AN INTERVIEW WITH P.N. CUMARANATUNGA
ON ASPECTS OF CULTURE IN SRI LANKA

Le Roy Robinson

Palavinnege Nandanapala Cumaranatunga, a free-lance journalist, is the editor of DANA, the international journal of the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement.

He was born on June 21, 1922 at Katukurunde in the Habaraduwa area of the Galle District in southwest Sri Lanka.

As a child, he attended the Dharminka School, Katukurunde, where the language of instruction was Sinhala.

He obtained his pre-university education in English at St. Aloysius College, Galle; Christ Church College, Baddegama; Mahinda College, Galle; St. Servatius College, Matara; and Rohana Vidya, Matara.

Under private tutors in Galle, he studied for an Inter Arts examination, London University, and qualified in English, Sinhala, Pali and Geography in 1948. From 1949 to 1951, at the Pembroke Academy, Colombo, he read for his B.A., London University, in English, Sinhala and Geography. Entering the University of Colombo in 1952, he read English, Sinhala and Economics for his First in Arts. He passed the London University B.A. examinations in Constitutional History and Sinhala in 1954.

He was a teacher of English in Sri Lanka schools for fifteen years: Anuruddha College, Nawalapitiya, 1954; Dharmaja College, Kandy, 1955; Vidyakara Vidyalaya, Maharagama, 1958-1961; Sri Lanka Vidyalana, Maradana, 1961-1967. In two of these schools he was an athletics and cricket coach.

In 1967 he gave up the teaching profession and joined the Independent Group of newspapers as a journalist. He served as sub-editor of The Sun, the Independent Group’s daily English language newspaper. He later joined the Lake House Group of newspapers. He worked as a sub-editor on both Janata, a Sinhala daily, and the Daily News, an English language newspaper.*

* This is the second part of an interview the first part of which was published in Bulletin of the Faculty of Liberal Arts, Humanities, Vol. 27, No. 1, July 1986.
ROBINSON: Let's continue with the Sarvodaya Movement. When and how did it get started?

CUMARANATUNGA: It was started in the 1950s. Dr. A.T. Ariyaretne was a school teacher in Colombo then, and he began to think that schooling in Sri Lanka was inadequate. Schools merely prepared students for narrow occupations. He thought education should help students to broaden their outlook. He began taking students out on weekends and vacations to the poorest villages so they could try to help the village people.

ROBINSON: Did many students participate in that activity?

CUMARANATUNGA: Yes. In Sarvodaya's first ten years, over 350,000 students from all over the country were active in Sarvodaya.

ROBINSON: What did they actually do to help village people?

CUMARANATUNGA: They spent time living among the village people. They helped them in constructing new roads, digging wells, building schools. But an important purpose of these activities was to awaken their own character. Dr. Ariyaratne's idea was that respect, a traditional cultural value in Sri Lanka, should be transformed into compassionate action. A person who performs a compassionate action gets a dispassionate joy. As for the communities that were helped, Dr. Ariyaratne wanted to strengthen the traditional values of sharing and constructive action and equality.

ROBINSON: Was Dr. Ariyaratne also interested in social change?

CUMARANATUNGA: Yes, he was. He became aware that Sarvodaya had to do more than rural development projects. He has said that society is at present unjust and if non-violent ways of bringing about social change are not found there will certainly be violence.

ROBINSON: Then is the Sarvodaya Movement connected with politics in Sri Lanka?

CUMARANATUNGA: Under Dr. A.T. Ariyaratne, the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement, takes good care to avoid being involved directly or indirectly in party politics. It attempts to bring about people's participation in uplift programs at the village level, as I said. This grass-roots action has convinced the Movement of the immense possibilities that exist for the Sri Lankan people to better their socio-economic conditions and their general well-being. Sarvodaya's objective is balanced development. Material and non-material needs—spiritual, cultural, social—should be satisfied.

ROBINSON: Can you be specific about "needs"?

CUMARANATUNGA: The Movement has identified Ten Basic Human Needs. A clean
and beautiful environment. A clean and adequate supply of water. Minimum clothing requirements. A balanced diet. A simple house to live in. Basic health care. Simple communication facilities. Minimum energy requirements. Education. Cultural and spiritual needs, as I just said. The Movement has started a diversity of projects to satisfy these needs of the people, particularly in the rural areas.

ROBINSON: How forceful is Sarvodaya in its activities?

