenabadi was from 1960. I was appointed in 1964, during the time of Mrs. Bandaranaike, along with two other members. We worked during the period of the United National Party government without any change from 1965 to 1970. S. G. Samarasinna, the Assistant Cultural Director, was the member appointed by the then government. The removal of the Drama Panel was done through S. Kulatilaka, an appointed Minister, not elected by the voters. He was a retired judge. With his advisors he appointed a Panel in which there were people who had already been contesting in the festival. When the 1971 insurrection happened, for the first time the annual drama festival could not continue. The funniest part of it was that again in 1973 the same Minister appointed the old members to that Panel. That was how the Minister of Cultural Affairs worked in the 1970s.

ROBINSON: What about the content of the plays of that time?

KARIYAWASAM: The dramatists thought drama the best medium to express political ideologies. There was a stream of politically propagandistic plays. Simon Navagattemga’s Subha Saha Yasa supplied the model. Subha is the king's
gatekeeper. Yasa is the king. Both were historical characters. They both look the same. They change places to deceive the Ministers. One day the gate keeper kills the king. The play describes his activities as king. Navagattekama was drawing a parallel with contemporary politicians. This play has been staged here about 1500 times. The imitations unfortunately lack its clarity of writing, its quality of acting, and its dramatic construction.

ROBINSON: Going back a little, has there been much production of Sinhala plays in the Tamil language?

KARIYAWASAM: As you know, only a few Sinhalese understand Tamil. And politically motivated fights have created a big gap between the Sinhalese and the Tamils. So, in the field of culture, there is little influence or any other bond between these two cultures. One Tamil literary journalist, Kailayar Sellanainar Sivakumararan, tries at least to introduce Tamil and Sinhala cultures to each other in his newspaper writings. He’s been doing this for almost thirty years. His works include Tamil Writing in Sri Lanka and Sivakumararan Kathaigal, a collection of his own short stories. This is a funny situation. The Tamil Bharata Natyam style of dance is a celebrated art in Sri Lanka. Even in the Ministry of Education, it is an accepted subject. Sinhala teachers teach Bharata Natyam to many Sinhalese girls and run schools for that purpose.

To answer your question more directly, yes, in the 1970s, some popular Sinhala dramas were translated into Tamil and produced. For example, Dayananda Gunwardheren’s Nari Bana (Fox Son-in-Law) and Ibi Katta. Ibi is of tortoise and katta is shell.

ROBINSON: Would you describe these two dramas?
KARIYAWASAM: Dayananda combined two folk tales for *Nari Bana*. A mother and her daughter go to the forest to collect firewood. The daughter is so playful, the mother says, that if she continues life in this fashion she will be given in marriage only to a fox. A fox hears this and comes to get her. According to the folk tale, people never lied at that time. So the parents had to do as promised. The daughter is given in marriage to the fox. According to custom, the parents had to give a dowry to the son-in-law. He takes it away with him. He goes home and opens the sack of money. A dog comes and chases the fox. The fox runs out at the end. The daughter is happy.

In *Ibi Katta* Saragarba had taken a loan to buy a necklace for his wife-to-be. By now quite a sum is payable as interest. He submits a false medical certificate to support his application for a distress loan from his department. He is an honest man and this is a very distasteful step for him. A clerk, Jeewanasaka, harasses him over this application, and Saragarba forgets his wedding date. Vijjulatha, the bride-to-be, comes to his office in search of him, but he is not there. Jeewanasaka meets her and falls in love with her and shows her Saragarba’s medical certificate proving him to be a sick man. Vijjulatha goes to the medical practitioner with the certificate. The practitioner takes her to be a person sent by the C. I. D. to investigate corrupt practices, so he confirms Saragarba’s illness. But the practitioner is unhappy about his falsehood. He sets out with his daughter Punyaseeli to meet Saragarba. Saragarba is now really a sick man, but he is happy in the knowledge that the medical certificate submitted in support of his loan application is no longer false. The
practitioner gives him his daughter Punyaseeli in marriage, promises to cure him, and gives him his bills for the treatment as a dowry. To Saragarba this is a piece of good fortune. He can now go back to his office, produce real medical bills, and so put finis to his distress loan application file.

ROBINSON: As long as you mentioned Bharata Natyam, do you have any other comments on dance in Sri Lanka, ballet, for example?

