

# SUMITRA PERIES, SRI LANKAN FILMMAKER, ALTERNATIVE VIEWS AND PERSPECTIVES

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**T**ext of the address by Vilasnee Tampoe-Hautin<sup>1</sup> given on the occasion of the launch of her book, *Sumitra Peries, Sri Lankan Filmmaker, Poetess of Sinhala Cinema*, on 11th August 2011

I'm very happy and honoured to present this book to you tonight. I would like to address three points : first the origins and reasons why I decided to write this biography on Sumitra Peries, second, the focus and objectives of this study, and finally, how this book is relevant to the research that I am conducting at my university, Université de La Réunion, in France's Overseas Department in the Indian Ocean.

To begin, the roots of this particular book go back to the launch of my other book, *Last of the Big Ones*<sup>2</sup> which I wrote on my father, Robin Tampoe, a contemporary of Lester and Sumitra Peries and a friend of Philip Gunawardena, Sumitra Peries' uncle. My father was also part of the film establishment, during the early 1960s until his death in 2000. On the day of the launch in December 2008, Sumitra Peries was the chief guest and I remember distinctly how she was not unmoved that a daughter should honour her father this way. So together, Sumitra and I mooted the idea of writing her biography, something that seemed to me to be largely justifiable.

My own position in all this was rather ambiguous, when one considers that, on the one hand, both my grandfather W.M.S. Tampoe (1916-1996) and my father, Robin Tampoe (1930-2000), had left their names inscribed in the annals of local commercial cinema, and on the other hand, I had as if by a strange coincidence, a quirk of fate, entered the world of cinema not as a practising filmmaker but in a film-related area, as part of those who had made cinema their intellectual breadwinner.

So, as another daughter of our nation, this is my contribution to research on cinema in Sri Lanka. This I think I have achieved on the strength of the language and cultures

bequeathed to me by Britain and France, just as Sumitra Peries has given Sri Lanka the benefit of the European film culture she acquired in the highest circles. Further, my Sinhala-Tamil origins as well as the contacts I had with members of the film industry facilitated my access to this particular milieu, which is conservative and Sinhala-speaking. But more prosaically speaking, the funds made available to me by my university also encouraged me to write this book on a key figure of Sri Lanka's cinema industry.

## Track Record

Sumitra Peries' accomplishments are no secret. She and countless other people, both illustrious and ordinary, have worked in their capacity as producers, directors, critics, actors, and of course academics, to forge the industry and make cinema in Sri Lanka what it is today. As regards this biography, mine was one of the many promises that had been made to Sumitra, and which I have fulfilled tonight, after a brief period of intensive writing.

Straddling 50 years, Sumitra's career, whether as a woman filmmaker or otherwise, has been remarkable, with an exceptional track record in terms of international and national accolades. And yet, a closer look at the existing bibliography, both in English and in Sinhala, reveals that she has not been the focus of many studies. These were some of the reasons why a biography seemed to me to be a good idea, all the more so as publications on Sinhala cinema in English are a rarity.

As concerns this point, numerous critical reviews of Sinhala films are regularly brought out through a diversity of channels, primarily journals and magazines specializing in cinema, destined for the Sinhala-speaking public.<sup>3</sup> A number of commendable books in Sinhala also trace the evolution of the seventh art in our island. They concentrate on filmmakers, actors, music directors and lyricists, but also bring to the fore playwrights and stage actors, given that various forms of the performing arts have comprised an important part of the

Sinhala cultural tradition, the Tower Hall theatre becoming the foyer of Sinhala nationalist creativity during the first quarter of the 20th century.<sup>4</sup>

With regard to publications in English, however, research on Sri Lankan cinema has always remained in the shadow of the gigantic Indian cinema. This is why the special issue of *Asian Cinema* (2008) devoted to Sri Lankan cinema, edited by Ian Conrich, can be viewed as a truly significant milestone, coming to enrich the existing corpus.<sup>5</sup> More needs to be achieved, if we consider that only ten English language monographs exist that explore various aspects of Sri Lanka's film industry, many of which are dedicated to Sumitra's husband, Lester James Peries.<sup>6</sup> This is not to deny the existence of two theses<sup>7</sup> and a number of investigations of exception, which have appeared in *Framework* and *Cinesith*, notably Richard Boyle's review of *Song of Ceylon* (1934) and the worthy contributions of Professor Wimal Dissanayake, Professor Jayadeva Uyangoda, Robert Cruz and Ashley Ratnavibhushana.