CUMARANATUNGA: Sarvodaya is always pacifist. It works for peace and harmony among all racial groups living here. Its voluntary organizations carry on activities even in Northern and Eastern provinces without interruption.

ROBINSON: Your mentioning the Northern and Eastern provinces leads me to ask you what you predict will happen in the current ethnic crisis in Sri Lanka.

CUMARANATUNGA: It's difficult to predict the outcome of the present crisis. Much depends on India's attitude and the attitude of Tamil Nadu. On the other hand, if there is any political party in Sri Lanka that is truly democratic to our people—I mean the entire nation—and is prepared to go to the people and honestly explain the problem clearly to them without hiding facts, a solution is possible.

ROBINSON: Why do you say the people need to have the problem explained to them clearly?

CUMARANATUNGA: Because the great pity is that the majority of the voters, be they Sinhala, Tamil, or Moor, are ignorant of the facts—political, economic, social, historical, cultural, religious. Hence they are prone to be led by the nose by scheming political parties. For the last two decades or so, politics here has turned out to be a trade. It has been a case of one trading company taking over the reins of administration from the other. The United National Party and the Sri Lanka Freedom Party are both semi-capitalist in leadership and outlook. The first is a little more capitalist than the second. Both parties use communalism, caste and religion to come to power. As long as communal, religious and grievances remain, their position in the political arena is somewhat safe. Once these grievances are removed, both these parties will have to find new slogans to catch votes.

ROBINSON: Do you have any suggestion as to how to deal with the current crisis?

CUMARANATUNGA: I think devolution of power through provincial councils is the most feasible for the time being. The Tamil moderates, who are in the majority, appear to be coming to terms with devolution of power through provincial councils, but what proportion of the Northern and Eastern Tamil population would agree has to be clarified. Some intellectuals, Sinhala and Tamil, do support separation, of
course. But if it comes to that, the consequences, in my opinion, could be precarious for both communities. It could only multiply problems for both.

ROBINSON: Do you think a military solution is possible?

CUMARANATUNGA: A military solution is not possible.

ROBINSON: You mentioned the attitude of India. Aren't there many Sri Lankan Tamils in India now?

CUMARANATUNGA: According to Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, many thousands of Sri Lankan Tamils are living in Tamil Nadu as refugees. This is a burden on the Indian state. Incidentally, one of Sarvodaya's activities is helping in the rehabilitation of refugees returning here from India.

ROBINSON: Is an Indian military intervention in Sri Lanka possible? By Tamil Nadu?

CUMARANATUNGA: Intervention, militarily, by the Indian National Government, is unlikely. But it is possible. By Tamil Nadu it is not possible.

ROBINSON: In your opinion, what are the main causes of the present crisis in Sri Lanka?

CUMARANATUNGA: In the predominantly Tamil areas of the North the basic cause of today's crisis is economic depression. Actually, recession is affecting the poorer sections of all communities in the island—Tamil, Sinhala, Moor. But the Tamils, being more militant than the other two groups, and being able to buy arms and find training grounds in the sympathetic Tamil Nadu State, are in a better position to struggle.

ROBINSON: Isn't at least one element of the present crisis a language problem?

CUMARANATUNGA: Actually, there is no language question in the Northern region. Sinhala has never been the official language there in practice. The problem developed when the Northern Tamils brought up the demand for a separate state. They envisaged an independent administration. When Sinhala became the official language in the predominantly Sinhala areas, scope for Tamils seeking employment in government service began to narrow down when they did not have a working knowledge of Sinhala.

ROBINSON: Any suggestions on how to narrow the language gap?

CUMARANATUNGA: Sinhala could be taught to Tamils and Tamil could be taught to Sinhalas. Provided they are willing to learn. The necessity should arise. The proper institutional machinery should be set up. To teach the two languages in schools, a cadre of teachers equally competent in Sinhala and Tamil will have to be found. This has to be done in earnest, not like the way in which Bandaranaike's Sinhala
ROBINSON: Are there many Sinhalese in all the Tamil areas in Sri Lanka?

CUMARANATUNGA: There are no strictly Tamil areas here except in the Jaffna Peninsula. In the early 1950s there were a fair number of Sinhalese engaged in trade and minor jobs in Jaffna. They had gone there on their own. A few families had settled down there. But in the communal eruption in 1958, they were scared out. According to the government, the so-called colonists — people settled on government lands for agricultural pursuits — had been living in those areas long before the Tamil armed militants went into action. The militants started killing some of them and drove the others out. Actually, no part of the country south of the Jaffna Peninsula can be called a particularly Tamil area. Besides the Tamils, there have been Sinhalese, Moors, Vannias, living in those parts for generations. In the Eastern Province there are large concentrations of Sinhalese and Moors. There is a recently settled Indian Tamil population in the Northern Province too. They are not in favor of separation.