KARIYAWASAM: Ballet is new in this country. Or what is called ballet here. When Rabindranath Tagore came here in 1934, his Shap Mochan became popular among the elite. Some young people who were interested in dance went to India. When they returned, they tried to introduce the new art called ballet following the then new dance school of Uday Shankar. They had no suitable stories, so they turned to Indian mythology. Chitrasena, Vasantha Kumar, Premakumar Epitawela, and Nimal Velgama were the first artists here who tried to introduce this style. Both Premakumar Epitawela and Vasantha Kumar also made attempts to dramatize contemporary social problems in dance. They both criticized the agricultural reforms in the country. When the government increased the price of rice, Premakumar did Titta Batha (Bitter Rice). When the government was to impose the Paddy Lands Act both did ballets to praise the Act.

ROBINSON: How do you see the situation in the Sinhala theatre today?

KARIYAWASAM: An entirely new kind of drama exists. Its sole purpose is to make the spectators laugh. By whatever means. Without the least regard to the theatrical appropriateness or to the overall quality of the production. Nihal Silva's
Interviews with Tissa Kariyasam and Hope O’Neil Todd

*Sergeant Nallathambi* is a prominent example of this trend. Nihal Silva is a competent actor on the Sinhala stage. His *Nallathambi* has been done hundreds of times. It ridicules the accent of a Tamil officer. His words, manners and acts are hilarious. It is very popular. The critics, however, do not have a kind word to say about this play.

ROBINSON: Then the situation of Sinhala drama in 1960s and 1970s was much better.

KARIYAWASAM: Yes, it was. Now, after a period of Western translations and adaptations, the Sinhala theatre has lost the audience that sponsored the development of Sinhala drama. They were a bilingual audience, speaking Sinhala and English. Of course, there was a struggle between the old School of actors and producers of the Tower Hall era headed by the late J. D. A. Perera and the students of the then Government College of Fine Arts who were against the actors and producers of the Sarachchandra school.

ROBINSON: What was this struggle about?

KARIYAWASAM: It was a struggle in search of a theatrical tradition. The main issue was about dramatic and non-dramatic elements but was later discolored by party politics.

ROBINSON: When it comes to other literature in Sinhala, what is the situation these days?

KARIYAWASAM: In the present day, in every field of Sinhala literature, there is a new generation of writers who do their best for the development of the literary genre of each. Young blood is everywhere. In poetry, for example, there are new writers like Monika Ruvanpatirana, Parakrama Kodituwakku, Dharmasiri Rajapaksa, Ratne Sri Wijesinghe, K. O. Ananda, and Senerate Gonsalkovale. In the novel, Jayakody
Seneviratne, Aravvala Nandimitra, Somaweera Senanayake, Minivan Tilikaratna, Sumitra Rahubedde, and Kulasena Fonseka. These novelists describe the changes in village life, especially changes in the lives of the poor. Political corruption. Unemployment. The disparity between the rich and the poor. The weak position of women in society. The political situation is one of the themes. The future of Sri Lanka. The army and police rule. Problems created by the Middle East job seekers. Leaving the country for greener pastures.

ROBINSON: Is there a generational struggle here too?

KARIYAWASAM: Yes, there's an unfilled gap between two generations. The writers who were brought up in the now outdated English stream do not accept the new Sinhala writers as creative writers. Take, for instance, a writer like A. V. Suraweera, whose work you know fairly well. He was engaged in classical Sinhala literature studies. Then he published his first creative piece. In 1969. As you know, he has published five novels and four collections of short stories. But I still can remember when the works of Suraweera were not discussed by the critics attached to the University of Peradeniya. Some do not mention his name when they discuss Sinhala novels. In his creative writing Suraweera is looking closely at some of the social problems of this country. Unfortunately, some of the older critics cannot react positively to these themes. Only Sarachchandra Wickramasooriya writes about Suraweera. Unfortunately, he is not recognized as a critic by the University of Peradeniya people.

Similarly, in the universities most of the dons teach about the older generations of poets, but nothing is being taught about the new writers. I'll give you a fine example. Mahagama
Sekera was not discussed while he was still alive. He died on January 14, 1975. He was a lyric writer who brought the Sinhala folk idiom into his writings. He introduced a special rhythm into free verse. Then, after he died, he was ridiculed by some writers who said he belonged to a little tradition of poets but not to the great tradition to which they assume they belong. Gunadasa Amarasekera has said that Sekera was a second grade writer.

ROBINSON: Finally, do you have any comments on the reading public in Sri Lanka?

KARIYAWASAM: Literary and artistic taste here has deteriorated to a low level. Newspapers and television and most of the stage dramas contribute to this. New plays are not discussed at all. When you read reviews in the press, they all praise everything. Newspaper criticism is at its lowest.

The so-called "open economy" policy has brought adverse effects upon the arts. The middle class who always helped to develop the forms of art is a low paid, poor lot. They are not in a position to go to the theatre or buy a book.

