

## **NAVAM APPADURAI (1920 - 1983)**

**SCI Asian Secretary, a man of Peace**



**A compilation of tributes from those ...**

**whose lives he had touched**

## NAVAM APPADURAI (1920 - 1983)

Content	Page
Introduction – Roger Gwynn	3
THE SCI ASIAN SECRETARIAT - Phyllis Sato	7
REMEMBERING NAVAM APPADURAI - Devinder Das Chopra	8
A SPECIAL PLACE IN SCI HISTORY - Valli Seshan	9
WE ARE LEFT BEHIND TO SING - Bhupendra Kishore	11
A MAN OF PEACE - Phyllis Sato	12
NAVAM, THE FACE OF SCI - Stephen Nah	14
HE RADIATED GOODNESS - Pauline Mayer	16
J.N. APPADURAI THE CIVIL SERVANT - J.V. Thambar	17
AIYA - Suhendrine Kanagaratnam	19
AN INSPIRING PARENT - Shirani Nagarajah	21
NOBODY CAN TAKE HIS PLACE - Arulini Radhakrishnan	22
A GIANT AMONG MEN - Lilani Jayatilake	24
MY GRANDFATHER - Gayendra de Silva	26



Navam and wife Rubina,  
beside Jenny Chew of M'sia



Navam at a meeting in Japan,  
on his left is Masahiro Shintani

## **NAVAM APPADURAI (1920 - 1983) – Roger Gwynn**

Around 1914 a young Tamil-speaking teacher, Joseph Nannithamby Appadurai, left his home in Malaya and travelled to Ceylon in order to get married. His bride-to-be was Anne Alagamma Blanchard. The couple made their home in Jaffna and both taught at Jaffna College, a school established by the American Christian Mission in the 1800s. They were to have eight children, of whom James Navaratnam (Navam), born on 7th September 1920, was the fourth.

The family of six boys and two girls was a close-knit unit. Joseph was a strict disciplinarian, though he also had a softer side and loved to bring home treats for the children on payday. He was a committed Christian convert, and a feature of Navam's early life was the daily ritual of morning prayers and hymn singing, enacted on the verandah of their home, in which the entire family took part. Later Navam would recall with amusement his "irreverent" concentration on the whereabouts of windfall mangoes falling from the trees in the garden, while his father was deep in prayer!

Navam's mother Anne was a pillar of the local community: besides caring for a growing family and maintaining a busy teaching schedule, she also fulfilled the role of voluntary community midwife. She had received ample training in this line from her father, who had been the district medical officer in his time. Navam remembered her being called out in the wee hours of the morning to assist local women at childbirth.

The children were hardworking and talented and did well at school, between them winning the lion's share of prizes on school prizegiving day. Navam was interested in drama and took part in several school plays. Once he even had to float above the stage, suspended on a wire, when he took the part of Ariel in Shakespeare's *Tempest*. In the epic story of Nalan and Damayanthi, he was assigned the female role of Damayanthi because of his fair-skinned good looks, while his darker-skinned brother was chosen to play the male part. Neither brother was altogether pleased, either with his assigned role or with the reason why he was chosen for that role! Another highlight was when Navam was chosen to be "bell monitor" - a much coveted position, for the chosen one was given the privilege, not only of ringing the school bell, but also of getting to wear a wrist watch for the duration of his monitorship.

Unexpectedly and tragically this domestic idyll was abruptly shattered. Those were the days before the discovery and use of antibiotics. In 1931 Navam's younger brother Balan, aged nine, developed typhoid fever. He was nursed at home by his capable mother, but despite her best efforts Balan's condition worsened, and within days he was dead. Then Navam's mother herself contracted the dreaded disease and passed away in her turn. She was barely 34 years old at the time of her death. Navam's father was profoundly shaken by the double tragedy; scarcely twelve months passed before he too sickened and died.

So at the age of twelve, Navam had lost both his parents. His eldest sibling was still in her teens, and the youngest a toddler. Various relatives offered to take in some of the children; none could, however, care for the entire brood. Navam and his siblings, bereft so cruelly of both parents, had no family except each other, and they were anxious not to be separated. It was then that Jaffna College stepped into the breach. The parents' years of dedicated service at the college were graciously rewarded when the college authorities decided to take charge of the orphans. School fees were waived and the children became boarders.

In the difficult time when they were newly orphaned, the children held a family conclave in which they resolved that despite their changed circumstances they would apply themselves diligently to their work and make a success of their lives. The older ones decided that they would each be individually responsible for the education of a younger sibling. A promise they kept, for the youngest two, Edward and Reggie, eventually acquired doctorates in their respective fields, and the third youngest, Ruby, won a master's degree with which she taught in Jaffna schools. Navam's elder brother Ernest, though he did not pursue higher educational goals, was a successful man of affairs, eventually becoming the Secretary of the Employers' Federation.

Another happy event helped the Appadurais at this time. The eldest girl, Marjorie, met and married the young Reverend Jeyasingham, who assumed the daunting task of caring for his numerous brothers- and sisters-in-law. The Appadurais now had a home to go to during the holidays, one in which they were always made to feel welcome.

Navam was a model pupil and an excellent student. When he had completed his Intermediate Arts exams the Principal was keen that Navam should take up a scholarship to study medicine in the USA. The terms of the scholarship were most generous. Navam, however, was determined to stay close to his family, and with a politeness and a firmness which were both highly characteristic, he turned down the offer. Instead, he obtained teaching positions first in Carey College, then in Wesley College in Colombo. This enabled him to financially support and care for his younger siblings. Whilst teaching Navam pursued his own studies in his spare time, and in due course he acquired his Bachelor of Arts degree from London University.

While still teaching he met Rubina Hensman, the sister of a fellow teacher and friend. Rubina herself was a trained teacher of English and an accomplished pianist. They were married on 21st June 1948. In time they were blessed with four daughters, - Suhendrini, Shirani, Arulini and Lilani. The family was a close-knit and happy one; the girls grew up in a house filled with fun and laughter. For Navam, this was the family life he had longed for ever since his early teens.

After completing his degree in 1947 Navam had worked for a short time in the Cooperatives Department: there he had his first experience of working alongside poor and deprived village folk. After his marriage he joined the newly established Department of Social Services within the Ceylon Administrative Service. His duties now took him to many parts of Sri Lanka and thus for a number of years the family relocated frequently to different parts of the island, with Rubina keeping up her teaching career in various regional government schools. Navam's work at one stage involved the administration of public assistance to the marginalised peoples of Sri Lankan society. Navam considered his work with the poor as being of great personal significance as it chimed with his passion for social justice.