As far as the main thrust of the book is concerned, which is my second point, it's true that the biography places more emphasis on the life and times of the personality behind the camera than on the depth and quality of Sumitra Peries' work. The book explores her rise to stardom from the time she entered cinema as assistant director in the late 1950s with *Sandeshaya*, and worked her way to become one of Sri Lanka's rare women filmmakers, having, in the interim, edited a good part of her spouse's films before going on to do her own record-breaking, at national and international levels.<sup>8</sup>

### Role

The roles Sumitra Peries has played at different levels are wide-ranging, which this account has explored, reiterating her exceptional qualities and competences, as well the more humdrum ones, like her love of gardening and antiques. Her life has been eventful going from the provincial Sinhala Buddhist environment to a more sophisticated urban life in the capital city during the war years. The 1950s were years spent in Europe, and the cinema training Sumitra received would lay the foundation of her future career. Her marriage to Lester James Peries no doubt equally contributed to forging her vision of cinema. She stands out in striking contrast to other filmmakers such as Sirisena Wimalaweera, whose nationalist ideas and attempts to portray the culture of the Sinhala people did not concretize, for lack of financial resources, but also lack of exposure to Western culture, or at least an urban culture, indispensable to those wishing to enter the industry in the mid 1950s.<sup>9</sup>

It's true that I could have done more justice to Sumitra's outstanding *oeuvre* by engaging in a critical discussion of all her films. But assessments and critiques of her works are numerous, that have been written by academics, film specialists and journalists. I have included such relevant critical material in my study to bring into sharper focus how and why Sumitra Peries rose to the top as Sri Lanka's first qualified professional filmmaker. Indeed, in addition to the interviews that I conducted, which present Sumitra as she is today, the study has gathered and collated other material written so far to expose both known and unknown facets of Sumitra Peries' achievements, her personality and her daily existence, both as a public figure and a human being, in relation to herself, her country, her peers and the outside world.

This leads to my third point. In fact, this book is more consonant with my approach to research on cinema – that is, cinema as a way of extending my reach to other grounds. Cinema as a prism through which one could observe society. Many of those who write on cinema usually concentrate on film as text, they delve into the contents, they analyse film as they would a text, or a piece of artistic work. They use certain tools, i.e. a critical language, to decipher the grammar of cinema. Their primary concern is to critique the final product. So much so that, as pointed out by Dr Ian Conrich,<sup>10</sup> there is a veritable lacuna in what might be termed as cinema studies as against film studies – i.e. all the things that surround film – the faces, the places, and cinema ephemera, or the social history of cinema. We all know that cinema is not just about film content, or a director's style and technique, or how many awards a film has won.

It's not only about art and aesthetics, its also about politics, and economics. Cinema, through its three branches (production, distribution and exhibition), illuminates a host of interrogations on ideology, colonialism, ethnicity, religious and linguistic nationalisms, caste and class. This of course signifies acknowledging cinema in its duality, as both an art and a trade, as both a means of expression and a means of subsistence. Cinema is dependent on a whole gamut of human and technical resources, with a long and complex assembly line going from creation to production, from distribution and exhibition. Which precisely makes cinema an extremely fertile ground from whence to observe human behaviour and mentalities.

A multitude of avenues thus await investigation for those interested, such as the complex relationship between distributor, proprietor, producer, exhibitor, or how audience preferences are determined by their social and ethnic origins,

or on the contrary, their choices belie these very markers of identity. Other areas are state policy. Conservation is a particularly important question both in terms of research and national policy. Film, stills, handbills, posters, billboards are all precious material. We note the disappearance of the limelight and the box office, now relegated to metaphorical language, but sometimes entire cinema halls are demolished because proprietors are oblivious to the value of such buildings with their art-deco interiors and 1920s façades, and unique names that belong to a by-gone era. These are giving way to multiplexes. Sri Lanka lost its first ever cinema hall, the Empire, where now stands a block of luxury apartments. But perhaps, it is this very link to Sri Lanka's colonial past that is disturbing and which one feels obliged to erase for a variety of reasons. Or perhaps it's simply a question of money. We know that many cinema professionals do not consider cinema as constituting part of national heritage, but simply a means of making money while entertaining the masses.