But there is a "new rich" class that sponsors the vulgar, debased works coming onto the scene in the name of art. These people have money to spend.

ROBINSON: Is going to the theatre expensive now?

KARIYAWASAM: Now a theatre ticket is being sold for about 100 rupees. About four American dollars. You might not think that is expensive. But remember the average worker gets about 1,000 rupees a month, about $40. In the 1960s the highest price we paid for a theatre ticket was five rupees, about twenty cents. In the 1970s the price of a theatre ticket went up to ten rupees. Now it's 100 rupees. A teacher here gets
about 1,800 rupees a month. That's about $72. A university lecturer gets about 2,500 rupees, about $100.

The middle class is most affected by the new economic developments, and thus the arts are deteriorating. A new class of people is sponsoring the arts. Unfortunately, they cannot be called rasikas. Rasiha is a Sanskrit word that means one who appreciates and respects the arts.

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II

HOPE O'NEIL TODD is the Managing Director of Borwood Limited, a subsidiary of the Industrial Development Board of Sri Lanka.

He was born on June 3, 1926, in Matale, a town sixteen miles north of the central capital, Kandy, and approximately 100 miles from the commercial capital, Colombo.

His primary education was at St. Agnes', a Catholic convent school, and his secondary education was at St. Thomas College, both in Matale. His tertiary education was at Pembroke Academy, Colombo.

He completed his Diploma in Civil Engineering at the Ceylon Technical College. He has also completed his studies at the Institution of the Irrigation Department, specializing in Irrigation Engineering.

In government service since 1950, he has been a Senior Technical Assistant in the Irrigation Department, Assistant Technical Director of the Ceylon Tourist Board, General Manager of the National Small Industries Corporation, and Project Manager of the Kandana Boron Rubberwood Project for the Industrial Development Board.
He has been a consultant to the People’s Bank, the Ceylon Tourist Board, the Mahaweli Authority, and the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation.

He has done engineering and land surveys. He has prepared proposals for the development of tourist areas in Sri Lanka, feasibility studies on agro-industrial potential, and reports on craftsmen’s and fishermen’s cooperatives.

Hope O’Neil Todd was the first chairman of the Sri Lanka Wood Furniture and Wood Products manufacturing Exporters Association.

He has officially represented Sri Lanka abroad, doing feasibility studies and marked development studies in Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, the Philippines, the Middle East, the U. K., Yugoslavia, and the United States.

Hope O’Neil Todd is a member of the National Crafts Council, the Colombo Museum Library, the Sri Lanka Association for the Advancement of Science, the Kinross Swimming and Life Saving Club, the Wild Life and Nature Protection Society of Sri Lanka, and the Colombo Rowing Club.

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ROBINSON: The first question I want to ask you is this: as a life guard, have you ever actually saved anybody from drowning?

TODD: I’m not a life guard, but, as a matter of fact, I have saved a number of people from drowning, including a small child and, strange to say, a drug addict. My main purpose in being a member of the Kinross Swimming Club and the Colombo Rowing Club is to keep myself fit.

ROBINSON: Well, to row ahead . . . You used to be the Chairman
of the Handicrafts Panel of the national Arts Council. Would
you briefly describe this council?

TODD : The Arts Council of Sri Lanka covers every aspect of the
culture and arts of the country. As you must already know,
it has a number of “panels”. For example, the Drama Section
has Sinhala, Tamil and English panels. Similarly, there is a
Literary Panel for each of the three languages. An Artist
Panel. A Dance Panel. A Puppetry Panel. I used to be the
chairman of the Crafts Section. I’m still a member. The Arts
Council draws its members from the various disciplines. The
personnel are deeply invloled in the subjects for which they’re
ominated.

ROBINSON : You were also once General Manager of the National
Small Industries Corporation.

TODD : Yes. But the N. S. I. C. has been liquidated. It was one of
the first government financed state statutory bodies created
in 1958. It acted as the parent organization for the develop-
ment of small scale industries using indigenous raw
materials.

ROBINSON : Such as?

TODD : Such as clay for bricks and tiles. Timber for furniture.
Other wood products. The use of specified local timbers for
the manufacture of boats. Ayurvedic herbs for medical pur-
poses. The use of herbs for the manufacture of alternative
cigarettes. For the poor. Briefly, we wanted to implement and
use indigenous raw materials and our own skilled and semi-
skilled workers.

ROBINSON : Why was the National Small Industries Corporation
liquidated?

TODD : Owing to inadequate political structures that had been
continued since 1958.

ROBINSON: Is another agency now doing the work of the N. S. I. C.?