In the early 1960s, while he was stationed in Jaffna in the north of Ceylon, Navam's concern for the poor and the marginalised led to a rather serious confrontation with the government of his day. One of the main political parties with a significant presence in Jaffna at that time organized a "satyagraha" (a peaceful protest on Gandhian lines) outside the Jaffna administrative building. As a result of the picketing, the regular monthly welfare allowance paid out to the poor could not be made. Word got out that the government was hoping to scrap the payments for that month as a punitive measure. However Navam and his team from the Social Services department worked round the clock, at his home, to issue the payments before the government could decree otherwise, thus averting severe privation among the poorest segments of the community.

Following this incident Navam was summoned to Colombo for a meeting with a cabinet minister, and later he was transferred to the other end of the island. Since it was not possible for the family to join him he had to live away from them for a number of years, to his great regret. When at last that posting had run its term Navam was offered a position in Anuradhapura, which was closer to home. It was during his tenure in Anuradhapura that he came into contact with Service Civil International. A joint work-camp had been arranged by the Ceylon Department of Social Services and SCI India. At this work camp Navam met, among others, Valli Chari (later to become Valli Seshan) and Devinder Das Chopra, who were to remain lifelong friends. Navam's idealism in the matter of reconciliation and peace through practical service found a perfect vehicle in SCI. Thus began a long period of association for both Navam and Rubina. Navam involved himself to the point of being one of the founder members of SCI Sri Lanka.

The SCI way of life influenced the whole family and the motto "Deeds not words" kept popping up frequently. The family residence became a halting-place and a "home away from home" for numerous volunteers on their way to or from work camps. The Appadurai girls thus received a very unusual education at an impressionable stage in their lives. Often they were taken along to work camps where they learned to live without the comforts that they were used to, to do hard manual labour and eat plain, sometimes unpalatable food without complaint. Sitting in on some of the SCI meetings, they became aware of the hardships endured by the less privileged members of society. They learned at these international work camps to sing the favourite songs of different nations, and thus Bengali, Japanese, Malay, Hindi and Indonesian songs were added to the repertoire sung at home. Needless to say, for Navam there was no dividing line between SCI and family life.

Navam had some alarming adventures in the course of his SCI career. In December 1964 he went to India in order to attend a work camp. On his return journey he was to take the train to Dhanushkodi, at the southern tip of India, and transfer to the ferry which would carry him over the straits to Ceylon. The day he was to travel a cyclone struck south India and a huge tidal wave swept that train out to sea. Many lives were lost and Dhanushkodi was obliterated. Rubina feared the worst and was frantic with worry. In fact Navam had somehow missed his train and was stranded in Madras; but in the prevailing chaos he was unable to send a message home letting Rubina know he was safe.

In the meantime Rubina contacted the Government Agent in Anuradhapura, who forwarded the enquiry to the then Prime Minister of Ceylon, Mrs Sirimavo Bandaranaike. Mrs Bandaranaike took a personal interest in the matter; it happened that Navam's brother Edward was a member of her government's diplomatic corps. When Navam's whereabouts had been ascertained the Prime Minister phoned Rubina to reassure her, and went on to send a plane to rescue Navam and other stranded Ceylonese people. Navam arrived home just before Christmas. It was the best Christmas the family had ever celebrated.

On another occasion Navam and a few SCI friends had flown to Tashkent intending to meet up with some Russian SCI members. Unexpectedly their visa applications were refused and they found themselves stranded in Tashkent airport, unable to enter the Soviet Union. The other SCI members staged a protest by sitting down on the tarmac and refusing to budge. At this the airport authorities became distinctly hostile, and Navam found himself in the unenviable position of mediator between indignant SCI members and exasperated Soviet officials. He finally managed to persuade his friends to leave the tarmac.

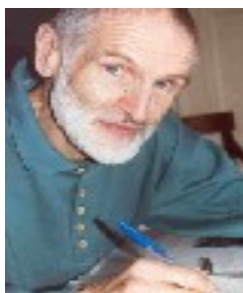
In 1968 Navam took early retirement from government service and assumed the position of Asian Secretary of SCI, taking over from Hiroatsu Sato. For two years thereafter the office of the Asian Secretary was located in Colombo. Aatur Rahman was appointed Assistant Asian Secretary and came to live in Colombo. Easygoing and friendly, he quickly became a part of the extended Appadurai family.

In 1970 the Asian Secretariat was relocated to Singapore. Aatur Rahman and Masahiro Shintani, who was Assistant to the Asian Secretary, lived with the Appadurais in their home. The trio of Navam, Masahiro and Aatur, though quite unlike each other, worked very well together as a team.

In 1972 the Singaporean Government, which had a policy of compulsory military training for young school leavers, took umbrage at the pacifist ideology of SCI and requested it to change the crucial clause in its constitution or else move its office elsewhere. It was decided then that the Asian Secretariat should be moved once again to Colombo.

Navam retired from the Asian Secretariat in 1978, but SCI continued to play a big part in his life. He joined the National Christian Council of Sri Lanka as its Development Secretary and worked for three years on various projects throughout the island. After that he worked for a think tank, the Marga Research Institute, where he focussed on community development projects. He was working on a paper for the Marga Institute, highlighting the escalating racial tensions in the country, when he suffered a major heart attack and passed away on 9th July 1983, at the age of 62, just two weeks before the outbreak of widescale rioting and civil strife.

Navam Appadurai was an exceptionally gentle, kind hearted and good humoured person, highly talented yet remarkably modest and approachable. A yearning for peace and justice was deeply rooted in his soul. Although his life was cut short while he was still at the height of his powers, he had already made an outstanding contribution to the causes he believed in. He will be remembered in the SCI movement as a great harmoniser and conciliator who made peace a reality wherever he went.



## THE SCI ASIAN SECRETARIAT

Phyllis Sato

The Asian Secretariat was pioneered in 1958 by Devinder das Chopra, with headquarters in New Delhi, and further enhanced when Devinder was joined by Valli Chari (now Seshan). When it became time for them to move on, Hiroatsu Sato became their successor and the Executive Committee requested that the office be located somewhere in between the main areas of activity - the Indo-Pakistan-Ceylon region and Japan. Because of tensions over Kashmir, it was difficult for Indians to get visas for Pakistan and vice versa and it was hoped that a neutral ground would make it easier to work together. There was hope of augmenting the activity begun already in Penang and Kuala Lumpur. After temporarily operating from Tokyo, in August 1965 Sato set up an office in Kuala Lumpur, pending government recognition of SCI. The following year Masahiro Shintani arrived as Assistant Asian Secretary and Aatur Rahman was appointed to work from Dhaka, concentrating on East Pakistan, Nepal and India. After their visas had been extended in two week increments for one and a half years the Malaysian cabinet, used to dealing with the Peace Corps and JOCV (Japanese Peace Corps), decided that SCI was too left-wing and refused to give official recognition, so there were no more visa renewals. That meant that the Sato family and Shintani-san had to quickly leave. In April 1967 we made the trek down to Singapore, because officials there had declared their openness for international enterprises and had no problem in granting visas.