Cinema architecture, auditorium lay-out and social segregation, linguistic nationalisms and film dubbing and sub titling, distribution circuits as revelatory of ethno-demographic patterns, make-up and costume as an articulation of national identity are other areas of interest. The question of film and propaganda has been a classic subject of research. In Sri Lanka, film has been used to project the imaginary of a people, the Sinhala majority. This includes both commercial feature films and documentaries shot during the 1960s-1970s by the Ceylon Government Film Unit. These are a few random examples to show the multiple avenues of exploration.

### Cinema Studies

Indeed, current trends in cinema studies exhibit an increasing concern with cinema as a socio-cultural phenomenon.<sup>11</sup> Religion, language and culture cannot be extricated from the discourse on film. As in the case of Pakistan, Bangladesh and India, the cinematic art in Sri Lanka has been deeply enmeshed in political, social and ethnic issues. The growth of the film industry in Sri Lanka needs to be examined within the framework of colonial and post-colonial history, and the identity crises that arose from such a context. It must equally be put in parallel with the cultural histories of neighbouring countries.

In a multi-cultural society like Sri Lanka where cinema has been deeply enmeshed in politics from its arrival in the colony, there is a crying need for more research on how cinema has either oriented or reflected Sri Lankan history, during the colonial period and after independence. A number of scholars, students, film commentators and critics writing in English have

begun to take an interest in the the way cinema began in Sri Lanka during colonial times, and how it has ever since continually articulated the socio-political and economic dynamics of the island, more particularly, the island's geographical proximity to India and the cultural affinities the countries hold in common.

In fact, no other art form has highlighted in such an unmistakable way the ties that bound Great Britain to her overseas possessions, which neither geographical distance nor cultural conflicts could totally obliterate. Cinema saw the light of day at the apogee of British colonization, during the latter decades of the 19th century, as part of a spate of inventions, and following the now celebrated race for patents between the French inventors, the Lumière Brothers, and Thomas Edison. It then rapidly occupied the colonial space with American companies capturing on celluloid the first moving images of British territories, but also actuality and news reels. It didn't take long for colonies to constitute rich subject matter for primitive cinema. Ceylon became the locus of some of the earliest newsreels shot by American companies at the turn of the century. Figuring prominently as a classic of primitive cinema, and as the first "movie" on Ceylon, is the one-reeler, *Ramble through Ceylon* (1910), shot by Charles Urban's film company, where seven minutes of footage are devoted to the island colony. But the jewel of the crown is undoubtedly Basil Wright's *Song of Ceylon* (1934), a documentary commissioned by the Empire Marketing Board to promote tea sales but which ended up as one of the most outstanding examples of films to come out of the British Documentary Movement. More importantly for our discussion, *Song of Ceylon* would present itself as a model of reference to aspiring Ceylonese filmmakers seeking an alternative to the popular commercial movie.<sup>12</sup>

The Boer War (1890-1902) was the first major conflict to be shot *en direct* by British companies who despatched their operators, such as Joseph Rosenthal, to South Africa. Film was also part of imperial propaganda, an apt illustration of this being the screening of the British victory in South Africa to the colonized subjects in India and Ceylon. More significant is the projection of the images of British triumph to the very vanquished of this war,—Boer men women and children who were incarcerated in Diyatalawa from the late 1890s to 1902.<sup>13</sup>

Between 1920 and 1950, Indian and American commercial distribution circuits brought the island within their fold, many pioneers demonstrating the efficacy of the colonial network in the development of cinema in the Indian Ocean territories.<sup>14</sup>

Ceylon, as it was then known, was part of an area under British occupation, comprising Burma, Malaya, Singapore and of course India. Culturally, and more particularly as regards cinema, distribution circuits also reflected this unity of colonial space. Films circulated between these colonies from 1920 until independence, imported by mostly Indian companies, such as Madan Theatres Ltd., that acted as intermediaries between the US and the British territories.

