

A FOND ADIEU TO OSMUND JAYARATNE

Joyce Jayaratne

“Like the dew on the mountain
Like the foam on the river,
Like the bubble on the fountain
Thou art gone and forever.”

-Sir W. Scott

The saddest day of my life dawned on the 31st of August 2006 when Osmund breathed his last and departed from this world. The funeral took place on the 3rd of September. All that occurred during this period is etched and will remain forever in my mind.

It is not my intention to repeat here all that has been said in the speeches made and articles published in the newspapers extolling the life and work of my late husband. I would merely state that his life was a dedication to the upliftment of humanity in the fields of politics, science and education. Glowing tributes have been expressed by people from all walks of life – from the President of Sri Lanka down to the poor farmer in the deep south in a village called Hathporuwa in Tissamaharama. They all reiterated the value of the service and contributions made by Osmund during his lifetime, and mourned the loss of a true patriot of this country. To me it was a loss of a dear husband, friend and companion. Many were the trials and losses which dotted out lives, but we faced our tomorrows with fortitude with the knowledge that we had each other.

Osmund and I shared an interest in literature and music which we both enjoyed. I have gathered much information from his conversations which enriched my knowledge of science and politics. Recorded CDs and cassettes sent to him by his former students now working in the USA kept him updated about the happenings in the scientific world. He was fascinated with the vastness of the universe containing millions of galaxies. Our own galaxy, the ‘Milky Way’ was of special interest to him and he would listen enthralled to any scientific discovery made by astronomers and astronauts probing outer space.

Turning his attention to our known world, he enjoyed the beauty of nature, but deplored man’s inhumanity to man. He always stood for justice and equality. Even in the early years he would observe certain injustices in the treatment of different categories of people. For example, the rich lived in comfortable houses and traveled in cars, while the poor laboured and toiled for a pittance, living in little huts and walking barefoot on the streets. Such a situation was unacceptable to Osmund. We were students then

and he would talk to me about these matters which greatly influenced my thinking. It surprised me to know that my views and ideas were the same as his. I admired his dedication to change the order of things in the society in which we lived. It was his firm belief that everyone had the right to claim in the words of Karl Marx, “From each according to his ability, to each according to his need.” (It is significant that a similar reference is found in Acts 4 v.34 of the Bible) Such an era has yet to dawn, and perhaps it will in the not-too-distant future.

Osmund was happiest in the company of his colleagues, friends and students whom he loved. He would warmly welcome them whenever they visited us in our little home. Their response of love and regard expressed at the funeral was overwhelming. I am deeply grateful to all those who supported and assisted me in my time of grief.

In passing, I am sure that Osmund would have liked to leave behind a message to all of us and especially to the youth of this country, from a quotation by the poet H.W. Longfellow:

“Lives of great men all remind us
We can make our lives sublime
And, departing, leave behind us
Footprints in the sands of time.
Let us then be up and doing
With a heart for any fate;
Still achieving still pursuing,
Learn to labour and to wait.”

It is not an unknown fact that Osmund was an excellent actor. Even as an undergrad and after, he took a lead part in many of the plays directed by Prof. Lyn Ludowyk. These plays enacted in English became popular social events among the English-speaking population in Colombo and also in Kandy and Galle. His best performance was the role he played in *The Father* by Strindberg. Osmund particularly revelled in the plays written by Shakespeare, and had played the part of Duke Orsino in *Twelfth Night*. He would often recite with passionate fervour, some passages which he had memorized. In conclusion I would like to express my own sentiments by repeating from *Hamlet*, just a line which Osmund loved to quote:

“*Goodnight sweet Prince, and may flights
Of angels sing thee to thy rest...*” ■

OSMUND JAYARATNE (1924-2006): SCIENTIFIC AND POLITICAL VISIONARY

The death of LSSP politician, physicist and writer Osmund Jayaratne in September 2006 was mourned by the many who knew him in his various capacities. He is missed by those with SSA who came to know him recently through working with him on his memoirs, as we extend our deep condolences to his wife Joyce and family.

