

women. It called for a quota of 30 per cent for women at local government, provincial and parliamentary levels and a 50 per cent of the seats on the national list of parliament to be given to women. The other options which the authors propose for discussion include: (i) the reservation for women of 22 per cent of the National List MPs; (ii) A reservation, 33 per cent, in the nominations list of candidates at all elections; (iii) Ensuring by political parties of 33 per cent all elected to be women; and (iv) Multi-member constituencies to guarantee the election of at least one-woman member.

Sri Lanka's constitutional reform debate seems to be one that has a recurring life. Even at present, issues of democratization and electoral reform are at the core of the constitutional reform debate.

It is important that women's groups seize this space to bring the question of women's equal representation to the center of the reform agenda. It requires a range of activities for intervention – public education, lobbying among political parties, public communication through media, networking, campaigning and of course further and continuing research and documentation. *Preferring Women* is an important and useful handbook. It is lucidly written, incorporating what has been generated through recent research and surveys conducted in Sri Lanka. It also synthesizes the legal, judicial and constitutional arguments with the concerns of democratic activist communities. A public educational text like this needs to be made available in vernacular languages, Sinhalese and Tamil. Vernacularization of the democratic struggle is a strategic goal which we should not ignore.

GREAT DAYS, GREAT READ!

Lakmali Gunawardena

Manel Fonseka, 2001, *Great Days. memoirs of a ceylon government medical officer of 1918*, Colombo: Social Scientists' Association
118 pp. Rs. 300.00

There has been a number of memoirs of officers retired from government service recently. It speaks well for the thriving publishing industry and the longevity of retired public servants, whose offspring are aware that all that their aged parents are recounting over and over again is part of our oral history which should be recorded in some way. When Alec Peterson approached Manel Fonseka to put his octogenarian doctor father's stories into some form of writing as a gift to him on his birthday, both son and writer had something much less than a published book in mind.

In a meticulously edited and annotated recording of Dr. Peterson's life in the Ceylon Medical Service at the turn of the century, published by the Social Scientists' Association, Manel Fonseka transports us back to a bygone age when doctors made house calls by foot, on horse back, buggy cart and sometimes on an elephant! It's another world from medical practitioners plying from one hospital to another, tracked by cellphones, to attend to patients waiting in vast numbers to consult them for 5 or 10 minutes.

The editor has carefully preserved the doctor's voice and style of narrative, simple, direct, down-to-earth and lined with humour. She carries us from his student days, when he was part of the temperance movement, when carolling during Christmas was accompanied by an organ tied to a bullock cart, and one could go shoot some rabbit in the wild in Wellawatte, to when he retired from service as Superintendent of the leprosy hospital in Hendala, organizing the patients in building a barbershop for themselves. What comes across the length of the narrative is the personality of an unassuming and practical medical practitioner whose dedication to his service is as rock solid as the man himself. Dedication to the call of duty is foremost to the point that he leaves, for awhile, a son dying of meningitis in the care of his wife, entrusted with nursing instructions, to attend to granting pratique to a ship, while stationed in Galle.

The medical officer takes us all over the country where he was posted, peppering his recollections with many anecdotes. How it took five days to dig a grave in the hard ground of arid Buttala, so that he ordered that the graves be prepared ahead of time. How falling on a recently pruned tea bush in Galaha would rip one's bowels out that would require on-the-spot surgery, and the many-times-told tale, finally caught in writing, of an unforgettable *vambotu* lunch in Badulla. Some of these anecdotes are highlighted by Barbara Mututantri Yearsley's humorous line drawings.

The book shows us another facet of the Burghers as a hard-working people, in contrast to that of the ribald, and rather rumbunctious one painted by Carl Muller in *The Jamfruit Tree*. A grandmother, Sophia Vandergucht who started "the ragged school," a father who became a chief clerk of the loan board and had the lane on which he lived named after him, an uncle, Bonnie Herft, who was an engineer and "was doing well."

Manel Fonseka, is a documentalist and editor. That *Great Days* ended as such a readable and informative book is to her credit and unflinching will and desire to see it in print. Reading it would be giving her more than the gift of chocolate slabs she got from Dr. Peterson!