### Indigenous Cinema?

This is at the level of distribution and exhibition. As regards creativity, cinema is again a compound art and a gigantic industry – working in concert with other forms of expression, such as literature, music, dance, song, theatre, painting. At the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Ceylon came under the sway of both western and Indian art forms. Parsi theatre troupes toured the Indian continent and extended their reach beyond its shores to adjoining colonies.<sup>15</sup> Their *nurthi* style would become the blueprint of early Sinhala cinema and orient audience tastes in post-colonial Ceylon.<sup>16</sup> That burgeoning Sinhala cinema should be born in India in the mid, 1940s would act as a compelling force in the creation of a nationalist discourse on “indigenous” Sinhala cinema.

The Sri Lankan film industry would for a long time be dogged by a fissure between private companies and directors making formula films, driven by commercialism, and those who refused to make compromises for box office demands. This period was marked by generic disputes reaching a frenzied peak during the mid 1960s, some of these dichotomies referring back to more deep-seated issues that are beyond the scope of this address. Such rifts, cutting across ethnic and social categories, provided subject matter for a lively ideological discourse, substantially nourished by a local film press who decided on what was “good” or “bad” cinema. As Uyangoda argues, the Sinhala critical discourse of cinema evolved in parallel to the project of what has been termed as a truly indigenous Sinhalese cinema (...) an artistic or aesthetically refined cinema and a home grown cinema.<sup>17</sup>

It is against this background that a new generation of Government Film Unit-trained and other directors became the architects of quality cinema with seminal works that are today part of the immortals of the Sinhala silver screen. The GFU in fact evolved into a centre of promotion of Sinhala culture, attracting virtually only Sinhala filmmakers and technicians, the latter learning their art and trade from the GFU’s first directors, Italian Giulio Petroni and Ralph Keene. Petroni arrived in the island in 1948<sup>18</sup> and took over the GFU

on the request of D.S. Senanayake. He was followed by Englishman Ralph Keene, who later recruited Lester James Peries to work with him.<sup>19</sup>

As a young woman, freshly returned from England, Sumitra joined forces with these directors in the late 1950s, of whom the most important was Lester James Peries. What they all accomplished is all the more commendable, as there was a well-established tradition of commercial cinema that dated back to the 1940s. When these young filmmakers broke away from the GFU to strike out on their own, dissatisfied with the functioning of the institution, they carried with them the training and skills received in anthropological cinema – and the seeds of future ‘indigenous’ Sinhala cinema. Some had already experimented with different genres, integrating into their documentaries various forms of fiction. They inadvertently laid the foundations of Sri Lanka’s feature film industry, or national cinema, whose substratum would be the documentary format and Italian neo-realism, inherited, possibly, from Petroni’s and Ralph Keene’s documentary work. But then again, Sri Lanka must also face the question, not to say, dilemma, of creating a “national cinema”, in multi cultural and multi linguistic contexts, “national” being synonymous in the minds of many with “Sinhala”. While road signs, official documents and other public visual signs are now displayed in three languages, - Sinhala, Tamil and English, what of a “national Sri Lankan Tamil cinema” ?

Needless to say, with the departure or the demise of the Tamil and Muslim founding fathers and other pillars of cinema production and distribution, (A. Gardiner, K. Gunaratnam, Jabir Cader), a page has been turned, such a turning coinciding with 1983. It is interesting to note their replacement with a new generation of benefactors, financiers and promoters of Sinhala cinema, keen to be in the public eye and keen too to project their Sinhala Buddhist identity while engaging in philanthropic work. In the same vein, the political or economic strategies that underpin the creation of film festivals, awards and other distinctions by prosperous citizens are also worthy of attention, given the passion evinced by those in the Sri Lankan film industry for such barometres of “quality”.

### Context

It is evident then that a proper understanding of Sumitra’s cinematic career, themes, style and format of her films can only be reached by recalling this background and making a brief survey of the expansion of the film industry during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, at a national and international level. Her career and contribution to Sri Lankan cinema acquire greater significance when articulated in relation to the political, socio-

economic upheavals and cultural currents that marked the 1950s through to the 1970s.