When Sato left the Asian Secretariat in March of 1968, Navam was appointed his successor, with Shintani-san remaining in Singapore until Navam could move his family there. I recall that Aatur joined him in Colombo. As the wife and mother of three who had trekked from Tokyo to Kuala Lumpur, enrolling our oldest daughter for her first grade in a British school, then a year later in Singapore enrolling her sister and her in a Japanese school, I had compassion for the Appadurai family with four daughters making this big transition. Obviously the whole family managed it well, and today they are an international family spanning Sri Lanka, Australia and Canada.



## **REMEMBERING NAVAM APPADURAI**

Devinder Das Chopra

Navam Appadurai, who took over from Hiroatsu Sato as the Asian Secretary of the Service Civil International in 1968, was a soft spoken, well educated civil servant of some repute in the Sri Lankan government. He was of Tamil descent and recognised well, as early as the sixties, the route his country was heading for, especially with regard to the future role of the English language and the Sinhala language, Tamil Sri Lankans' position in Government and civil society, and the fate of the plantation labour. He was, very naturally, highly sensitive to the changes that had taken place within a few years of the coming to power of Bandaranaike, who was tragically assassinated in 1959. I arrived in Colombo for the first time a day after that tragic event and stood for hours in the queues that formed, to pay homage to the departed leader.

I met Navam soon after taking the message of SCI and workcamping to Sri Lanka in 1959/60 on the invitation of Padmini Jayawardene, who had been active with the Co-ordination Committee of International Voluntary Service (CCIVS) during the days of Hans Peter Mueller. In the course of my visit and stay in Colombo I had met the late Abeysekera Ji who also worked with the Government in the Department of Rural Development and Cottage Industries. He spent much of his time on introducing SCI to his many contacts, and was instrumental in my meeting the Principal and staff of one of the leading colleges in Colombo - the Nalanda, if I recollect the name aright after more than four decades. Abeyji introduced me to a Nalanda teacher, A.T. Ariyarane, whom I hosted in 1959 for his visit to the Ashram of Vinoba Bhave (the famous Bhoodan movement's inspiration and founder), since he was consumed with enthusiasm for the Shramadana movement of Vinoba Ji.

Navam, his kindly wife Rubina and their four daughters provided instant and genuine hospitality to all friends from SCI. Their home became a haven for SCIs and their friends right through the year. Navam questioned all that there was to know about SCI. He helped with the issues related to the registration of the organisation, which government officials or offices to contact and which individuals would help in the sponsorship of work camps and which individuals to shun! He shared all that in a most gentle, quiet way without in any way pushing anything. In fact he left the decision making to the persons he befriended and for the overall good of the organisation.

Navam used a minimum of words, shared his thoughts in a soft and pleasant way and cogently explained even the most complicated query one posed him, regardless of whether it was about Sri Lankan government regulations, the economy, the Sinhala/Tamil "divide" which was under way, or about SCI and which way we were likely to go. I have rarely met such a person who would never lose his cool, who would suffer a fool and remain helpful and kind, come what may. And in this process he had Rubina and the four young lasses in the house take care of the hospitality, while he personally took care of tasks outside - in Colombo, Anuradhapura, Kandy, Galle or wherever else in Sri Lanka!



The modalities of running Committee meetings, writing minutes, explaining the most complicated issues and constraints to SCI development in the region, were well mastered by Navam. The late Ataur Rahman from Bangladesh (then East Pakistan), worked as the Assistant to the Asian Secretary. Ataur was welcomed into the Appadurai home, where he stayed as a family member. Navam and Ataur's team effort in SCI work represented the best in human relations I have ever seen demonstrated in the SCI world. Live and let live, help those who were caught up in problems relating to visas or registration with police or medical centres (regulations were followed stringently where Indian or other south Asians were concerned), even help with funds on short term loan to SCI friends.

I attended one of the Asian Secretaries' Meetings in Kathmandu and remember Navam falling ill while I was there with him. That is when I became alive to the fact that he suffered a heart ailment but despite that was dedicated to managing the SCI tasks with total loyalty and commitment to the organisation. Navam's passing in 1983 came as a sad and a rude shock to me. SCI lost a dedicated soul, honest to a detail, dignified in his way of sharing any difference of opinion - howsoever strongly held - and highly committed to standing by you, having once given you his word. Honest to the core, gently open and frank, and not in the least provocative when taking a different line from oneself on a given issue. He shared the pros and cons of issues, did not gossip or speak ill of others. Where even that could have been justified, he would convert the conversation with a humorous remark and move the discussion away from any one sided or passionate-cum-frustrating situations.

Such ones come very rarely indeed. His approach of "love thy neighbour", without ever referring to any religious norm or rule, differentiated him from all the other people I have met in my three score years and ten.

Navam departed at least a decade or two before his proper time, leaving his family and friends in a state of shock and genuine grief. I remember him with deep respect and great regard. His contribution to SCI in Asia was indeed of permanent value, as it was based on genuinely assisting the weak and the needy. Such ones come rarely in our midst, in SCI or in any other context.



Devinder Das Chopra  
in Spain and in Nepal

## A SPECIAL PLACE IN SCI HISTORY

Valli Seshan

Looking back, one can say that many Asian longtermers joined SCI services quite young. Touched deeply by the experience, they continued their involvement, grew in stature and over a long period made a lasting contribution to the movement and the cause. I met Navam at his first camp in Sri Lanka (Ceylon), which had a study theme examining the conflict between Sinhalese and Tamils. At that time Navam was a senior civil servant in the Ceylonese department of social services. Some years later he would quit the position to join SCI fulltime. During the discussions in the camp his deep commitment to efforts for resolving the conflict between the two deeply divided communities, and his maturity and understanding of the complex issues, were evident. I still remember asking myself while listening to him: which of the communities did he belong to? His attitude towards the groups in conflict, his wisdom and gentle nature endeared him to many participants. And later, throughout his long, tireless service in SCI which spanned many nations, he exhibited the same qualities in his work. He created a place for himself in the history of SCI in Asia. I had the privilege of being a close colleague and lifelong friend of Navam and his family.



Valli in the center, to her left is Roger – taken somewhere in Madras, India

## WE ARE LEFT BEHIND TO SING

Bhupendra Kishore

Navam climbed the Jacob's ladder,  
we are left behind to sing.  
Spade and pen as life companion,  
young one as the ink.

Crossed seven seas  
trod all the shores  
with messages in his heart  
for one and all to share.

Burnt candles when sun went down,  
to catch up with the plots,  
squeezed words into deeds,  
in one stroke with a smile.

