



THE NATIONAL TRUST – SRI LANKA

The Story of Narrow Gauge Railways in Ceylon: The Rise and Closure

**By
Rasika Wickramanayaka**

The Monthly Lecture Series No: 181 of the National Trust

Friday 28th August 2026 at 6.00 pm

at the Auditorium of the College of Surgeons of Sri Lanka

No. 6, Independence Avenue, Colombo 7

(For those who join online: https://www.youtube.com/live/f_GcDouY_nQ)

From the opening of the first railway line between Colombo and Ambepussa in 1864, the Ceylon Government Railway worked to a 5 ft 6 in (broad gauge) standard. When the Uda Pussellawa Railway was planned in 1900, however, the authorities chose a 2 ft 6 in narrow gauge. Two further narrow gauge lines followed: the Kelani Valley Railway and the Sabaragamuwa Railway. Over the years these were progressively closed or given over to road transport, and by 1998 no narrow gauge railway remained in operation in Sri Lanka.

This lecture presents the speaker's decade-long research into the narrow gauge railways of Ceylon and Sri Lanka, drawing on archival work here and overseas, photographic surveys, eyewitness accounts, historical documents and artefacts, and the restoration of locomotives and rolling stock. Particular attention is given to the rise and decline of the narrow gauge railway network and to its significance in the island's transport and industrial heritage.



Rasika Wickramanayaka is a Chartered Architect, researcher and author specialising in Sri Lanka's industrial and railway heritage. He holds a B.Sc. in the Built Environment and an M.Sc. in Architecture from the University of Moratuwa, and an MBA from the University of Sri Jayewardenepura. After working with leading architectural firms in Sri Lanka, he joined UNICEF in 2009 as a Construction Specialist, serving in Afghanistan until 2019. He is now an independent researcher and a part-time lecturer in Industrial Archaeology. He has written several books on Sri Lanka's railway heritage and also writes fiction in Sinhala. He is a Director of the National Railway Museum and Vice President of the National Scientific Committee on Industrial Heritage (NSCIH).

The National Trust – Sri Lanka conducts monthly lectures generally on the last working Thursday of each month. The lectures are open to the members and the general public.

Further information can be obtained from the Trust Office Tel.0112682730/ 0719566929