ROBINSON: Who are the Vannias?

CUMARANATUNGA: They're an ethnic group who migrated into Sri Lanka from the southern part of the Deccan region of India. Vanni derives from Vahni, meaning fire. They were originally fire worshippers. A warlike tribe. They settled in the region between Jaffna Peninsula and Rata hundreds of years ago.

ROBINSON: Where do the Sri Lanka Muslims — the Moors — stand in relation to the current crisis?

CUMARANATUNGA: Muslims have taken a neutral stand. They are in favor of devolution through provincial councils. They went peace. Of course, there have been clashes between Tamil militants and Muslims in Northern and Eastern provinces. Some Muslims have died in these clashes. Some Tamils have also died.

ROBINSON: Who are some of the important Moors in Sri Lanka?

CUMARANATUNGA: Badiudin Mahmud, for one. He was a former Minister of Education. As for government officials, Shaul Hameed, our present Foreign Minister, is a Moor. So is M.H. Mohamed, our present Minister of Transport. There are others.

ROBINSON: Where do the Buddhist clergy stand these days?

CUMARANATUNGA: In this crisis, the Buddhist clergy is divided. This division is based chiefly on political leanings. One group supports the United National Party and another the Sri Lanka Freedom Party. Both these groups are equally large. A third group, a comparatively small one, though fairly influential, supports the
socialist grouping of the Lanka Sama Samaja Party, the Ceylon Communist Party, and the Sri Lanka Mahajana Pakshaya. The group supporting the United National Party and the one supporting the socialist grouping are in favor of devolution of power through provincial councils. The group backing the Sri Lanka Freedom Party is totally opposed to it.

ROBINSON: When were the socialistic parties here organized?

CUMARANATUNGA: The Lanka Sama Samaja Party was founded in 1935. The Ceylon Communist Party was founded in 1943. It has direct connections with the U.S.S.R. These are the two main socialist parties here.

The Lanka Samaja Party had its origins in the Suriya Mal Movement. Suriya is a kind of tree. Mal is a flower. That movement was initiated by Matarage Aelian Pereira. He was the son of the eminent K.C. and Senior Judge Matarage Cecil James Walter Pereira. When he was an undergraduate in law at Gray’s Inn, Cambridge, he joined the British Army. That was in 1915. He fought on the Western Front in France.

He experienced the discrimination shown to non-English soldiers, even though they had fought together for the same cause. In one battle he lost an eye. After the Armistice he qualified as a barrister. He then returned to Sri Lanka. He launched the Suriya Mal Movement in the early 1930s—to collect funds to aid the non-English here who had suffered disabilities in the war. Some young socialists who had studied abroad—Dr. S.A. Wickramasinghe, D.P.R. Gunawardena, Dr. D.M. Perera, Colvin R. de Silva—joined the Movement in order to win support for the anti-imperialist campaign they were planning.

ROBINSON: Who was the founder of the Sama Samaja Party?

CUMARANATUNGA: Dr. Nanayakkara Pathirage Martin Perera. He was a product of the London School of Economics. A pupil of the eminent economist and political theorist Harold J. Laski. He was the leader of the party, its President, until his death. With the founding of the party, he embraced Marxism. But he could not called a deep-rooted Marxist in the sense Leslie Simon Gunawardena was, but he was a capable organizer who helped in large measure to build up the party. But he was also mainly responsible for the party’s political decline.

ROBINSON: What was the cause of that decline?

CUMARANATUNGA: Coalescing with the Sri Lanka Freedom Party headed by Sirimavo Rattwatte Dias Bandaranaike. Perera was Finance Minister in the first L.S.S.P.-S. L.F.P. coalition, and, later, for five years, in the united front government of the S.
L.F.P. and the L.S.S.P. and the C.P. He was perhaps the best finance minister the country has had. But he failed in rescuing the economy to the satisfaction of the broad mass of people that had placed implicit faith in him.

ROBINSON: How did he fail?