TODD: Other agencies. Bricks and tiles were transferred to the Ceylon Ceramics Corporation, and the furniture and wood manufacturing program to the Ceylon Plywood Corporation. As for herbs, a corporation called the Ceylon Ayurvedic Drugs Corporation was formed. The alternative cigarettes, another corporation, the Ceylon Tobacco Industries Corporation, was formed; it's liquidated, too, and is in the private sector.

ROBINSON: You're a kind of Renaissance Man, and I've heard about certain proposals you've made in regard to economic development in Sri Lanka. For example, the Village in the Jungle proposal. Did you take that name from the title of Leonard Woolf's novel about Sri Lanka?

TODD: The proposal was for a program to construct igloo-like structures in the deep South of Sri Lanka in an area by the sea that has high sand dunes. An igloo-like structure was designed with cement and steel and buried in a sand dune so that insulation and comfort were possible. The unit would have adequate space for a family of probably a maximum of five. There would be facilities for cooking, toilets, etc.

No, I cannot agree that the Village in the Jungle name was taken from Woolf's novel. It was created by a close colleague of mine, an architect, Nihal Amarasinghe, who is one of the most creative in this discipline, and it was formulated into the structural design by another colleague, Geoffrey Bawa, working at the prestigious architectural firm Edward Reid & Begg, who designed the new parliamentary complex
and executed its construction.

ROBINSON : When will this proposal be put into effect?
TODD : It's being kept in abeyance as a result of design refi- 
nements. A fair amount of technical and scientific knowledge 
has to go into a program akin to this concept, you know.
ROBINSON : You also proposed a plan to the Tourist Board to 
develop the tourist industry in Sri Lanka.
TODD : Yes, the tourist plan covered the entire country. Coastline 
development. Central hills development. Archaeological 
reserves in the National Parks. The coastline development 
plan was initiated before the completion of a master plan 
completed by an American firm of consultants in collabora-
tion with the Ceylon Tourist Board, of which I was the co-or-
dinator. This was the Bentota Development Project. Bentota 
is 40 miles south of Colombo. The project was sited on ap-
proximately 100 acres. The infrastructure was designed by 
the Tourist Board. There was cooperation from the Ceylon 
Electricity Board, the Water Supply and Drainage Board, the 
Telecommunication Department, the Railway Department, 
the Police Department, the Health Department, and others. 
Everything was planned out with the Edward Reid and Begg 
architectural firm to blend with the private hotel development 
in that area. Geoffrey Bawa was head of the infrastructure 
studies.

ROBINSON : What was the central hills development plan?
TODD : Infrastructure facilities and hotel development in the Kan-
dy area. Kandy was the capital of the last king of Sri Lanka. 
Nuwara Eliya used to be a holiday resort for the British 
colonists. It’s located about 7,000 feet above sea level. 
It’s cool. The Kandy area includes Anuradhapura, and the
archaeological reserve there dates from the 3rd century A. D. to the 9th century. Sigiriyya, a rock fortress with the famous fresco painting gallery. Polonnaruwa, the 9th century A. D. to 13th century capital.

ROBINSON: Did your plan include the east coast of Sri Lanka?

TODD: Yes, the master plan included the east coast. Trincomalee. The east coast is the most beautiful area for the development of this plan—cabanas, swimming pools, parks. The development will be under the guidance of the Sri Lanka Tourist Board too. Unfortunately, since the initial engineering service was determined, Sri Lanka has gone through a disturbed period. So this plan is also in abeyance.

ROBINSON: You also suggested some kind of agro-industrial plan, right? Would you describe it too?

TODD: The main proposal was for the development of the handloom industry here. Throughout Sri Lanka there are approximately 300,000 handloom weavers. Another part of the proposal was for the development of fishermen’s cooperatives. Another was for the development of saw milling. The manufacture of wood products using small machinery and equipment firms. This country has a vast potential of talent available for this purpose—the development of the handicraft sector, using cane and bamboo—and for the upliftment of the craftsmen. In view of the availability of a vast potential of creative, skilled personnel, the use of these two natural renewable resources, bamboo and cane, with the import of simple inexpensive machinery, could create not only sufficient employment but also a thriving industry both for the local market and for export. The Philippines, Thailand, China and Hong Kong are good examples of this kind of development.
ROBINSON: Now you work for the Industrial Development Board. What is that?

