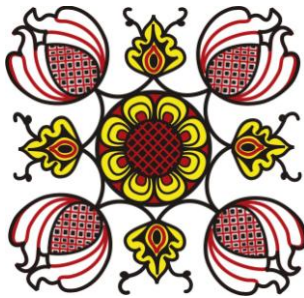


# Quarterly Tours – No. 14



**National Trust – Sri Lanka**

**29th May 2010**

**Compiled by Nilan Cooray**

## **National Trust – Sri Lanka**

### ***Quarterly Tours – Saturday, 29<sup>th</sup> May 2010.***

#### **Programme**

- 0700 hrs. Leave PGIAR
- 0730 - 0845 hrs. Visit to a traditional potter's workshop at Kelaniya
- 0915 - 1030 hrs. Visit to the Star Granite workshop at Minuwangoda that deals with stone sculpture
- 1130 – 1230 hrs. Visit to the Dankotuwa Porcelain Factory to see some of the finest Sri Lankan Crockery
- 1300 – 1430 hrs. Lunch at Ranveli Hotel at Waikkal
- 1445 – 1515 hrs. Visit the Sandalanka Tile Factory at Sandalankawa
- 1530 – 1615 hrs. Visit the 'Atelier', the bronze casting foundry of Dr. Sarath Chandrajeewa near Wennappuwa
- 1830 – 1930 hrs. Visit to the Chitrasena School of Dancing to view a special dancing demonstration arranged by Trustee Upeka
- 1945 hrs. Arrive PGIAR

## Traditional potter's workshop at Kelaniya

Pottery has a long and unbroken tradition in Sri Lanka from at least the proto-historic period, and the potter, as an artisan creates both utilitarian and decorative house-hold items have a niche that has continued through the centuries.

The raw materials for the pottery industry are found in the alluvial clays and there are two major types, viz., the white clay (*kiri-meti* or kaolin, also known as China clay) and ball clay that occur as small deposits. The latter is mixed with white clay to form the clay body. Both types of clay are found mainly in the flood plains of the major river systems. Since there was no paucity of raw materials in Sri Lanka, the tradition of the pottery craft has continued to date without any interruption. Usually, the potters are found in close-knit groups in villages like Kelaniya which lies in the flood plain of the Kelani River, where the different clays suitable for the pottery craft can be found.



The potters who make earthen ware products have not deviated substantially from the traditional methods used by their ancestors over time. However the primitive *sakaporuva* (which is manually operated by the potter's wife or a child) for moulding the pot, has now been given away to the power driven potters-wheel. The firing is also done in the traditional way, in a modest

kiln made by the potter himself. This is a square enclosure built with bricks up to a height of about one meter with a domed covering of wet clay and sticks.



The potters at the village in Kelaniya are known for their red-ware with incised work used for domestic needs as well as for the colorful clay toys that thrilled children of a bygone age. Ananda Coomaraswamy describes pottery from Kelaniya as one in which ‘incised decorations reached its highest level of design and execution’. The water based red slip, used to create incised decorative red-ware is made by grinding certain ferruginous nodules (*gurugal*) or concretions and applying on the red and white clay base. The red slip is thereafter applied to the leather hard clay vessel and the decorations are then incised through the red slip to expose the white clay beneath.

The visit to the potter’s workshop cum residence at Sinharamulla, Kelaniya will not only provide one an overview of the art and science in making pottery, but will also expose the visitor to their way of living in the age old style.

## **Star Granite Workshop at Minuwangoda**

Granite is one of the most durable and elegant material, which the architects and sculptors of all world civilizations had preferred to realize their dreams. Its character reflects the creative forces of nature - the patterns of each block of granite tells one a story of the gigantic pressures, including the searing heat of the earth's core, and its tortuous birth in the volcanic eruptions of a bygone millennia. Sri Lanka has four major types of granite deposits, viz., granite proper, gneissose granite, regmatite and graphic granite, in substantial amounts. The color, grain structure, hardness and strength of Sri Lankan granite are suitable for quality workmanship of the highest order.

The ancient Sri Lankans had very well identified the above properties of granite deposits and the value of such stone and there is ample evidence of stunning and moving stone work which dates back to the first half of the first millennium A.D. These decorative stone work and the magnificent carvings have survived and are to be seen today in the ancient sites of Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa, Yapahuwa etc. Granite has brought grace to many edifices and sculpture of Sri Lanka's ancient cities and added a timeless beauty that has survived for centuries.

Today, the Star Granite Industry is closely following the footsteps of the ancient stone masons and has attempted to offer granite products that match their great counterparts of a bygone era. The company has now established the position of being the pioneer in the mechanized granite carving industry in Sri Lanka. The machines used for cutting, carving and polishing are all locally made by re-utilizing salvaged machinery components. However they use modern technology



for quarrying as against the traditional rock blasting to minimize the impact on the environment as well as to prevent the quarried stones developing hair cracks that may open up subsequently.