For the past several years, we visited Osmund and Joyce at their home in Kandana regarding the compilation and editing of his memoirs. This culminated in the launch of the book on his 80th birthday, in October 2004, and the rousing speech he made to the packed N.M. Perera hall. It was a working relationship that continued, with Osmund Jayaratne regularly contributing engaging and educative science articles for *Polity*. Osmund could not have written his memoirs or articles without the support of Joyce, who during his last years living with his visual disability, never left his side. Those with SSA who worked with Osmund and Joyce, and came to know this legendary figure, who was physicist, dramatist, leading LSSP activist, local council politician, university professor, reformer and vice-chancellor – appreciated the chance to contribute to the publishing of his memoirs and last writings.

No one could forget the genuine warmth of Osmund's welcoming smile and sincere words, and the inspiration that he provided over to so many people over so many years. As Kamini Meedeniya, who knew him from university days, emphasized: "Osmund was an excellent teacher; he made any subject he taught come alive, whether in physics or politics. He was passionate about whatever he did. That is why his students, whether here or working now at NASA or as professors in universities abroad, supported him in his most difficult days."

Osmund Jayaratne, even after losing his sight, still held strong to a powerful vision for people here and throughout the world, best captured in his own words, from the closing lines of his book, under the heading "A Renewed Vision." Much of the tragic trajectory he professed four years ago, in light of the

ensuing Iraq war and the tsunami, seemed prophetic – as more hopefully still would be his ultimate vision for humanity. As he wrote:

"Through BBC and CNN I am fairly aware at the moment of the tragic events in the world: nation fighting against nation; massacres occurring in many of the countries of the Third World. The Arab nations, particularly those of Palestine, are subject to the cruellest attacks by the well-armed State of Israel. Blood is flowing along the streets and human life has become cheap in the poorer countries of the world, and above all this stands the monstrosity of US imperialism seeking to impose its will upon all the countries of the world..."

In addition to these man-made disasters, natural tragedies have also begun to affect the world. Floods and drought, earthquakes and violence, eruptions and disasters in the transport sector are killing thousands upon thousands of the peoples of the world. The grossest corruption seems to have overtaken the capitalist corporations in the USA. The world is undergoing an unprecedented economic crisis, in fact a severe depression that is euphemistically referred to as a 'recession.' States are collapsing everywhere, markets are dwindling, and the world is undergoing a crisis that, in my opinion, is even worse than the Depression of 1924-25 and the 1930s of the last century.

"Yet, at the risk of being labelled an incurable optimist, I still believe that the world cannot proceed in this manner for very long. In the decades to come, long after my own generation has passed away, imperialism and capitalism will inevitably reach its destined end predicted by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels 150 years ago. A socialist society must inevitably arise, and the human race will for once come into its own.

(Osmund Jayaratne, *Politics, Science, Academe: Memoirs*: p160-61) ■

Book editor, May Yee; Osmund Jayaratne's memoirs were compiled and edited by the Social Scientists' Association. The book is available at the SSA's Suriya Bookshop.

THE MANY FACES OF OSMUND JAYARATNE

Ajith Samaranayake

The death of Professor Osmund Jayaratne closes a chequered life which has left its imprint on diverse areas of Sri Lankan society. An eminent scientist and academic he was also a leading member of the LSSP and a member of the Colombo Municipal Council while at the same time being a leading light of the Lionel Wendt Theatre at the time when the Centre could still hold. Academic, Politician and Thespian, Osmund Jayaratne was a Renaissance man of a type which has made an immeasurable contribution to enriching the intellectual and emotional life of the Sri Lanka of our times.

Osmund Jayaratne belong to that generation of idealistic young men and women who were radicalised by the ideas of socialism as spread by the LSSP during its early days. While excelling himself in his chosen discipline of physics he also soon emerged as a second-string leader of the LSSP and a formidable speaker in both Sinhala and English on both political platforms as well as study groups. He had a sound grasp of socialist theory and although not a theoretician in the same league as Hector Abhayawardhana or Doric de Souza was a speaker much in demand at seminars and study groups where socialism was seriously discussed.

In the 1950s when Dr. N. M. Perera was elected Mayor of Colombo much to the chagrin of the UNP establishment. Osmund and Bernard Soysa were N. M's main stalwarts. The filibustering speeches made by the two of them on the vote of 'No Confidence' against the Mayor while waiting for a judgment from the Supreme Court have already attained folkloric status in the annals of LSSP history.