TODD: The Board assists small and medium scale industrialists in evaluating the industrial potential of projects. The members of the Board are nominated by the government and they all are professionals in their respective fields. The Board considers inputs and outputs, financial conditions, other technical and financial data, to make a project viable. The Industrial Development Board also generates research and development projects such as Borwood. The Board then either continues with such a project as a subsidiary company as in the case of Borwood, or sells the know-how at a nominal price to an industrialist who wishes to establish an industry. The Board also has an extension service throughout the country. It holds seminars to disseminate information with reference to project evaluation, financial requirements, raw material resources, research findings, infra-structure facilities, and so on.

ROBINSON: Then, what is the Borwood Project?

TODD: The Boron Rubberwood Project. Borwood Limited is a company whose major shares are held by the government. It has a continuing research and development program to utilize two renewable agro-plantation timbers. Rubber wood and coconut wood. Until 1969 these woods were used mostly as fuel wood. In 1969 two of my colleagues and I worked on the processing of structural data and the implementation of the sawing of the rubber tree. The timber of this tree has a very large starch content. It’s very susceptible to insects and to attacks of fungus. We treated the timber with boron. These problems have been overcome. This timber research is known
as one of the best research projects in the world.
ROBINSON : Who knows it as such?
TODD : It’s been recognized by the World Bank, the U. N. D. P., the New Zealand Forestry Research Institute, and other forestry research institutes throughout the world.
ROBINSON : Who were the two colleagues you referred to?
TODD : A. E. Kingsley Tissaweerasinghe. He used to be Assistant Conservator of Forests then. Now he’s a Professor of Forestry in Papua New Guinea. The other was Professor Milton Amaratunga, who is presently Dean of the Faculty of Engineering at the University of Peradeniya.
ROBINSON : Can we go into this success story in more detail? How did it all get started?
TODD : Well, every year in Sri Lanka there’s a felling and replanting of rubber trees on the plantations here. There are about 500,000 acres of rubber trees in Sri Lanka. We use them to get latex. As a rubber tree gets old, the amount of latex it produces diminishes. When they are about 25 years old or so, they are felled, and the land is replanted with young saplings. Every year about 10,000 acres are replanted. As I said before, until 1969, the felled timber--about 4 million cubic feet of rubber logs--was used only as firewood. That was because people thought the wood was unsuitable for any other purpose because of its susceptibility to insects and fungi.
ROBINSON : So you and your colleagues changed that way of thinking?
TODD : Yes, we did. It had come to my mind that these so-called useless logs could be converted into timber useful for making furniture. We could also conserve a lot of the forest area in Sri Lanka in this way, I thought. It would be economically
ROBINSON: What did you actually do?

TODD: In 1969, I was, as you know, the General Manager of the National Small Industries Corporation. We received an order for school furniture from the Department of Education. There was a timber shortage at that time. So Kingsley Tissawerasinghe, Milton Amaratunga and I worked out a technique for treating and drying rubber wood with a non-toxic preservative mixture of borax and boric acid salts. Then we made some furniture. It was as strong as furniture made from jak, halmilla and teak. And it was resistant to arthropods. We still have the patent for this process, by the way. And we have devised a solar dryer to dye the wood too. We call this processed wood “borwood”.

ROBINSON: Do you still make school furniture? What kind?

TODD: Most of the school furniture used in Sri Lanka comes from the Borwood project. We also market tables, chairs, cupboards, wardrobes, in Sri Lanka and abroad. I mentioned the World Bank before. A few years ago the World Bank heard about Borwood and they arranged a visit to us by a group of scientists from the People’s Republic of China. Today we make school furniture, desks and chairs, for Chinese school children.

ROBINSON: Where is your factory and how big is it?

TODD: The factory is in Kandana. That’s a village about 30 miles to the southeast of Colombo. It's close to the district town of Horana. The complex is sited on the boundary of one of Sri Lanka’s main rivers, the Kalu Ganga, which flows into the sea at Kalutara, 22 miles south of Colombo. The factory’s about 75,000 square feet in size. We work one shift a day, and
we produce about 50,000 cubic feet of sawn lumber a year. It takes about three months to treat and process rubber wood with the boron salts, but when the wood is correctly seasoned the finished product has an elegant finish like teak.

ROBINSON: Is there any place in Colombo where this furniture is sold?

TODD: Borwood products are exhibited and sold at a showroom in Nugegoda, 257 High Level Road. I would like to add that Borwood furniture has been exclusively used in the parliamentary complex at Sri Jayawardenapura, Kotte, for the administrative divisions. Also in some of the luxury hotels here. And in numerous public and private institutions throughout the country.

ROBINSON: Is Borwood Limited known to other countries in Asia besides China?