The voice still be heard,  
by those who had the chance  
to tread or live with him ...

No one knows nor Robin ...  
the secret of his heart  
the hurry to leave ...  
and to join the others  
in the valley of the kings.

All shall remember  
singing together  
We shall overcome,  
Bangla and Hindi songs.

In war time and in spring  
Navam climbed the Jacob's ladder  
we are left behind to sing.



Bhuppy as he grows older..

## A MAN OF PEACE

### **Phyllis Sato**

Rummaging back into my memory to find the place and occasion I first met Navam, I find that it seems as though I had always known him. That bespeaks of how comfortable I felt with him through our sharing of a world view and ideals. I didn't think of him as a Ceylonese - our acquaintance predated the name change to Sri Lanka - but as a member of the same family. We were even reading the same novel (I've forgotten the title) when I first visited his home. I think Navam would have been at home anywhere with his unique ability to actively listen and his tolerant demeanor overlaying a great sense of humor. I never saw him angry - a feat in SCI meetings! Those very qualities were invaluable for the Asian Secretariat during a period of one of SCI's inevitable contortions over change: how much to emphasize community development projects vs. work camps, and how political vs. non-partisan to be in the Vietnam War era and Cold War period.

My first memory of visiting the Appadurai family in Mount Lavinia was at the end of 1967. As Sato was longing to be back in the field (both literally and figuratively) he was preparing to hand over his duties as Asian Secretary and was actively looking for land for his next endeavor. Our youngest son and I met Sato on his way back from meetings in Europe to suss out the possibilities of residential visas in Ceylon and cooperation for establishing an Asian Regional Training Center, and the Appadurais hosted us. Navam was a civil servant and had good connections so he was very helpful to us. I remember hearing for the first time about the brewing tensions between the Sinhalese speaking, mainly Buddhist population and the Tamil speaking, but Ceylon born people. Sinhalese had been declared the official language. Promotions in the government were limited for Tamil speakers, even though English was the language used at work, and Navam was being encouraged to take early retirement, and I thought that would be SCI's gain and the government's loss.

Little did I think that the Sinhala-Tamil issue would remain unresolved nearly 40 years later. It affected our own plans as well since the man in charge of immigration made it clear that long-term residential visas or even citizenship was not in the cards since so many Tamils were considered stateless and had not been granted citizenship, and naturally they had to be consistent. He said that as long as he was in charge he would be able to guarantee visas for us, but we knew from talks with SCI members in Ceylon that change was in the offing. The future seemed uncertain.

Nonetheless Navam drove us around looking at available land near Kandy and even to some acreage he owned on the east coast. I remember thinking that this island was a slice of paradise. The climate was perfect, the vegetation lush, and above all the people seemed very welcoming and gentle. There were many similarities to our life in the city-state of Singapore, except there it was rush-rush and materialistic. Maybe Navam's measured, low-keyed manner had me projecting this on the rest of his compatriots, but it seemed like an idyllic life. However there were too many signs of future uncertainty.

Those who know the Sato family history will recall that we then went from the frying pan into the fire, as we chose to buy land in India instead - little knowing that eight years later the "Emergency" under Indira Gandhi would send us packing. Nonetheless, for our first

Christmas in our temporary (unfortunately it never transformed into permanent) house on the land we named Visionville, Rubina and her daughters joined us. Navam joined them after finishing his meetings in New Delhi as the new Asian Secretary. I remember having sympathy with Rubina, as I once counted that Sato had been away from home a total of six months out of the year when the office was in Kuala Lumpur - frequently over holidays because that was when others had time to meet. Though we had little furniture and no electricity yet, the company of Rubina and her daughters made it one of the most memorable Christmases I ever had. I remember Rubina suggesting that we blow up some balloons and see who could keep them in the air the longest, puffing them over the trusses (ceilings were never put in the house) until almost everyone was collapsing with laughter. When Navam came to collect them I was sorry to see them go, but first he and Sato had some of those endless SCI discussions.

My last visit with the whole family, in April 1971, was when they had finally shifted the office from Colombo back to Singapore. Shintani-san had kept the equipment and a mini-office open there until they were able to move, but he had already returned to Japan. I was taking the children back to the States to see their grandparents and to give time for two of them plus me to recover from a bout of Hepatitis A that had sapped our energy. We flew from Madras to Singapore, and had a good visit with the Appadurais who took us out to our favorite open-air restaurant overlooking the Straits. I remember that Navam had recently purchased an old second hand VW Bug but he was driving it like he was in the slower-paced Colombo and parked it facing the wrong direction in front of their house - a no-no in rule-based Singapore. The office was later shifted back to Sri Lanka. I continued to run into Navam at SCI meetings held in India, though those hectic occasions made conversations brief and hurried.

Navam, a man of peace with a peaceful outlook on life, toiled during a time of upheaval - much like today's period. He was in the Asian Secretariat during the breakup of East and West Pakistan, with India drawn into the civil war and increasing communal tensions in Sri Lanka, the Emergency in India making travel difficult, and the royal succession in Nepal in 1972 creating turmoil there with student strikes and suppression of reforms, and the long simmering tensions between South and North Korea. This was against the wider backdrop of the Vietnam War that cast a tense curtain over the whole region. Nonetheless, SCI members in all those countries (except Vietnam and North Korea) continued to organize work camps and long-term projects. Navam kept the candle of reconciliation lighted and never threw in the towel. He touched many peoples' lives and promoted the possibility of a different vision. Through his efforts and persistence, exchanges went forward and I am sure he touched many lives along the way. His was a life snuffed out too soon.



Phyllis Sato



Stephen Nah at the 1<sup>st</sup> Workcamp

## NAVAM, THE FACE OF SCI

### **Stephen Nah**

It's been thirty-five years since I met the late Navam Appadurai. I can still vividly recall the whole episode. I was a nineteen-year-old travelling alone on a night train from my small hometown (interestingly named "Everlasting Peace" or Taiping) to Singapore, 250 miles away. The train stopped at Kuala Lumpur next morning, and I needed to change trains. Being myself a rural dweller and not knowing which platform the connecting train would leave from, I asked for directions from a modestly dressed Indian man who was sitting on a bench. He smiled gently and pointed to the platform in front. I thanked him, and as I walked away I couldn't help wondering why this gentleman, though nicely attired, had no shoes on.

This was my first train journey to the south. The scenery was different from that up north. There were fewer hills, there were hardly any padi fields or tin mines; instead I saw rubber and pineapple plantations. It so happened that that simple and scholarly looking Indian man was in the same coach when the train pulled out of Kuala Lumpur on its way to Singapore. All the time he was busy reading and making notes. Amused, I went over, sat opposite him and exchanged pleasantries. He introduced himself as Navam Appadurai from Ceylon, working as the Asian Secretary for Service Civil International and staying in Singapore. He spoke about what SCI was and invited me to join in an International Workcamp in Penang a few weeks later, in December 1970.