Sumitra Peries was only an assistant director and editor during the decade of the 1960s. On the strength of a cinema culture gained in Europe and by working along side Lester James Peries, she learnt the ropes of the art. Lester James Peries' *Rekawa* (1958) broke away from the formula that dominated the film industry at the time, even though the film contained a few elements derived from the entertainer, including songs, which drew the comment from patriotic film critics that the film did not portray authentic Sinhala culture. When *Gamperaliya* (1963), edited by Sumitra, was awarded the Golden Peacock for its editing, Sumitra was on her way to being recognized as a director of quality cinema. Her films, beginning with *Gehenu Lamai* (1978) are shot in the realist genre<sup>20</sup>, avoiding the popular formula of songs, dances and fights. Not only have they successfully developed themes that are dear to the Sinhala people, but they have fared supremely well at the box office and given lie to the theory that only entertainers bring in money.

Indeed, for the disinterested researcher, it is this very conflict between those who privileged the entertainer and others who upheld "realism", that makes for fascinating study—with parallels to be made between such choices and the ethnic and social ills that our island has been beleaguered with until recently.<sup>21</sup>

### Disputes

While generic disputes and nationalistic discourses went far in buttressing the film industry in Sri Lanka, the new millennium has also revealed how far we have travelled down the road from every point of view, including the very critical discourse on cinema. Times have changed radically. The binaries of art/commerce, quality/trash or the debate on art and box-office are now obsolete, with wider ramifications than this speech would allow. The struggle between the realist movie and the formula film has not much relevance in research: the tearjerker and the Bollywood musical, castigated by intellectuals, and enjoyed by most of us, have gained recognition in academic circles. Be they films termed as "cultural" or "commercial", "realist" or "formula,"<sup>22</sup> most films constitute objects worthy of academic inquiry and are an important part of our national cinema heritage.

This is evidenced by the increasing number of studies devoted to the entertainer, to music and spectacle in film, of which the Hindi formula movie is a perfectly notorious example.<sup>23</sup> In Sri Lanka, of late there has also been a palpable effort to

reconsider the primitive Sinhala cinema, and its genesis in the Indian sub-continent, more objectively, possibly as part of the healing process. But after Sinhala film critics of exception had consistently elaborated their critical discourse around the idea that generic disputes and lopsided homilies are both petty and outmoded.<sup>24</sup> Despite belonging to the very vocal nationalist press, these Sinhala critics were very much avant-garde in their stance to straddle that divide between the superficial glitzy extravaganza, and the realist film with its memorable dialogues and shoestring budget.

In fact, some of the romantic dramas and musicals belonging to incipient Ceylonese cinema,—despite, or sometimes by reason of—their buffoon performances and makeshift technology, have increased in both popular demand and academic appeal. Through these forebears of our cinema, researchers can take the pulse of a society at a given time. Critics made much of the 1950s Sinhala melodramas' disinclination to deal with realism and social issues. But in fact Ceylon's incipient cinema must be viewed as texts that are bound by generic conventions, like formula, and an internal logic, which are just as justifiable as "social realism" or other variations of the realist genre.

They also attest to the cultural heritage held in common by both India and Sri Lanka. Culture as everyone knows is a hybrid phenomenon, and it would come as no surprise that nascent cinema should draw heavily on existing theatrical forms and models, some of which derive from ancient Sanskrit opera, or from the more "modern" Parsi theatre.<sup>25</sup> The latter grew out of partnerships between British colonials and the affluent Parsi community of Bombay, with the knowledge that even during the 18th century, heyday of the East India Company, a theatre hall had been erected in Bombay and plays organized to entertain members of the resident British community, agents of the British East India company and other expatriates living in Bombay. It is no coincidence either that Bombay should then become the cradle of Indian cinema, and today the nerve centre of *Bollywood*, having been nurtured by the colonial, mercantile and cultural elites of what was the commercial capital of the British Raj.

Sinhala indigenous cinema also has its roots in the documentary and neo-realist forms which are the worthy contribution of British and European cinemas.<sup>26</sup> Few would disagree that realism and documentary cinema have a special resonance for many film directors in Sri Lanka, because they came as solutions to other formats imposed by supposed alien cultures that dominated the scene during the 1960s.<sup>27</sup>

## Crossing Boundaries

Nevertheless, classifications, typologies and gradings, while spurring resourcefulness and creativity, must not prevent the crossing of real or imagined boundaries, especially with today's increasingly blurred frontiers between genres, where even the art movie has to bend its rules, if it must be an economically viable venture, and not a financial disaster. As I stated in my preface, this book owes its very existence to my own refusal to take any firm ideological stance on film discourse, with all due respect to those who occupy various camps and fight for what they believe is "true" cinema. It is indeed this very philosophy of *vivre et laissez-vivre* which has enabled me, the daughter of a "commercial director", to pay homage to Sumitra and Lester Peries, two of Sri Lanka's top filmmakers who have conferred on Sinhala cinema the stamp of quality, that of *cinéma d'auteur*.<sup>28</sup>