TODD: I’ve been invited to other rubber producing countries in South East Asia, Papua New Guinea, Malaysia, Thailand, to talk about our process. Their forest conservation problems are not as big as Sri Lanka’s, but, sooner or later, their problems will be bigger, because they’re all cutting down their forests. Our Borwood process is like an insurance plan for the future. I’m a member of the Wild Life and Nature Protection Society, and, as I’ve said before, every tree of rubber wood used for furniture allows another tree in our national forests to stay alive.

ROBINSON: Do these countries use a similar process?

TODD: As I said, Borwood has a patented process in the use of non-toxic salts, but I presume that other countries do have similar or alternative processes for the treatment of rubberwood. It’s quite possible that they use the standard
technical preservative treatments, most of which have been found to be carcinogenic.

ROBINSON: You are also a member of the Crafts Council. What does this council do?

TODD: The Crafts Council has many functions. In general, we advise on the preservation of traditional handicrafts. The Council can set up crafts museums or galleries to preserve handicrafts, for example, but this has been delayed until a decision can be made as to their locations, that is, whether they should be in existing institutions or in a new complex that’s envisaged and for which monies have already been allocated. The Council provides for the training of craftsmen. It advises on training programs for craftsmen and apprentices. It organizes seminars and workshops and conferences, national and international, to improve the standards and skills of craftsmen. It arranges international exchange programs for craftsmen. It institutes schemes for their welfare. It awards prizes and medals and scholarships for the study of handicrafts. Scholarships to countries such as Thailand, Indonesia, the Philippines, Japan, and some European countries. The Crafts Council also tries to improve the quality of the raw materials used in the production of handicrafts. The National Design Center also assists in this.

ROBINSON: You always refer to craftsmen. How about women in the handicrafts in Sri Lanka?

TODD: Strange but true—most of the recognized people in the field of crafts, in design and execution, have been men. Of course, there are women in the reed and rushware industry and also in pottery, lace, and handlooming, to name just a few disciplines.
ROBINSON: Would you mind giving us some examples of the kinds of handicrafts you are referring to?

TODD: Sculpture. For example, stone work and figure carving, statuary. Brass and silver casting. Other kinds of metal work. Woodcuts, wood carvings. Wood pillars and roofing. These wood products are basically for religious buildings, but some ordinary buildings and houses use them. Then, there's mat weaving and dyeing. Handlooming. Pottery. Leather goods. Embroidery. Ivory carvings. Painting. Ritual masks. The rituals and ceremonies in which the gods are invoked may normally be distinguished from each other by means of their different masks.

ROBINSON: What are some of these masks and rituals?

TODD: If you are interested in this subject, you should read the publications of Dr. Ediriweera Sarachchandra, Dr. H. M. Goonatilleke and Mr. Otaker Pertold. I have a layman's interest. Basically, I'm referring to the ritual masks used in the Thovil ceremony and the Sanni ceremony, the Devol Madauwa and the Gam Nadauwa. In the Thovil ceremony there are a few Kolam masks. Kolam is a dance of a prime concept. A Sanni mask has well established types. There are two Thovil ceremonies comprising the Maha Sohan and the Gara Yakuma. These are associated with belief in an enormous demon of the graves of the dead. The Gara Yakuma is identified with several mask dances and symbolizes the transformation of a human into a demon. The Sanni Yakun or Sanni Yatum are associated with the demon dancing ceremonies with Sanni demons. Sanni means a disease arising out of bile, phlegm or wind. There are eighteen such ailments, referred to as the Eighteen Sanniya or the Eighteen Sanni diseases.
Each ailment-causing demon is called a Sanni Yaka. As for the Devol Maduwa or Gam Maduwa rituals, gods and goddesses are invoked and impersonated in them. These gods are the deities who are of use to people in this world, the Pattinidevi, the Indian goddess of chastity and purity, now a local goddess, and other gods like Devol, Saman and Vishnu. Other masks are used in drama, the Kolam and the Sokari. Kolam is a dance drama or rural opera. It has a central theme. Serious episodes are enacted by dancers wearing masks. This type of dance drama culminating in the dramatic presentation of a story is confined to the Southern coastal belt of this country. Sokari derives its name from the wife of a wandering Indian mendicant or trader. The story about this couple is called the Sokari Katha, the Sokari story, and the performance is called Sokari Netuma, Sokari dance. This type of drama is traditionally performed in the hill country of Sri Lanka.

ROBINSON: What is the National Design Center's connection with all these handicrafts?

TODD: The purpose of the Design Center is to advise the Sri Lanka Handicrafts Board and craftsmen in matters relating to the production of handicrafts and their development. The Design Center tests materials used in the production of handicrafts. It issues certificates in respect of the quality of these materials. It does designing for small industries. It does research in the substitution of local raw materials for imported ones. It surveys market conditions here and abroad for handicrafts. It maintains an information bank on materials, processes, designs, and laboratories and workshops. It has its own expertise in costing the different items for the crafts industry. The Center uses both local and foreign designers. The local
Interviews with Tissa Kariyasam and Hope O'Neil Todd

designers are trained in Sri Lanka and sometimes outside.