During the hartal of 1953, fifty-three years ago Osmund Jayaratne was in charge of organising the Colombo South area. He manned an operational centre from a hideout in Wellawatte and was horrified when well-known LSSP leaders like Dr. Colvin R. de Silva arrived at what Osmund had made out to be an innocent middle-class household. Yet the hartal was a total success in Colombo and much of its organisation in the capital city was carried out by Osmund.

In the 1970s during the government of Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike, Osmund Jayaratne was appointed Chairman of a committee charged with the reorganisation of the University system. In a radical measure which evoked howls of injured protests from the conservative academic Establishment the Jayaratne committee recommended a single University with Peradeniya, Colombo, Vidyalandara and Vidyodaya as its campuses.

Osmund Jayaratne will have his own space in the LSSP's history as the proponent of the Second Resolution at the LSSP Convention in the mid-1970s where the whole question of the role of the LSSP in the SLFP-LSSP-CP United Front Government was brought under challenge.

The Second Resolution was highly critical of the LSSP's role and Osmund recalled much later how he was virtually pushed into the toilet of the New Town Hall and forced into withdrawing it by some very formidable LSSP leaders!

I first saw Osmund Jayaratne when I was a schoolboy in 1968, when Principal of Trinity College E. Lionel Fernando invited him to give some tips to the College English debating team. Being an actor no doubt helped but Osmund was a speaker in a class of his own where diction, delivery and body movements were synthesised into a delightful whole. Very much later I had the pleasure of long hours of his company when along with the late Surath Ambalangoda, a former Editor of the *Aththa* and a formidable speaker in his own right and the late Lakshman Lokumanne, a well-known printer of the day, we formed a foursome who met fairly regularly at the Solis Restaurant at Koswatte Junction, Nawala, when Osmund was living at Welikadawatte, Rajagiriya.

Osmund Jayaratne's was a full life which was not without its afflictions and in a sense was a tragic commentary on the life of an intellectual in a Third World society. However, his was also a contented life, for Osmund Jayaratne belonged to that dwindling breed which refused to join the rat race, seek the baubles of office or surrender to the Establishment. ■

Courtesy *Sunday Observer*, 3 October 2006.

Ajith Samaranayake is a leading journalist and editor of *Friday*.

While this issue was under way, Ajith Samaranayake passed away at the age of 51. The *Polity* mourns the loss of a friend, contributor and social commentator par excellence.

A VOICE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS

(A TRIBUTE TO THE LATE ADRIAN WIJEMANNE)

Neville Jayaweera

Unlike the more famous voice that cried in the wilderness some two thousand years ago, Adrian Wijemanne did not literally have his head served on a platter, but was regularly threatened with reprisals no less gruesome. Neither did he ever have to live on a diet of locusts and honey, but was constantly promised humble pie unless he stopped writing and lecturing on the ethnic conflict. His detractors not only ridiculed and abused him, but also directed at him, hate mail, death threats and promises of bodily harm if he ever set foot in his native Sri Lanka. Even though for the past 5 years he was ravaged by cancer and was often in excruciating pain, hardly anyone, that is, besides his immediate family his devoted wife Chitra, daughter Shevanthi, and son-in-law Dr Bruce Roser, and occasionally a few other close friends, and myself, cared to look him up or call him. The only reason for banishing Wijemanne to the wilderness was that he had the audacity and the moral courage, unequivocally, volubly and globally, to challenge the extreme rightist Sinhala orthodoxy on the Sinhala-Tamil conflict.

Wijemanne, a distinguished product of Royal College Colombo, passed into the then CCS in 1947 and went on to hold several important positions in the Lands and Irrigation Ministry. However, though a scion of a top drawer Sinhala family from Kalutara, unable to adapt himself to the emerging culture of political interference, indiscipline and ethnic discrimination, during Mrs Bandaranaike's first government in the early 1960s, (he took early retirement). After a short stint in the private sector in Colombo, he joined the World Council of Churches, as the head of its Development Bank in Geneva (moving later to Amsterdam) in which role he served till his retirement in the early 1990s. Upon retirement, he and his wife Chitra settled down in England, to be close to their daughter Shevanthi.