To conclude, let me say that Sumitra Peries is part of Sri Lanka's film industry which is animated by a lively discourse on genres, style and techniques. The existence of a pulsating film press and a longstanding tradition of festivals and awards are also a sign of good health. Film festivals and film journalism have played equally bracing roles in taking Sri Lankan cinema to higher levels with competitive assessment. The film festival is a forum, a veritable marketplace, and a necessary stimulus for any creator. As Edwin Ariyadasa argues, it is a "wholesome meeting place for the film technician and technologist, director and producer, actor and writer, film critic and film merchant, film buff and film expert – in other words the totality of the film tribe."<sup>29</sup>

All this keeps film professionals in the country on their toes. By the 1980s, Sinhala cinema had benefitted largely from being exposed to and recompensed by both international and national critical appraisal. This is one of the most important goals to achieve for any filmmaker, and which Sumitra has many times reiterated and achieved. Widely acclaimed at various festivals organized around the world, both Sumitra and her husband have been persistent in their mission to uphold quality and improve the aesthetic taste of Sri Lankan audiences. They continue to be efficient ambassadors, both official and unofficial, of Sinhala cinema and culture at home and abroad.

Suffice it to say, that with legions of stylish directors, seasoned actors, polished cameramen and skilled technicians, a number of memorable films and many dreadful ones, Sri Lankan cinema does merit erudite comment. It is my wish that this book be the beginning of many more to come and revive in Sumitra Peries the desire to pursue her work of excellence,

and thereby push further the frontiers of Sri Lanka's national cinema.

## End Notes

<sup>1</sup> V. Tampoe-Hautin is senior lecturer at the University of La Réunion, specializing in British and Commonwealth Studies.

<sup>2</sup> Tampoe-Hautin, *Last of the Big Ones*, Colombo: Tower Hall Foundation Institute Publication=2008.

<sup>3</sup> A recent addition is the journal 14 edited by Anoma Rajakaruna.

<sup>4</sup> The Tower Hall was built by one of the rare Sinhala business men, C. Hendrik Seneviratne, its works completed between 1910 and 1911. It immediately drew within its fold many dramatists, the most significant, for our discussion, being Sirisena Wimalaweera. Wimalaweera would be one of the playwrights to become victim of the popularity of cinema and the transformation of the Tower Hall into a cinema hall by A. Gardiner, inciting Wimalaweera to attempt filmmaking.

<sup>5</sup> Ian Conrich, Nelly Gillet (eds.), "Cinema in Sri Lanka : A Symposium", in *Asian Cinema*, ed. J.A. Lent, Vol 19, no 2, Fall/Winter, Philadelphia: Asian Cinema Studies Society, 2008.

<sup>6</sup> See list at the end of the book.

<sup>7</sup> Laleen Jayamanne's unpublished thesis focussing on women, and my own thesis published in France, *Cinema, Colonialisme et Identité*, Paris: L'Harmattan, 2011.

<sup>8</sup> V. Tampoe-Hautin, *Sumitra Peries : Sri Lankan Filmmaker, Poetess of Sinhala Cinema*, Colombo Aitken Spence, 2011.

<sup>9</sup> W. Dissanayake, "The Early Phase of Sri Lankan Cinema", *Asian Cinema* (ed. Conrich et Gillet. N), Vol 19, no 2, Fall/Winter, Philadelphie: Asian Cinema Studies Society, 2008. p. 9 ; M. D. S. Maithripala, "Sirisena Wimalaweera's dream: penchant for fostering Sinhala film industry", *Daily News*, 30 août 2006 ; "Pioneer of Sinhala Cinema", M.D.S. Maithripala, *Daily News*, le 12 septembre, 1984.

<sup>10</sup> Dr Ian Conrich of the University of Essex is a specialist of cinema, more particularly the cinemas of South Asia and the Pacific. He has published extensively on all aspects of cinema.