He shared with me some information about the voluntary services SCI was carrying out, which seemed in some ways similar to those of the American Peace Corps, except that SCI was more practical and service orientated. Also, of course, SCI was not attached to any particular nation: its workcamps attracted people from different countries and different communities to team together. He informed me that in the coming workcamp there would be volunteers from Japan, Pakistan, Great Britain, Singapore and Ceylon besides local Malays, Chinese and Indians belonging to different faiths (Christians, Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists) taking part. The participants' ages ranged from 16 years to 50, averaging at 28. They had selected the School for the Mentally Handicapped at Dato Kramat, Penang as the venue.

I was impressed with this man's organized thoughts and his vision for a peaceful society. Malaysia had experienced its worst race riots just the year before. Many people had been killed, property had been destroyed and the racial polarization had suddenly become conspicuous. Workcamps such as Navam described, where people from different communities and ethnic groups could come and stay, work, eat, sleep, play and learn together, would be a practical way to build trust, friendship and harmony.

I noticed that Navam was now wearing slippers. Without any trace of anger or unhappiness he told me that during the overnight journey from Penang to Kuala Lumpur he had managed to get an upper deck sleeping berth. When retiring to bed he had left his leather shoes on the floor of the compartment, only to find them missing when he woke up the next day. Philosophically, he mused about the wisdom of taking certain practical precautions when travelling. Here again he impressed me as a very patient and forgiving person who held no grudge against the people who had done him wrong. He did not brood over a mishap; rather he was quick to look for a positive and practical response to any problem. This was one hallmark characteristics of Navam.

We parted at Johore Bahru, just before Singapore, with a promise to keep in touch. And when my business in Singapore was done and I returned to Taiping, I found a detailed letter from Navam informing me about the camp and how I could join it if I liked. This was another trademark of his - he was ever efficient with correspondence. In the later days of my association with Navam - this was really a joy for me - he always gave a timely response to our queries, in a manner that was invariably encouraging, optimistic and warm. I truly thought he was a wordsmith, a person so natural with words, correct words which had maximum clarity and simplicity and also touched the heart. From Navam I got to learn a few unique items of SCI vocabulary, like signing off with "Amities".

Many have said that your first workcamp is usually the best and most memorable. For me too this was true. I followed up on Navam's letter with its directions to the camp, and found myself there as one of the young participants. I made friends with John Oorijitham, who subsequently helped to form the first registered SCI group in Malaysia in 1972. I met Akira from Japan; Pamela from IVS, England, with whom I communicated several times after she left her LTV posting in Seremban; the indefatigable Aatur Rahman who was the Assistant Asian Secretary and a pillar of strength to SCI, and many others.

I was young and impressionable then. I was truly fortunate to have friends and mentors like Navam, who have left behind many beautiful memories and values in my life and in those of numerous others. Whenever SCI friends meet, we will rehash stories of the sacrifices, challenges and successes our SCI models have gone through. Some are funny, but most are inspirational. Many of the things we heard were passed from mouth to mouth, and whether they were true or not was sometimes hard to verify! Anyway, what the heck! They sounded good, and they had a positive "multiplier effect", like the following:-

- \* Navam loved SCI so much that he gave up a promising career in the civil service to work fulltime with SCI.
- \* Navam willingly relocated with his whole family to take on this Asian Secretary assignment.
- \* Whenever Navam travelled, it would be by the cheapest mode, and he seemed to enjoy it.
- \* Navam was always reaching out to everyone, old and young, rich and poor, in high office or otherwise; and had the right words and chose appropriate discussion points with everyone.
- \* We never had the opportunity to hear Navam raising his voice in anger or disagreement, and never heard him using an offensive or abusive word against anybody else. Rather he always had a kind, comforting, or positive word to alleviate whatever difficult situation arose.
- \* Navam was well read, well informed and well connected. Yet he remained so humble.
- \* Navam's wife Rubina was very supportive and the house was always warm and open for SCI and friends.
- \* Navam was truly committed to SCI ideals, he was a true Pacifist.

It's been thirty-five years since I first met SCI through Navam. In around one thousand words I have tried to recapture our chance meeting, and how Navam and SCI became a part of my life. Thank you, Navam. I miss you. You were the face of SCI that I saw.

## **HE RADIATED GOODNESS**

Pauline Mayer

I was delighted to be asked to contribute to this memorial. I knew Navam between 1970 and 1972, when I was a long-term volunteer in Singapore where the Asian Secretariat of SCI was based. Navam, Rubina, Arulini and Lilani welcomed me into their home, and I soon felt like a member of their family. I was there very frequently, but was never made to feel I had overstayed my welcome!

Of all the people I have met throughout my life, barely a handful have had the very special quality of radiating goodness. Navam was one of them; though that phrase gives the wrong impression, as he was not "pious" or "saintly" in the conventional sense. His goodness was human, and came across in warmth, caring, constancy and a quiet humour, giving a feeling of affirmation, support and security. Many times Navam spoke of the history and ideals of SCI, and although I remember little of what he said, the person he was, and the way he lived, showed far more clearly than words what it was all about.

Navam was totally committed to both his work and his family. When there was conflict within SCI he felt it very deeply and was sad, but he could always understand the different points of view of the antagonists, so could be a genuine peacemaker. He cared deeply and passionately about the plight of the poor and oppressed, and hated injustice. When moved by such situations he would become involved quietly, but with determination and persistence, until eventually opposition would begin to crumble.

I never heard Navam speak ill of anyone (although he may have disagreed with some people's views), and I never heard anyone speak ill of him.

I remember that although he enjoyed meeting SCI friends in different countries, it was always a struggle for him to leave his family for extended periods, and he was so happy to return.

On the lighter side, I have many "memory pictures" of Navam, two of which I will share.

Cleaning the kitchen floor was a regular ritual following the evening meal. This involved the whole household, and was enthusiastically led by Navam. After the tedious soapy stage Navam would hurl bucketfuls of water all over the floor and over the feet of everyone standing thereon, as we all brushed it towards the open door like a series of tidal waves. The suds were well mixed with tears of laughter by the end of the process.

The other picture is that of his gentle smile, with more than a suspicion of mischief in it, when being chided by Rubina for working too long or not looking after himself properly!

Navam not only touched many lives but also had a deep influence on those of us who were privileged to know him. It is through that influence that his legacy continues today and will continue into the future.