ROBINSON: Next, who are the craftsmen in Sri Lanka?

TODD: The execution of the crafts has generally been restricted to hereditary communities. They trace their ancestry back to Vishvakarma, a god of arts and crafts.

ROBINSON: Where are these communities located?

TODD: For instance, the community that manufactures the most beautiful mats, the Dumbara mat, comes from a place close to the ancient capital of Kandy. Most ivory workers come from areas around the city of Galle. They also work with ebony. Lac workers come from a village close to my own village in Matale. Near Hapuvidha. In the Eastern Province, there's a reed industry around Batticaloa which produces mats and baskets. The Northern Province has a thriving handicrafts industry in gold, silver, wood work, and pottery, around Jaffna. In the suburban town of Kelaniya, about 10 miles from Colombo, there's a Buddhist monument on the banks of the Kelani River. Pottery is a main craft there too.

ROBINSON: What is the connection between crafts and gods in Sri Lanka?

TODD: The importance attached to craftsmanship is explained in the Shilpasastras, the Canons for Craftsmen. That probably goes back to the period of the Veddas, the native people of Sri Lanka. These canons are identified in the Atharva Veda and the Vedic mantras by which deities are invoked. If I may appeal to authority, Ananda Coomaraswamy, Andres Nell, and Ediriweera Sarachchandra have all said the crafts of Sri Lanka can be understood as religiously symbolic. The Sanskrit word for skill, kausala, applies not only to the craftsman's creativity but also to his spirituality. Many
Buddhist priests were sculptors and architects in the past. We could change your question to what is the connection between crafts and priests. There used to be a king-priest relationship in which the priest determined what the artist should create and the king was the patron of the artist who executed that concept.

ROBINSON: Can you give an example of the kind of religious craftsmanship you are referring to?

TODD: Buddhist statuary. The Tholuvila Buddha in the Dhyani attitude. It came out of the Anuradhapura period, about the 3rd to 4th century A.D. It is made out of crystalline limestone. It's in the Colombo Museum now.

Many bronze statues have been found at Polonnaruwa dating to the 11th and 12th centuries. The greatest of these bronzes is the Siva as Nataraja, the God of Dance. Dr. Nell has said this statue is a conception of the rhythmic processes of nature. It's a symbol of cosmic energy in dynamic activity.

ROBINSON: Are the names of the artists who executed these works known?

TODD: The artists did not leave their names behind. More important is that in these works there is an absence of any personal self-consciousness. They possess the aura of human aspiration in unity of thought and unity of action. Perhaps the moderns lack this kind of imagination.

ROBINSON: Along these lines, religious arts and crafts, I understand you have an interest in ancient temples in Sri Lanka.

TODD: Yes. About ten years ago I wrote a piece about the remains of Buddhist temples at Ambulugala, Dhanagirigala, Dodantalai, and Vakirigala. Gala means rock outcrop.

ROBINSON: Where are these temples?
TODD: All four of them are in Kegalla on a road branching off from the Colombo-Kandy road at the 51st mile post. It's about 49 miles from Colombo. The road passes through the Karandapona Estate. To approach these temples you have to pass through tea plantations and rubber and coconut and paddy plantations. It's very picturesque.

ROBINSON: Are these temples very old?

TODD: The Vakirigala temple dates back to the 13th century. The Ambulugala temple dates back to the 15th century.

ROBINSON: Would you describe one of these temples?

TODD: The temple at Dhanagingala goes back sometime between the 13th and 15th centuries. It's a rock temple. The rock is a kind of gneiss, in common parlance, granite. It's one of the finest rock temples in the country, but it has been abandoned. It's one of the oldest in the Kegalla district. There are only two ways to get to it. The more interesting one requires you to walk across about 367 stone slabs. There used to be a beautifully carved bronze gilt Buddha there, Makara Thorana, but it's been removed for safe keeping to another temple. But there are other statues in the temple—a number of standing Buddhas, a seated Buddha, a recumbent Buddha. There are statues of Vishnu and Saman, the guardian deities of Sri Lanka. There are statues of four other guardian deities, the Satara Varam Deviyo. There's also a statue of Lewke Dissawe.

ROBINSON: Who is he?