Star Granite Industries was responsible in producing all the decorative stone work for the renovation of the terraces of the Sri Maha Bodhi at Anuradhapura and a number of ancient and modern religious sites and in sculpturing large scale free standing Buddha images. Besides these, the company produces various decorative building materials such as tiles, slabs, countertops, wall claddings, basins, memorials, garden furniture etc. of fine export quality.



The visit to the Star Granite Industry's workshop will offer the whole process of transforming a rough and lifeless stone into a unique piece of sculpture as a work of art.



## Dankotuwa Porcelain Factory



Dankotuwa, now famous for its clay based terra cotta products, originally became popular in the middle decades of the last century as the birth place of the well known Rev. Fr. Marcelline Jayakody (born in 1902), the winner of the Ramon Magsaysay Award for Journalism, Literature and Creative Communication in 1983. Fr. Jayakody was the author of thousands of essays, poems and songs covering Sinhala culture and its traditions.

Today Dankotuwa Porcelain, named after the town of its location, has made the name, not only famous in Sri Lanka, but internationally as well, because of its world class table ware.

Dankotuwa Porcelain originated in 1983 when it began as a project under the Ceylon Ceramics Corporation to cater to the export market with high quality porcelain table ware. In 1984, the project was transformed into a duly incorporated Private Limited Liability as Dankotuwa Porcelain Ltd. Today it is a Public Company listed on the Colombo Stock Exchange and has about 3,000 shareholders.

Its products are recognized as being amongst the finest in the world due to many superior characteristics of its body, such as the high whiteness, high translucency, high resistance to chipping and scratching, and also because of the high quality of its decorations.



Dankotuwa is not a mass scale producer but produces special items for niche markets. About 85% of its production is exported round the world but mostly to Europe, USA and Japan. The company's products can be found in many top departmental stores in the world including Macy's of the USA, Bhs of UK, El Corte Ingles of Spain, Migres of Switzerland, Isetan of Japan and Jashanmal of Dubai.



Specially arranged guided tour by an expert in ceramic productions of the company will take you around the factory explaining the whole manufacturing process - how the raw materials are turned and mixed, how items are shaped, cast, fired, glazed and in-glazed, how the decorations are applied using gold, platinum and color pigments before re-firing etc.

## Sandalanka Tile Factory at Sandalankawa

The area in and around Sandalankawa is famous for the production of fired clay roofing tiles in Sri Lanka. The factories ranging from medium to large scale units with chimneys ascending skywards are a common sight in this area.



Tile factories are built up in production units. Each unit has one pug mill (to take coarse aged clay, of correct moisture content and clay blend, and to extrude finely blended, workable clay), two or more tile presses, adequate clay and tile storage, and a kiln. Some large factories will include as many as six of these units on the same site, operating for the most part independently. These units use land and labor to their utmost, and are easily managed by two site supervisors.

Visit to Sandalanka Tile factory, which has also produced traditional flat roofing tiles (Kandyan tiles or *pethi-ulu*) for the restoration of numerous heritage buildings in Kandy and elsewhere, will provide an opportunity to get an idea about the production of fired clay roofing tiles, that enables us to keep out rain.



## **The ‘Atelier’, the bronze casting foundry near Wennappuwa**

Dr. Sarath Chandrajeewa (born in 1955) has been the Director of the Colombo Academy of Arts since 2002 and has exhibited and lectured widely. He gained a Diploma in Bronze Casting at the Royal College of Arts, London, and a PhD and Master of Fine Arts Degree in Sculpture from the State Academic Arts Institute in Moscow. His prizes include Hon. Academician of the Russian Academy of Arts and the 'Kalasuri' National Award. In 1993 he was also the recipient of a Bunka award (Japanese - Sri Lankan cultural award), the first ever won by a Sri Lanka.

The exhibitions titled "Hundred Impressions on Bronze" and "Form and Feeling" respectively, were ample proof of Dr. Chandrajeewa's maturity as a sculptor. The former, which