CUMARANATUNGA: He blundered when he attempted to implement theories that did not suit the economic and political set up he was placed in. He thought that the centers of private production and trade should be nationalized to usher in socialism. Probably, he miscalculated the political motives of the leader of the S.L.F.P., who was the most dominant figure in their coalition.

ROBINSON: Would you say something about the present leaders of the Lanka Samaja Party?

CUMARANATUNGA: Dr. Colvin Reginold de Silva is the present leader. He was the president of the party in its formative years too. He's an eminent criminal lawyer, probably the best after the illustrious Q.C. Matarage Richard Lionel Pereira, who dominated the courts of law here for fifty years. De Silva is perhaps the finest political orator of the socialist movement in Sri Lanka, and even in the country. He's a debater of exceptional skill. But, even though he's endowed with leadership qualities, he's not so popular as other leaders. As a revolutionary, he is fearless. He drafted the 1972 Constitution of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, by the way.

The current General Secretary of the L.S.S.P. is Widanelage Bernard Soysa. He acted as General Secretary while Leslie Simon Gunawardena was still living. Like Gunawardena was, he is endeared to the rank and file of the party. Also highly learned. Politically the most knowledgeable man in the party for many years. A man of high integrity too. Also a strict disciplinarian. He's a brilliant debater too. In Parliament he always speaks to the point. He substantiates his arguments by accurate facts and figures. So he has won the admiration of even his severest political opponents. He is one of the finest economists in Sri Lanka, by the way.

Leslie Simon Gunawardena was the General Secretary of the L.S.S.P. for many years. He was a Christian, by the way. He was the live wire of the organization. Also a man of high integrity and sterling discipline. A man with rare organizational capacity. He was an almost perfect theoretician. Perhaps the most forthright and outspoken member of the party.

By the way, one of the most dynamic characters in Sri Lanka's Left Movement and the Lanka Sama Samaja Party, Theodoric Amand de Souza passed away recently.
He was a Goen Catholic by descent and a naturalized citizen of Sri Lanka. He was probably the finest English teacher any Sri Lanka university had produced. He was always thorough, his analysis incisive, his knowledge profound. He was an authority on Marxism and on the history of Marxist activity here and abroad. Personally, I had the good fortune to study English from him at the University of Colombo—and politics more closely when I was attached to the L.S.S.P. local chapter at Nawalapitiya, a tea plantation area. He master-minded the jail break when the L.S.S.P. leaders, Phillip Gunawardena, N. M. Perera, Colvin R. de Silva and Edmund Samarakkody, were incarcerated in the Bogambara Prison in Kandy during the Second World War. He was an honest and dedicated Marxist.

ROBINSON: Who founded the Ceylon Communist Party?

CUMARANATUNGA: Sugeswara Abhayawardena Wickramasinghe from Nasanaanketiya in Akuresa, Matara. He was the C.P.'s leader until he died. He was a medical doctor by profession. He gained popularity through his humanitarian attitude toward his patients. He seldom went after political posts in government. A rare quality among local politicians. He was one of the founders of the Lanka Sama Samaja Party in 1935, but at the start of the Second World War he broke away on ideological grounds from the C.P.

ROBINSON: What were the ideological grounds?

CUMARANATUNGA: This was a reflection of the split that had occurred earlier between Leon Trotsky and Joseph Stalin. The L.S.S.P. followed Trotskyist Marxism; the C.P. followed Stalinist Marxism. Wickramasinghe had been a Marxist Socialist years before the formation of the L.S.S.P. He had entered the State Council in 1933 from the Morawaka seat as a Marxist. He introduced Russian Marxist political thinking to the broad masses in Sri Lanka. Until he died he went on ceaselessly educating the common people of this country in Russian Marxism. He used to relate the social and political life in Soviet Russia to large Sinhala- and English-speaking audiences. His knowledge of Russian socialist life was unsurpassed by anyone in Sri Lanka. He was Soviet Russia's most intimate comrade in Sri Lanka. He was the live wire of the C.P. here. He more or less carried it on his shoulders. Although he was very learned and affluent and influential, he was so kind and simple in his ways that even the lowliest person could approach him and chat with him. Wickramasinghe will go down in history as an honest politician with a conscience who never bartered his principles for ministerial positions.