## **J.N. APPADURAI THE CIVIL SERVANT**

### **J.V. Thambar**

When Ceylon's Department of Social Services was formed in 1948, as recommended by the Social Services Commission (1947), J.N. Appadurai, along with myself, was among the first batch of Social Services Officers recruited to the staff. We were assigned to various aspects of the newly formed department to improve existing services and design new programmes to meet emerging social problems using our own initiatives, knowledge and experience. Navam Appadurai was assigned to work in the field, specifically to look into the question of Vagrancy and Oversight in the House of Detention and in the Vagrants' Home at Gothatuwa, established by laws in the early years of the nineteenth century and administered by the police. The Vagrants' Home was run between 1950 and 1956 by the Salvation Army, before the Department took it over.

These laws provided for those found begging with no visible means of sustenance to be haplessly arraigned by the police and sentenced by court to serve a term in either institution. As the beggar problem was assuming major proportions in the city and was an embarrassment to the newly established independent State with a welfare orientation, it was decided to have a quick but perceptive survey on Vagrancy and examine available options. This assignment was given to Navam who had already made his mark in studying any matter referred to him and furnishing a clear, analytical relevant report.

Navam spent nearly a year studying the problem in 1950-1951, visiting institutions in the country, having discussions with authorities and resource persons in governments, NGOs and the private sector. In his terse but comprehensive report he surveyed the problem in depth and came up with recommendations for social policy and measures to contain and prevent vagrancy. His excellent and timely report was well received and commended by the Director of Social Services, Mr A.S. Kohoban Wickreme. Eventually it was published by the government as a Sessional Paper on "The Beggar Problem".

Navam brought to his work and service the talents of integrity, wisdom and thoroughness in discerning issues and making recommendations. He had a good and friendly rapport all round with both public and authorities, which earned respect for him and facilitated his work. He was much respected by his colleagues for his humanity, subtle humour and gifts of mind and spirit. In his strength of character he often confronted bureaucracy for the sake of fair dealings and decisions. His mature advice was frequently sought by colleagues and willingly given. He never spoke ill of anyone, and if anyone attempted to do so he laughed them to scorn. He was a gentleman in every sense.

Navam's other passion was his involvement with Service Civil International. Because of his commitment to the disadvantaged he was an obvious and correct choice when the Government sought officers to train rural youth in work camps for local infrastructure which would benefit the community. This was when he first came into contact with SCI. Perhaps he was drawn to the movement by his earlier involvement with local committees through the cooperative movement. Alongside his official work he devoted much time and effort to SCI in building a network of SCI camps in remote rural areas. This brought together isolated village communities and volunteers, local and overseas, in work camps which provided earthworks, rural roads and simple community facilities or infrastructure development.

In these work camps villagers learnt the basics of cohesive community life and values and working together in mixed diversity, showing, caring, understanding other cultural values and living in peace and harmony. Above all, they set themselves and achieved goals within their capacity and limitations of time and resources, which brought satisfaction and dividends to the communities. In these efforts, he may be seen indeed as a pioneer in local level community participation and mobilization at grass roots. His dedicated and indefatigable efforts with the SCI were followed in later decades by international and local NGOs. Thus his contribution may be considered as a niche in the methodologies of rural development, poverty alleviation and sustainable development programmes, which supplemented the limited social welfare services. In a long term perspective his effort with the SCI may be considered as opening new frontiers for community services which have been widely accepted and practised in the country since then.



Images of Sri Lanka or Ceylon, downloaded from Internet

## **AIYA**

### **Suhendrini Kanagaratnam**

A loved one who is no longer in our midst is never completely gone from us, and this fact is brought home to me time and time again when I think of my father. Of course we all still miss him, but with the passage of years the sharp pangs of grief have faded and I have come to the realization that my sisters and I were singularly blessed to have had Aiya as our father.

Everything that a child looks for in a parent was embodied in my father. We felt safe, secure and unconditionally loved, right from the beginning of conscious memory. Aiya was always there to listen to our worries and concerns, giving each of them his deep consideration, however childish or absurd they may have sounded. We worried about not disappointing our parents, although in all fairness they asked us only to try our best. The fact that Aiya trusted us to do so had us striving to improve - not always, I have to confess, but most of the time.

At the time when I was growing up, in the sixties, not many fathers took an active role in the child rearing process. My father however was the exception. He used to bathe the little ones, feed them, brush and comb their hair, patiently struggling with hair ribbons, bobby pins and what not. He did not care if anyone thought it was an unmanly thing to do. He was proud of his four daughters and readily admitted it.

Aiya and Amma took the trouble to get to know our friends, and made them feel welcome at home; so much so that while I was away in India and later in Scotland where I was living with my husband, my friends felt comfortable enough to visit them. One friend even paid them a visit while they were in Singapore.

Aiya was the quintessential story-teller, keeping us spellbound with stories and anecdotes. I can almost hear his voice in my mind reading aloud from *A Ring of Bright Water*, that delightful story about the antics of an otter. I used to sit and listen along with my younger sisters, even though I could have read it for myself. The story sounded so much better and much more exciting with Aiya reading it out aloud. Mealtimes used to stretch out quite a bit, if we could persuade him to tell us some story. There were many lively discussions around the dining table and the subjects were many and varied. It was an education that I would not have missed for the world.

When I was a 5th grader my father used to help me out with math problems. Sometimes my attention would wander, but I would be brought back to earth as soon as I saw him waiting patiently for my answer. I would then make something up, off the top of my head, in reply. Aiya however never lost his patience with me and would explain it all over again. He also used to help me with Tamil poetry, simplifying the complex verses into a more comprehensible form. He did this so well that even now I can recall most of them. When the family moved to Anuradhapura and I had to stay on in boarding school along with my sister Shirani, I missed his help greatly, while preparing for my GCE O-Levels.

However busy Aiya was, he made time to be there on important school occasions such as Prize day and Sports day, especially if one of us was taking part. Once he travelled by train to Jaffna in time for a school function in which I was taking part. It made all the difference to me to see him there. He made each one of his children feel special and cherished. I remember the times he came to see Shirani and me in India, when we were undergraduates. He took us shopping and to restaurants. We didn't really mind where we went as long as we were with him. It was wonderful also to have Aiya visit us in Glasgow while my husband and I were living there. Apart from seeing a loved one from home, it was wonderful to be able to spend time together catching up on all the news.

My father's kindness did not stop with just his immediate family. He was concerned about the well being of all his brothers and sisters and their families as well as my mother's siblings and their families, and they, in turn, thought the world of him. In the presence of my father's optimism and enthusiasm for life, the laughter, jokes and fun which were characteristic of his joie de vivre, one could not remain gloomy for long. One of the few occasions on which I saw him truly worried was when my sister Arulini had a serious illness as a child, and then his look frightened me as much as my sister's illness; but characteristically he calmed us and allayed our fears by explaining to us the true state of affairs.