In 2001 Wijemanne was first diagnosed with a cancer of the spine but even though the illness took hold rapidly and he was often in great pain, he never spoke about his condition, unless asked. I saw him last as he lay dying in hospital, a few days before he passed away, but even then, though in unutterable pain, he was lamenting not his illness but the

folly of SL leaders in failing even belatedly to face up to the reality of the crisis facing the country. Two days after I saw him he went into a coma and within another two days, on the 22nd of July, passed away. He was 81.

Handling dissent

Wijemanne and I had not only been colleagues in SL (he was my senior in the Service by seven years) but after we both took early retirement, we went on to be colleagues in the international ecumenical service as well, he working from Geneva and I from London. However it was only after we both finally retired in the mid 1990s that we got to talking on the telephone almost daily, sharing our respective views, mostly on issues relating to the ethnic conflict, but often discussing international problems and spiritual and religious themes as well. Very often we disagreed, and disagreed vehemently too, but it was the measure of his stature as an intellectual that Wijemanne could not only listen to those who held contrary views but could also handle dissent with total composure, without becoming personal or vituperative, however animated the discussion or sharp the discord. I thought that this inner coherence and dignity, more than anything he wrote, set Wijemanne apart as an intellectual. Equally, Wijemanne was endowed with a rare sense of humour and a capacity for infectious laughter, with which he fended off with a total insouciance, the vituperation that detractors hurled at him regularly.

Motivation

During the period 1990 to 2001, Wijemanne not only wrote copiously but also lectured widely, in the USA, in Canada and in Europe. Although he copied all of his writings to the principal broadsheets in SL, hardly any local paper published them. However, several global websites carried them regularly and the Internet multiplied them hundreds of thousands of times over. I recall that in the nineties, along with the SL journal Pravada, Wijemanne writings were standard reading for diplomats manning South Asian desks in the Foreign Offices of European capitals. I also recall that at least on one occasion in the nineties, the

UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva gave him a hearing in his personal capacity, which was an unprecedented gesture for a UN body.

However, regardless of all this publicity and international exposure, Wijemanne remained transparently modest and devoid of ego, neither talking about himself nor ever deliberately seeking public profile or visibility. He was modest not only in demeanour but also lived modestly with his wife Chitra in a twin bedroom suburban apartment, never accepting payment either for lecturing or for writing and having only his pension and savings for an income.

Former friends and even relatives, often wondered what motivated Wijemanne to espouse the Tamil cause in the manner he did, exposing himself to such wanton condemnation. Far from deriving any material or visible benefits, he and his family paid a mighty price for his self sacrificial commitment, in terms of the stress they were constantly subjected to, and their eviction from the mainstream Sinhala community, both in SL and in the UK.

I believe that what motivated Wijemanne was a total dedication to justice and righteousness as he saw it, untainted by self or ambition, and stemming from his deep Christian roots. Espousing the cause of the Tamil people was not for him a foreign funded. He did it because he believed that it was the right thing to do, whatever the cost, and expediency and opportunism never stained his endeavours. He simply loathed injustice and oppression per se, by whomsoever perpetrated, not only in SL, but wherever it manifested in the world, and he spoke up as unequivocally on the side of the Bosnians, the Palestinians and the Chechnyan rebels as well.

A contradiction

However, heroic though he was, Wijemanne stance on the LTTE was fraught with a contradiction, which he and I have debated lengthily, though without resolution. The contradiction was simply this. How can one condemn Sinhala oppression of the Tamil people on one hand and yet not condemn the oppression of the Tamil people by the LTTE itself? How can one condemn state terror and turn a blind eye to LTTE terror?

Wijemanne sought to resolve this contradiction by claiming that the LTTE recourse to repression and terror was episodic

and tactically inevitable, as it had been with every liberation struggle throughout history, whether class based or nationalistic. He believed that when Eelam is finally achieved and Tamil society secured and stabilised, the need to resort to repression and terror will disappear and the culture of violence wither away. In support of his contention Wijemanne would cite the liberation struggles in Kenya, Algeria, Cyprus and Ireland.

Those who seek to justify the use of terror and repression as tactical tools often adduce this argument. However, as I used to point out to Wijemanne repeatedly, any society which claims to be civilised must order its affairs within a framework of certain absolute values, and the abrogation of democracy, fundamental rights and the rule of law, and the systematic recourse to terror, whether by state or non-state actors, even tactically, is never acceptable. On the other hand, it is true that the UN system has conceded to states the right to derogate human rights and the rule of law, for coping with specific emergencies, under certain defined conditions and subject to strict monitoring by international agencies, but not as an alternative to democratically resolving long simmering national conflicts.

