



THE NATIONAL TRUST – SRILANKA
DR. ROLAND SILVA MEMORIAL LECTURE ON
WEDNESDAY 27TH JANUARY 2021

“SAILING SHIPS OF SERENDIB: IN SEARCH OF LOST NAUTICAL CULTURES”

By Lt. Commander Somasiri Devendra

The 131st Session of the Monthly Lecture Series of the National Trust - Sri Lanka and Publicity Event of the new publication *George Keyt – A Portrait of the Artist* by Prof. Albert Dharmasiri will be delivered online on **Wednesday 27th January 2021 at 6.15pm**

The Roland Silva Memorial Lecture by Lt Commander Somasiri Devendra will follow at 6.30 pm.

Link to lecture

<http://bit.ly/3bWso2D>

Sri Lanka was linked, by sea, to maritime cultures of the Euro-Asian landmass. Mariners and merchants spread ideas and technology between these cultures. While we had our own vernacular nautical culture, foreign mercantile communities settled in the country continued to use their own craft which would have sailed in our waters at the same time, for as long as necessary needed. By the 20th century, due to European domination, all forms of non-British watercraft had ceased to be of relevance. Yet three survived: the vernacular “*Yathra dhoni*”, the hybrid technology “*Thoni*” of Jaffna and Valvettiturai and the isolated “*Battal*” of Mutur on the East coast, which were all sailing less than 40-80 years ago, even within approved limits. This is an account of efforts to re-discover material information of the three cultures behind these ships: how they came to be here, who built them, who sailed them, what they were like, and why they disappeared. It is about sailing ships and not boats: based on material evidence rather than literary references.



Somasiri Devendra turned to maritime heritage studies after retirement, under the guidance of Vini Vitharana. He introduced maritime archaeology as a mainstream activity of PGIAR and ICOMOS. He led every project on behalf of the Archaeological Dept., CCF and National Museums on a voluntary basis. A founder member of ICUCH, he participated in drafting the ICOMOS Charter and the UNESCO International Convention, both on the Underwater Cultural Heritage; was National Team Leader for the “Avondster” project; was Archaeologist for EIA and Feasibility studies for all port projects; and conducted international Field Schools for UNESCO. Reverting to vernacular watercraft studies he has presented research papers in many countries and has been translated into several languages. He has been awarded a UNESCO Fellowship, the “*Uruma Prasada Pranamaya*” by the Ministry of National Heritage and the inaugural “Roland Silva Memorial Medal” by ICOMOS Sri Lanka. He rates the NAS Monograph, Gerhard Kapitan’s “Records of Watercraft from South and West Sri Lanka”, of which he was Associate Editor as his most rewarding work.

The National Trust – Sri Lanka conducts monthly lectures on the last Thursday of each month. The lectures are open to the members and the public. The HNB Sustainability Foundation is the principal sponsor of the events of the National Trust – Sri Lanka.

Further information can be obtained from the Trust Office Tel 2682730 / 0778081214