ROBINSON: Who are some of the present leaders of the Ceylon Communist Party?
CUMARANATUNGA: The current president is Pieter Keuneman, a Burgher of German-Dutch descent. He was a young Cambridge University English graduate when he joined the C.P. in the early 1940s. In next to no time he became a very popular political figure. He was General Secretary for several years before becoming President after Wickramasinghe died. He's an entertaining, elegant speaker. An outstanding debater. He's highly polished in speaking English. Like Soysa of the L.S.S.P., he always speaks to the point. He is the first person to write a book on Soviet Russian social and political life for Sri Lanka readers. His Soviet Way. He writes lucid, simple, clean and effective English. K.P. Silva is the General Secretary of the C.P. He's the only working class politician to hold a position of leadership in any political party in Sri Lanka semi-capitalist, Fabian Socialist, Socialist or Marxist. It's to the Sri Lanka Communist Party's credit that a worker has climbed to the enviable position of General Secretary, the most responsible and influential post in any Marxist Socialist party. He's a capable and efficient organizer who came up the hard way. He's a tough man with working class qualities. Very popular among party cadres. And he's liked by the workers unionized within the party. He's a close friend of the Soviet C.P.

ROBINSON: Who were some political leaders in other socialist oriented parties in Sri Lanka?

CUMARANATUNGA: Don Phillip Rupasinghe Gunawardena was a key founder of the Lanka Sama Samaja Party. He was the only Lankan who had participated in revolutionary movements abroad. He was once associated with Leon Trotsky. He was a man of indomitable courage, and during the Spanish Civil War in the 1930s he crossed the Pyrenees from France to slip into Spain. He carried a secret message for the government troops fighting Franco's rebels. He was a fiery orator. A devastating debater. He was perhaps the most popular figure in the early period of the L.S.S.P. He had a tremendous capacity for work. He was a master of maneuver. But he broke away from the L.S.S.P. to form the V.L.S.S.P. — meaning Revolutionary L.S.S.P. He later formed the M.E.P. (Peoples United Front) with S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike. In 1956. His supreme effort was the Paddy Lands Act of the Bandaranaike government.

ROBINSON: Are there any interesting new leaders among politicians in Sri Lanka?

CUMARANATUNGA: The youngest political party here is the Sri Lanka Mahajana Pakshaya. Mahajana means "people's". Pakshaya is "party". Under the leadership of its General Secretary Kovilige Vijaya Cumaratunga, it has registered astonishing progress within a comparatively short time. It has made headway among all racial
groups in the country —— Sinhala, Tamil, Moor, Burgher. It is the most popular non-Tamil political party among the Tamils at the moment. Cumaratunga is a film actor whose popularity is second only to that of Gamini Fonseka. He enjoys overwhelming support from the youth, both male and female. In national politics here he has displayed an uprightness and a forthright stance rare in the local scene. He made his impact on local politics when he almost single-handedly ran the campaign of Hector Kobbekaduwe, a former Land Minister of the previous government, in the last presidential elections. Kobbekaduwe fared very well thanks to Cumaranatunga’s support. He’s probably the only political leader capable of exchanging views personally with the warring Tamil militants of the North, as he did a few months ago. In current politics he is the crowd drawer. Mahajana Pakshaya now attracts crowds second in size only to those of the ruling United National Party. He recently stated unequivocally that the Mahajana Pakshaya believes in straight politics. They do not harbor short-term ambitions. They don’t believe in opportunistic shortcuts to political power. Their effort is to restore communal harmony. The need of the hour is to restore ethnic amity and protect the unity and integrity of the country. He says there can be little development politics if the country is disintegrated.

ROBINSON: Are you related to Vijaya Cumaratunga?

CUMARANATUNGA: We belong to different families. His early ancestors probably migrated to Negombo from Ruhuna in the deep south during the early Portuguese Era, around 1500 A.D. or so. My ancestors were also from Ruhuna. The two families could have been connected in the early stages. But we are Palavinnege Cumaratunga; they are Kovilage Cumaratungas.

ROBINSON: Speaking of elections, are elections here usually fair?

CUMARANATUNGA: Elections in Sri Lanka are reasonably honest. There have been allegations that on occasion thuggery, intimidation and vote buying prevented a fair election in individual instances. But these have been very rarely substantiated in court. It’s difficult to prove such allegations, even if they’re true. Anyway, opposition leaders are not detained. Yes, democracy in Sri Lanka is possible, if the voters really understand its meaning and are clear in their minds about the true nature of the issues.