Tamil nationhood

Wijemanne perspective on the ethnic conflict flowed from the premise that the claim of the SL Tamils to nationhood (not to be confused for statehood) is irrefutable. He held that by internationally accepted criteria, insofar as the Tamils of Sri Lanka had been in continuous occupation of a clearly defined territory for more than 1500 years, and are heirs to a distinctive language, and a distinctive religion and could claim to belong to the sub-continent's oldest culture, and most of all, are sustained by a vibrant sense of ethnic identity, they were already a nation, whether or not the Sinhalayo and the rest of the world recognised it. What was in dispute was whether that nation, so conceived, could be integrated within a single Sri Lankan state, or whether it should, or could, set itself up as a separate state.

He also believed that it was primarily in the interest of the Sinhalayo to release the Dhamilo from the majoritarian stranglehold they exercised over them, so that both nations, the Sinhala and the Dhamila, may prosper in a symbiotic and synergistic relationship within a single united Sri Lankan state, rather than waste their respective resources in a self-destructive civil war.

Terror and terrorism

Wijemanne held very strong views on the subject of terror and terrorism. While condemning terror, he also refused to draw a distinction between state terror and non-state terror. Terror is terror by whomsoever inflicted and he held that state terror was in fact more reprehensible because it had unlimited access to sophisticated technology and could easily cloak evil in the vestments of legality and legitimacy. He often cited the USA, the UK, France and the Soviet Union throughout their histories, and Germany and Japan during WW2, as classic perpetrators of state terror and claimed that more often than not, it is the state that casts the first stone and that non-state terror is invariably a last resort response by an underclass, driven to extreme frustration by the intransigence of the state.

Wijemanne was convinced that whether it takes another five decades or more, unless the Sinhala polity remedies the conditions that first generated Tamil militancy and LTTE terror, the blood letting will continue until the Tamil people finally emerge as a separate state or at least take their place as equal partners within a confederation. Therefore he urged that it was equally in the interests of both the groups to accelerate that outcome fast, through dialogue and negotiation. However, he also believed that such an outcome is not likely without direct foreign intervention and without a Dayton Accord type formula being first put in place. In

the absence of such *ex deus ex machina* he envisaged an endless haemorrhaging of both groups and their total debilitation.

Current trends

I believe that some of Wijemanne's views, as expressed in his writings of the early to mid nineties, especially concerning LTTE's policy on violence and terror, were flawed. But then, so has every conceivable view on the ethnic conflict, there being no fully consistent position ever possible, which can satisfy equally the aspirations of all parties, while simultaneously meeting the demands of liberal values.

Wijemanne's contribution to the debate is that he has, more than any Sinhala commentator or intellectual I know of, exposed with a relentless clarity and power, with total commitment, and on a global canvas, and furthermore, without material support from any quarter either, the folly of the main line Sinhala orthodoxy, and with equal cogency, argued the case for the Tamils. Judging by the current trends, the Wijemanne view that unless Tamil grievances are rapidly remedied through negotiations, helam, or at least a confederation, is inevitable, may not be so delusional as some may think. Adrian Wijemanne may not have had his head served on a platter, but he may yet prove to have been the prophet of his generation. ■

SENAKE BIBILE'S LIFE AND WORK

Carlo Fonseka

Senake Wilhem Bibile was born to an aristocratic family of Uva-Wellasa on the 13th of February 1920. He was the eldest of the six children of Sylvia Augusta Jayawardane (daughter of Mudaliyar Harry Jayawardane of Kataluwa, Galle) and Charles Wilhem Bibile, the much-loved *Rate Mohotampura* of Bibile at that time. A brilliant, scholarship-winning student and award-winning sportsman, he could also act, sing and dance. He was indeed an extra-ordinarily talented all-rounder. He was educated at Trinity College Kandy (1928 - 1939); the Colombo Medical School (1940 - 1945); and the University of Edinburgh (1949 - 1952). At the Colombo Medical School, he graduated MBBS



in 1945, having passed all the professional examinations in the First Class and winning the most prestigious gold medals on offer: the Dhunjishaw Dadabhoy Gold Medal for Medicine and the Rockwood Gold Medal for Surgery. In due course, he distinguished himself as an academic pharmacologist, a world-class medical scientist, a charismatic university professor, a perceptive medical educationist, and a socialist visionary, deeply involved in humankind.