Kipling, in his well known poem *If*, could well have been describing a man such as Aiya. I never knew him to be anything but calm in his speech and in his demeanour; he was slow to pass judgement, always looking for mitigating factors that could explain or excuse a person's actions; and he was as comfortable working alongside the common man, whose problems and difficulties became his life's focus, as he was in interacting with intellectuals, or even in confronting bureaucracy when the need arose. He was a very special human being.



Colombo 1969 - Left to Right: Shirani, Lilani, Navam, Rubina, Arulini, Suhendrini

## **AN INSPIRING PARENT**

### **Shirani Nagarajah**

Some of my earliest memories are those of our home at Christmas time when my parents prepared for the occasion. I remember the excitement of watching my father - Aiya to us - setting up and decorating the Christmas tree with ornaments and lights while my mother oversaw the preparation of the Christmas cake and other special food items in which we all got involved - the painstaking cutting up of nuts and dried fruit culminating in the hand-beaten batter which was baked in the oven. These activities seemed to take days, while the house filled with the heady aroma of spices mixed with fruit. Then came the carol singing at church services and at home by the piano. I loved to hear my parents sing. The sense of belonging that my sisters and I experienced in our childhood stemmed from the happy home our parents created for us - a home that was all the more cherished by my father, perhaps as a result of his own deprivation as a child. The value that Aiya placed on family was brought home to us by his perseverance in tracing the whereabouts of his mother's younger sister in India, who had somehow lost touch with the wider family.

Aiya was fully involved in our upbringing. He not only cared for our physical needs, in an extraordinarily unconventional way for fathers in those times, but was also sensitive to our emotional wellbeing. Those needs, however trivial, were always taken seriously.

Two instances in particular from my childhood left an unforgettable impression on me:

I remember an occasion when I was hopelessly confused by the way the times tables were taught and tested in a new school I had begun attending. Aiya understood my anguish and promptly paid a visit to my new class teacher. All I knew was that, from then onwards, the teacher seemed to have accepted my particular learning method and I no longer allowed the times table to loom too largely in my own estimation of my mathematical abilities.

On the eve of my tenth birthday my mother left us to attend to her father, who was seriously ill in Colombo. I was torn between the conflicting emotions of missing my mother, worrying about my grandfather, and regret at having the pre-arranged birthday party cancelled. Aiya however stepped into the breach and ensured that the party went ahead, with much fun and games.

Aiya was endlessly patient as a parent. I am positive that his patience was tested time and again and yet I cannot ever recall being explicitly disciplined for it. He held us to a higher standard without so much as laying down rules. He instilled in us an appreciation of some of the values that he held dear in his life - those of modesty and integrity, the importance of personal and family responsibility, as well as a desire to make a personal contribution towards the building of peace and social justice.

## **NOBODY CAN TAKE HIS PLACE**

**Arulini Radhakrishnan**

He was a wonderful loving father. He was always there when I needed him - whether it was for help with homework, a knowledge question, world affairs or a personal problem. I remember my Sunday School teacher asking me what my father's name was when I was three, maybe four years old - probably one of my earliest memories. I told her that his name was "Aiya". She insisted that he had another name. I vehemently protested that he had only one name and that was "Aiya"!

When Aiya was working for the Social Services Department in Anuradhapura, he would travel to remote villages along with two or three other officers from his department to give social assistance. I would accompany him whenever I was allowed to, traveling by jeep along untarred bumpy country roads. The jeep ride and trekking through jungle-like areas was a big thrill, but watching him hand out actual cash to a long line of villagers was phenomenal. I felt so important and proud that my father was helping these poor villagers.

When I was about ten years old Aiya got involved with the SCI, and we would all go to the work camps. I watched my father work along with other volunteers and locals building schools, houses, bridges and so on. He enjoyed the work and camaraderie. He was a leader, and even though I was very young I knew and could sense that he kept everybody on an even keel, smoothing differences and always making sure that the job in hand was done. He listened to everybody's opinion or complaint. He never treated any question, however trivial it may have seemed, as insignificant. He always gave it thought, and understood its relevance and the context it was asked in. Decisions he had to make were always well accepted because they were for the best.

When the Asian Secretariat moved to Singapore in 1970, Lilani and I moved with our parents. My two older sisters Suhena and Shirani were in University in India and would join us for their holidays. As the Asian Secretariat was housed in our home, whenever there were newsletters to be sent out Lilani and I would be coopted to cyclostyle, collate and paste stamps. We were ever ready to do this as it was fun, and besides, it took us away from homework. My father would occasionally entrust me with the banking. Someone who was present on one of those occasions expressed surprise at this, to which my father replied, "she is as safe as the First National Bank!" (that was the bank I was going to). He gave me confidence, and the mere fact that he trusted me made me extra careful with the banking.

When I was sixteen I was given permission to attend an SCI camp on my own. I suspect that this permission was given only because Pauline and Rolly (two long term volunteers in Singapore) were going to the camp too. I was ecstatic. We were painting a school for handicapped children in beautiful Penang, Malaysia. My parents were to join the camp during the last week. One night, there was a break-in and many valuables including passports and identity cards were lost. The police were called; the volunteers were upset and worried. No work was done for a few days. Some of the local volunteers decided that the break-in had been done with the help of someone in the camp. They brought a "bomo" (witch doctor) who said that she would make a cake for everybody to sample. Whoever fell ill after eating the cake was the culprit! I developed a severe stomach ache the moment I heard about it, and many others felt physically sick without eating the cake. Try as they might, the camp leaders couldn't instill confidence or serenity among the volunteers. I waited patiently for my father to arrive.

Fortunately, he appeared before the dreaded cake. The minute he stepped into the camp I knew that everything would be all right. He listened to everything that had happened, and after dinner that night he called a house meeting. In his quiet calm voice he proceeded to dispel everyone's fears, reminding them of the reason they were all there. It was not the SCI way to suspect one another or be distracted to the extent that everybody felt uneasy, unable to do any work. We all had to work harder now to catch up on lost time.

The uneasiness lifted like a veil from the campers. The relief was almost physical. I could sense everyone feeling happier immediately. The next day was back to normal, with extra effort on everyone's part and the traditional sing-song and jokes.

Aiya passed away two months before his 63rd birthday, on 9th July 1983. That morning he had to attend a meeting. For some reason my daughter Ranita, aged three, couldn't go to her nursery school that day, and Aiya looked after her, taking her along to the meeting too. In between these various duties Aiya was desperately trying to finish writing a paper with recommendations on how the Government could improve relations with disaffected Tamil youth in Jaffna. He was never to finish the paper; Lilani eventually completed it on his behalf many months later.