ROBINSON: Your mentioning the different Cumaratunga families reminds one of Munidasa Cumaratunga. You’ve already said a great deal about him. Would you say something about any of the non-socialist political leaders who were his contemporaries?
ROBINSON: Let me just mention Kalugamage Don Stephen Senanayake. He was Sri Lanka's first Prime Minister. He founded the United National Party around the time of independence in 1948 and remained its leader until his death. It's still the most powerful and influential political party here, as you know. That speaks for Senanayake's vision and foresight. He was not a highly educated man. Or, may I say, a learned man. But he certainly was the most practical of the semi-capitalistic political leaders of the time. His colonization schemes in agricultural development will stand as a monument to his political intelligence and pragmatism. His Gal Oya scheme was the first modern multi-purpose one—irrigation, agriculture, hydro-electricity. The first paper factory and the first sugar factory came about because of this scheme.

ROBINSON: To come back to you, as a journalist, have you been pressured by politicians?

CUMARANATUNGA: As a journalist, I don't handle politics. So I'm safe. My areas are culture and history—and ethology. I've enjoyed a fair degree of independence.

ROBINSON: Basil Fernando has come down very hard on journalism here. Any comments?

CUMARANATUNGA: Yes, I can agree to a great extent with Fernando's indictment of the Lankan Guardian for being liberal only in appearance. However, there is one redeeming feature in it. Particularly in the cultural aspect, it attempts to spotlight certain events and views that other, more popular organs, try to black out. On the other hand, to say as he did that Lake House is the most reactionary publishing institution here is a bit of an exaggeration. It was certainly reactionary in many ways. It was most reactionary, I may say, when Martin Wickramasinghe was editor of Dinamina and Silumina. Since the State took it over in 1972, it has blown the trumpet for the party in power, of course. But on the cultural side it manifests some sort of liberality.

ROBINSON: Would you mind if we got back to Munidasa Cumaratunga?

CUMARANATUNGA: You seem to think I'm an authority on Munidasa. In fact, I've no right to such a claim. I've only read some of his works. Of course, I've followed the events of the literary scene in his day.

ROBINSON: Well, how well did you know your uncle Munidasa Cumaratunga personally?

CUMARANATUNGA: I had no personal relation with Munidasa. My brother Dahamsiri had. From about 1930 till Munidasa's death in 1944. In fact, my brother was a sub-
editor of *Lah Mini Pahana*, which we’ve already discussed. Actually, I saw Munidasa on six occasions. On two of them he spoke with me. Two sentences. The first was at my elder sister’s wedding, the second when he visited Mahinda College in Galle, where he addressed a large audience of teachers and students and members of the general public. I was in standard six there at the time. He spoke on “The Use of the Sinhala Language in Creative Writing.” I first saw Munidasa when our family visited him while he was residing in his father-in-law’s house in Pallimulla, Panadura. I saw him next when our family was invited to his sister-in-law’s wedding. That was an interesting and, you may say, ecumenical event. When the bride was given in marriage, the traditional Sinhala rites were performed—the Poruwa ceremony in which the bride and groom stand together in public for the first time on a dais, and the nuptial knot is tied, joining the bride’s right hand thumb and the groom’s right hand thumb; the recitation of Jaya Mangala Gatha, a set of religious stanzas enumerating the victories of the Buddha which are recited just after the nuptial knot is tied; and the cracking of the coconut. After that, a Hindu priest, a Brahmin friend of Munidasa’s, officiated in some Hindu rites, recited some Brahminical hymns, admonished the couple, and wished them good luck in Sanskrit. Then Munidasa gave a short humorous speech. I saw him next addressing a packed audience of Buddhist monks, scholars, poets, writers, teachers and literary-minded laymen at Broadway Hall, Matara. That was in 1939. His topic was “Sinhalas Discover Their Worth”. The last time I saw him alive was at the performance of his *Niham Hekiyawa* at Jinaraya Vidyalaya Hall in Matara. Also in 1939.

Robinson: Before we go ahead, would you like to say more about your brother Dahamsiri?

CUMARANATUNGA: Yes, I would. Dahamsiri is my older brother. He studied at the Nittambuwe Teacher Training College when our uncle Munidasa was principal. Their association continued until Munidasa’s death. Dahamsiri was a headmaster of a Sinhala school first, and later a lecturer at the Polgolla Teacher Training College in Kandy. When he retired he was Principal of Dambadeniya Teacher Training College. He’s written a few books on language and composition and literary appreciation. He’s done a series of short stories for children and a few books on scientific subjects, also for children.