Of all the doctors Sri Lanka has ever produced, Professor Senake Bibile must be reckoned the one whose life's work directly benefits to the greatest degree patients who need

treatment with drugs. For his was the acute intelligence that devised a scheme for the rationalization of the supply and use of pharmaceuticals which makes available to the public, the most essential, effective and safest drugs at the cheapest possible prices. The alternative is to buy them in the free-market from the pharmaceutical industry whose sole reason for existence is the maximisation of profit by hook or by crook. Patients have no choice; they simply have to buy just what their doctors order for them. With the political support of Dr S.A. Wickremasinghe, Member of Parliament and leader of the Communist Party of Sri Lanka, Senaka Bibile created the State Pharmaceutical Corporation in 1971. As its Founder Chairman, he demonstrated for all the world to see, that his scheme actually worked very well in practice. It has since become the pharmaceutical policy model for many developing and even developed countries which do not regard health care merely as a branch of cut-throat big business. Successful implementation of his scheme eroded the exorbitant profits of the multi-national drug companies. Predictably, they used every means available to them including intervention by officials of powerful foreign states, to try to sabotage the smooth operation of the State Pharmaceutical Corporation. The fact that it has survived up to date in the teeth of calculated opposition is proof of the enduring validity of Senake Bibile's inspired and inspiring vision. If the light of rationality in the supply and usage of drugs still burns in this country, it is because Senake Bibile set it alight with such intensity. A national drug policy in line with Senake Bibile's vision is now being implemented step by step nearly three decades after his death.

The importance of Senake Bibile's mission in the field of pharmaceuticals far outshaded the seminal roles he played as a medical scientist, educationist, health policy theorist, university don, humanist and political activist. He was the first Dean of Peradeniya University's Faculty of Medicine (1967 – 1970), and one of his signal initiatives was the setting up of its Medical Education Unit. In the field of general education, he served as Chairman of the School Biology Project sponsored by the Ceylon Association for the Advancement of Science. Its aim was to devise curriculum materials suitable for use in secondary schools at the GCE

O level. He was a scientific researcher of the first rank, and had to his credit some 45 publications in local and international journals. As a health policy theorist at the national level, he subscribed to the view that medicine was primarily a social science and rational politics, the implementation of sound medical practice on a national scale. Thus his enthusiastic involvement in active politics as a committed member of the Lanka Sama Samaja Party. In 1959, he compiled the Ceylon Hospitals Formulary (the little Red Book), which gave a succinct and lucid account of the drugs used in our hospitals. He also collaborated with Ayurvedic Physicians to investigate the efficacy of some of our indigenous remedies. As a medical researcher he proved that large daily doses of Vitamin C (500 mg) neither prevented nor cured the common cold. As a teacher, he had a very decisive influence especially on his more perceptive pupils, a few of whom became his lifelong disciples. They endeavour to continue the practice of humane medicine he inspired in them by precept and example. His indomitable courage in the face of adversity persisted to his last days on earth.

His efforts to formulate and implement a national drug policy were frustrated. He was clearly ahead of his time. His political party, the LSSP, ceased to be a part of the United Front government in 1975. In 1976, Senake Bibile resigned from the Chairmanship of the State Pharmaceutical Corporation. In 1977, UNCTAD – The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development – invited him to work as a Senior Advisor and Consultant on Pharmaceutical Policy. He was entrusted with the responsibility of working on the pharmaceutical policies of 13 developing countries. Thus he proved to be a prophet who was held in honour, except in his own country.

His last assignment was to visit and report on the pharmaceutical scene in the Caribbean Islands. He was in Georgetown, Guyana, when he became terminally ill with heart failure and died on the 29th of September 1977. His wife, Leela, was by his side through thick and thin. She brought his ashes to his motherland and they were interred in the Colombo Jawatta Cemetery on the 4th of October 1977. ■

Dr. Carlo Fonseka is a member of the University Grants Commission.