TODD: Lewke Dissawe was a chieftain during the Kandyan period in the 18th century. He contributed tremendously to the renovation of the temple. There are paintings in the temple, too. On the ceiling. Paintings from the Jatakas depicting the Mara Yudda, the Divya Lokaya, the Suvisi Vivarana, and others.
ROBINSON : Please explain these names.
TODD : The Mara Yudda tells the story of Buddha’s fight against the forces of evil just before he attained supreme enlightenment. The Divya Lokaya refers to the World of the Devas, celestial beings. Suvisi Vivarana was the announcement by the 24 Buddhas who preceded Gautama Buddha that he would eventually become the Buddha. What is said to be the footprint of the Buddha is carved on a rock facing the temple. On the outer walls of the Dhanagirigala temple are figures of lions and elephants and of various kinds of flowers and creepers.

ROBINSON : More on the personal side, you are sometimes referred to in Sri Lanka as a Dutch Burgher. How would you define this term?

TODD : A Dutch Burgher is identified as having at least one parent who is a Dutch descendant. In 1830, Sir Richard Ottley, the Chief Justice, defined Burgher: “The name Burgher belongs to the descendants of the Dutch and Portuguese and other Europeans born in Ceylon. The right to this definition must be decided by the country from the father or paternal ancestors came”.

ROBINSON : How many Burghers are there in Sri Lanka?
TODD : In 1981, say, there were between 10,000 to 12,000, but the figure could be lower now. Small numbers of Burghers do keep emigrating to countries such as Australia, New Zealand, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States. To English-speaking nations.

ROBINSON : What did the Dutch originally come to Sri Lanka for?
TODD : I think you know the main interest of Dutch in Ceylon from 1658 to 1796 was trade—trade in spices and precious gemstones and timber. They looked into the possibility of exporting
elephants.

ROBINSON: What has the status of Dutch Burghers in Sri Lanka been?

TODD: This community has had an extremely interesting history in this country in that, with the advent of the British, the people in this group appear to have maintained their particular culture within the framework of the then new British rule. Most of the Dutch Burghers have been middle and upper middle class people. They have had the opportunity to have their offspring educated in law, medicine, engineering and politics.

ROBINSON: Hasn't there been any discrimination against members of the Burgher community?

TODD: There was no discrimination either during the British period of rule in the island or after 1948, after Independence, in regard to education and employment and residence in the country. There was the question of learning the national language, Sinhala. As you know, in 1956 the government of Sri Lanka made Sinhala the national language and Tamil an official language. English was not acknowledged. Many Dutch Burghers had to learn Sinhala. Most Burghers have assimilated themselves into the other ethnic groups that make up this nation, such as the Sinhalese, the majority community, the Tamils and the Muslims. Marrying into a traditional Hindu culture does bring about some particular problems, unlike marrying into a Sinhala Buddhist or Sinhala Christian culture. Burghers have married Muslims and in all cases have been converted to Islam. The Burghers do not have a community of their own now nor do they need to be united as they are identified as Sri Lankans. As far as I'm concerned, I have
completely assimilated myself into a Sri Lankan identity. I can find no constraints in living in this country.

ROBINSON: Incidentally, what happened to the descendants of the Portuguese in Sri Lanka?

TODD: To a great extent they've integrated into the different communities of the Sinhalese, the Tamils, the Dutch Burghers, and, occasionally but rarely, the English. The Portuguese belonged to the Roman Catholic Church. The Dutch belonged to the Dutch Reformed Church. Let me add that the Dutch Reformed Church here is unlike that of South Africa. And the British to the Church of England. These separate churches still exist in Sri Lanka except the last is called the Church of Ceylon here.

ROBINSON: What has been the main influence of the Dutch on the culture of Sri Lanka?

TODD: The main influence of the Dutch in the culture here, that is, education, the arts and crafts, can be identified as Dutch Roman law, religion, Dutch furniture, architecture of the still existing famous Dutch churches, and the construction of ports that can be found still well preserved in the cities of Galle, Jaffna, Batticaloa and other port towns. These architectural concepts have been carried over to the present day by Sri Lanka's most prominent architect. I've already mentioned, Geoffrey Bawa. Of course, he and other architects are also creating new concepts in the design and construction of public and private buildings. Dutch furniture traditions are still followed in the manufacture of replicas for both local and foreign markets. The Burghers are not a very large group, but the Dutch Christian religion is part and parcel of Sri Lankan tradition. The old Dutch Burgher Union still exists. It
produces an annual journal of a fairly high intellectual standard, too.

ROBINSON: What was your parents' influence on you?

TODD: My father's and mother's influence can be identified in two statements that have molded my life: Don't bear a grudge against anyone. Do what you can for anyone without expecting any reward.

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