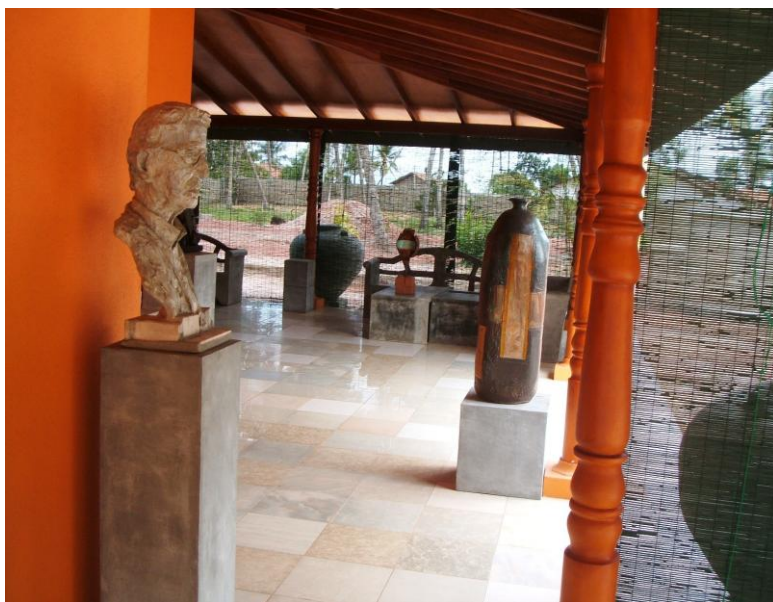


consisted of a hundred portrait sculptures of influential Sri Lankan personalities, was held at the National Art Gallery in 1994. It included busts of personages of extremes in Sri Lankan society, from Tissahamy

to Arthur C. Clarke. The National Portrait Gallery in London has recently selected the bust of Sir (Philip) Christopher Ondaatje (27 inches high) sculptured by Dr. Chandrajeewa as

one of its permanent exhibits to be in their collection. Dr. Chandrajeewa is the first Sri Lankan to be selected to display an artwork on a permanent basis in this reputed international gallery.

Dr. Sarath Chandrajeewa has a reputation in not only portrait sculpture, but also in painting, graphic work, including the design of stamps, posters, logos, calendars, terracotta murals and pottery. One of his recent works includes a series of relief sculptures in bronze made for the basilica of Tewatta, Ragama.



The visit to his newly established bronze casting foundry cum studio at Dummaladeniya, near Wennapuwa will provide an opportunity to see how this master artist gives life to a lump of clay in modelling a portrait of a fortunate member of the visiting National Trust's team and the procedure followed in transforming it to bronze.

## **Chitrasena School of Dancing in Colombo**

After almost 45 decades of Island's colonial occupation, the traditional dance was left impoverished and it was left to Chitrasena (born: Amaratunga Arachige Maurice Dias in 1921) to infuse it with a new dynamism. He is associated with the revival of the traditional Sri Lankan dance.



Chitrasena challenged the mood of the 1930's and 40's and influenced the mind of a generation, in establishing himself as an artist unparalleled in the dance annals of this country. He was the pioneer of the modern dance theatre, which proved a viable alternative to the changing social milieu that sustained the traditional dance rituals. Chitrasena steered the course of dance along uncharted paths infusing it with a dynamism that flowed from his visionary seal

and dedication, creating a distinct yet meaningful medium of expression. He brought about an infusion of the Theatre, the Stage, and the world of the Audience, including confrontation and entertainment to the Sri Lankan Dance. He revolutionized and extended the scope of dance, forging a link between the traditional and the contemporary with a vision of one who was seeking to extend the horizons of his creations, by going back to the roots of Sri Lankan heritage. He transferred Sri Lankan folk dance to the modern theatre and from that transformation created a vehicle of artistic expression for the Sri Lankan Ballet. He was, indeed, the pioneer of the national ballet.

In 1944, he established Chitrasena Kalayathanaya, the first school of dance in a rented house situated a few yards away from the Kollupitiya junction, gifted by the philanthropist Sir E. P. A. Fernando. The school started as a small nucleus with only a handful of students who lived and worked in the Studio. Chitrasena along with his wife Vajira introduced a creative dance form based on indigenous rhythms to these young artistes. It was where Chitrasena lived and worked for 40 years and become a renowned cultural centre for the dance enthusiasts and the connoisseurs of the arts.



The school subsequently became a cultural haven to leading artistes of that period whose talents become highly recognized. There has hardly been a name in the world of arts and letters, which has not at one time or another been associated with the Chitrasena School of Dance. Ananda Samarakoon lived and worked with Chitrasena and created the National Anthem whilst living in the School. Sunil Santha after his return from



Lucknow, Bathkande College of Music, held his music classes at this Studio. W. D. Amaradeva's early days were closely linked with the Chitrasena School. Dramatists like Henry Jayasena and Ernest Macintyre conducted rehearsals at this centre.

The school has won repute and fame that is international and received rare reviews for the productions both here and abroad. In the realm of creative work, the Dance School has played a vital role in the evolution of the contemporary dance theatre of Sri Lanka.



In 1984, the land on which the Chitrasena School of Dancing stood was unfortunately acquired by the Urban Development Authority, and the building was razed to the ground. In 1998, H. E. Chandrika Kumaranatunga, the then President of Sri



Lanka, bequeathed a piece of land on Park Road / Elvitigala Mawatha, Colombo 5, to establish a permanent location for the school. Subsequently, Chitrasena and his family raised sufficient funds to construct the dance school there. Since Chitrasena's death in 2005, the school is managed by his wife, Vajira and the two daughters Upeka and Anjali.

The visit to the school by the National Trust's team is to pay their gratitude to the great family and the school of dancing, that the Island has ever produced in the post-colonial era. The visiting team will be most fortunate to view a special dance performance of the students of the school as arranged by Ms. Vajira and Upeka.