Two weeks after Aiya's death, all hell broke loose in Sri Lanka in the form of a horrific ethnic clash. Thousands died, and thousands more were left homeless. God in his mercy had spared him this terrible tragedy.

The tragedy for us, his family, was that he passed away when he was only 63. He was denied his twilight years, a time to rest, relax and enjoy all his grandchildren. I know that I speak for all my sisters when I say that we miss him dearly. Nobody can take his place.



## A GIANT AMONG MEN

**Lilani Jayatilake**

How does one capture on paper the essence of a man? It is there in the tone of the voice, in the expression of the eyes, his silence, his laughter, his words and even his demeanor at different moments of time. I have a zillion memories and images of him, which elude my grasp when I try to set them down in black and white. To me, he was, and will always remain, a giant among men. All I shall try to do here, is to share a few anecdotes which might give an idea of the kind of man he was.

Aiya was always a good listener. He had a quality of stillness, which would allow us to confide our problems to him, with ease. He would not interrupt our outpourings with questions, nor would he rush in to try and sort out our problems. Now that I am a parent myself, I realize what an extraordinary achievement this was - to care enormously and yet maintain the objective distance necessary to enable us to grow. It was not merely our problems that we shared with him. We would share with him our hopes, our dreams, our exploits and peccadilloes and feel that he was in sympathy with all of these. I remember telling him that my friends and I wanted to see how we liked smoking cigarettes. It all seems so innocuous now, but this was the eighties and considered unacceptable behaviour among young women. My father merely smiled and said, "I wonder what the cigarette smoking clan will do next? Will they start drinking?"

I don't remember ever receiving a harsh word from him. I don't remember ever being scolded. And yet he governed us with just a look. In an era when fathers in our part of the world used punishment, very often corporal punishment, believing it to be not merely expedient but necessary to control and direct their children, Aiya would merely look at us, and his look of disappointment would suffice. In this sense he was a man who transcended the limitations of his age and culture. Ours is a traditional and patriarchal culture, one in which the male would never get involved in the domestic sphere. Though I have used the present tense, I must add that this has changed and is changing a great deal. But when Aiya was young, and we were young, things were very different. But Aiya was an exception. He would cook, he would (hand) wash his clothes and he would help with the housework. In fact, while we were in Singapore, my mother would make lunch, while it was my father's task to prepare dinner helped by either my sister Arulini or myself. What it boiled down to was that my father cooked the meal, while my sister and I sliced, perhaps, one onion, meanwhile regaling him with tales about school and the happenings there. As I mentioned before, he was a good listener, and the meal was done while we sorted out our problems. That he was different from the mainstream was brought home forcibly to me when my father once prepared a cup of tea for my tutor, and I got told off by my tutor for allowing him to do so. I was surprised and hurt, but my father gently told my tutor that we did not make a difference between men and women in our household.

When I try to picture my father, the most vivid image is of a man who had a hearty laugh. He enjoyed a good joke, especially one at his expense. I remember a stage (those terrible teen years!) when I gave expression to my confusion and dissatisfaction by making "smart Alec" comments to the people around me. I confess I did so to my father as well. But he, being the tolerant and mature man he was, would actually enjoy my comments, and laugh heartily. I must say it was very healing, to be so understood and tolerated. I am too ashamed now to dredge up any very specific memories of this.



His sense of humour was such that he was not averse to making a spectacle of himself at times. The four of us had put up a notice proclaiming, "Girls only" outside a room which we claimed for ourselves. (Teen years again!). My father struggled into a dress belonging to my sister, in order to join us and raise a laugh.

His gentleness and his sense of humour belied a formidable intellect. When SCI meetings were held at home, I would very often be curled up in the corner, listening. While heated debates and arguments were taking place, my father would remain silent. But curled up in my corner, I would be tense with expectation. I was waiting for the denouement. I knew that at the end my father would speak, and in calm, measured tones would summarize the arguments, identify the underlying motif, and suggest a suitable course of action, one that would dissipate the tension between opposing factions. I could not have imagined this, child though I was, because I could not have imagined the cacophony of debate and counter debate dying out, being replaced by a single, calm and collected voice. The tension in the air at the start of meetings used to be palpable, as was its dissipation at the end.

I benefited hugely from his clear and logical mind. I used to struggle with Math at school, but then I would come home and my father would explain it all to me, so clearly that I developed an affection for the subject. Tamil language and literature was his other love. I would listen enthralled as he explained the meaning of poetry written by an ancient Tamil poet, Thiruvalluvar. It was then that I had an inkling of how beautiful and rich was the language and literature of Tamil. Unfortunately none of us, his children, have acquired his proficiency with the language.

The bulk of Aiya's life work was in the sphere of social service. Today there are many who champion the cause of the underprivileged. But Aiya's interest began at a time when it was not considered fashionable, when he found himself swimming against the prevailing current of thought, when people looked askance at him for what they considered was his eccentricity. He was an idealist in a world which is running short of them, and he believed in what he was trying to do. I cannot comment about his political stance, because I still do not understand the intricacies of Sri Lankan politics; all I can say is that he saw the writing on the wall, so clearly that on the day he died he had exhausted himself writing a paper on the volatile situation that was brewing in the island. This was on 9th July 1983, two weeks before Sri Lanka came apart at the seams in what is now referred to as "Black July".

There were so many facets to the man, that I feel frustrated by my inability to capture them all. There was for instance his wonderful singing voice. He had a clear, true tenor voice and I remember many Sunday evenings spent with all of us, singing around the piano. The concluding lines in his favourite song, as I remember it, went "I'm always chasing rainbows, waiting to find a little blue bird, in vain". I find this so sad and significant now. It could have been his theme song. He dreamed of and worked for a better world, one which would always elude his grasp.

## MY GRANDFATHER

### **Gayendra de Silva**

As a little boy, I remember Appah very vaguely. One of my fondest memories is of the magic tricks he would perform for us. After every meal Ranita, Chrishanthini and I would get some sort of candy dessert. We all knew it was coming and we struggled through our lunch just to get the prize at the end. But, the neat thing about the dessert was the way he gave it to us. He would sit us down on his lap and magically present us with our treats. This would be a fifteen minute process as far as I remember (since we would play with him and each other at the same time). I spent much of the rest of the afternoon trying to figure out how he did it. Although I would ask him, he never gave up his secret.

As an adult, I wish I had had a chance to get to know Appah, since I never really had any strong male role models in my life. But the stories I have heard through my mother, my aunts and my grandmother have given me plenty of direction in my life. His patience, love, unselfishness, sacrifice and dedication to his immediate and extended families are the resounding qualities that echo in my mind whenever I hear reference to him. I wish to be as caring and loving to my family as he was to his. This is what I remember and take with me always about my grandfather.



Navam with family friends, Ralph and Idy Hegnauer, Zurich, Switzerland