<sup>11</sup> Diongu B. Nihalsingha, *Public Enterprise in Film Development: Success and Failure in Sri Lanka*, Victoria, British Columbia: Trafford Publishing, 2006 ; see also Wimal Dissanayake, "Sri Lanka: Art, Commerce and Cultural Modernity", in *Contemporary Asian Cinema*, Anne Tereska Cieccko (ed.), pp 108-119, 219-220, Oxford : Berg, 2006.

<sup>12</sup> In an interview given to A. Ratnavibhushana, filmmaker, scriptwriter and writer Tissa Abeysekera highlights the important role played by the film units and documentary format in post-colonial Ceylon. RATNAVIBHUSHANA, Ashley, « Tissa Abeysekera on *Song of Ceylon* and the GFU », *Cinesith*, ed.(Sinhalese, trad. Somachandra Wijesuriya), 1986. See also Richard Boyle, « Basil Wright's *Song of Ceylon* », *Cinesith*, 2 : 4-11, Colombo: Asian Film Centre, 2002.

<sup>13</sup> RK. De Silva's illustrated and commented work carries a photograph of the Diyatalawa camp where the prisoners lived: 19th Century Newspaper Engravings of Ceylon – Sri Lanka, Londres : Serendib Publications, 1998.

<sup>14</sup> M.R. Bose, *Bollywood, a History*, New Delhi, Lotus collection, Roli Books, 2006.

<sup>15</sup> For more on the Parsi Theatre tradition, see Kathryn Hansen, "Parsi Theatre and the City : Locations, patrons, audiences", in *Sarai Reader 2002: The Cities of Everyday Life* (date of consultation 18/22/2007): <http://life/2parsitheatre.pdf+%C2%AB+Parsi+Theatre+and+the+City+:+:+&cd=1&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=lk&client=firefox-a> ; P V, Dr., Vaidyanathan, "The Dream Merchants" : (date de consultation : 29 August 2003) [www.screenindia.com. http://www.screenindia.com/fullstory.php?content\\_id=5694](http://www.screenindia.com/fullstory.php?content_id=5694).

<sup>16</sup> See the work of Wimal Dissanayake, *Profiling Sinhala cinema*, op.cit., p 2-15.

<sup>17</sup> J. Uyangoda "Cinema in cultural and political debates in Sri Lanka", in *Framework 37*, London, 1989, p. 40.

<sup>18</sup> In fact, Giulio Petroni had been recruited by three nationalist Sinhala businessmen who had set up a company *The Vishvaranga Movietone Company*. They had travelled to Italy in search of a documentary filmmaker in order to train young aspiring Ceylonese in the art of film. Petroni arrived in the island with two other colleagues, Frederico Serra and Giogio Calabria, only to find that the company no longer existed. They soon found a new job with Ceylon's first independent government under the aegis of D.S. Senanayake.

<sup>19</sup> Peries was residing in London during the latter 1950s but answered Keene's call to return home.

<sup>20</sup> J. Uyangoda argues that within the Sinhala critical discourse, "realism" calls for a clarification. The concept is as unclear as it possesses multiple layers of meaning, ranging from the reproduction of true-life or real conditions to left-wing theories of "social realism".

<sup>21</sup> See Robert Crusz, "Sri Lanka : the Crisis and Cultural Practice", *Framework* No. 37, London : 1989, pp. 12-13.

<sup>22</sup> On formula films, see J.Uyangoda, *art.cit.* p. 45.

<sup>23</sup> The importance of song "picturization", a unique word and process inextricably linked to Bollywood has been the focus of an illuminating article by Heather Tyrrell and Rajinder Dudrah, "Music in the Bollywood Film", in *Film's Musical Moments*, (ed Ian Conrich and Estella Tincknell), Edingurgh University Press, 2006, p. 195-208.

<sup>24</sup> Among them, Ranjith Kumara, Sunil Mihindukula and Elmo Gunaratne.

<sup>25</sup> For more, see Joël Fargès, "Le Cinéma en Inde : Rasa Cinematographica", ch. XXIV, pp. 545-68, in Christophe Jaffrelot, *Inde Contemporaine*, Paris, Fayard 2000. Also Kathryn Hansen, "Parsi Theatre and the City: Locations, patrons, audiences", in *Sarai Reader 2002: The Cities of Everyday Life* (18/22/2007): <http://life/02parsitheatre>.

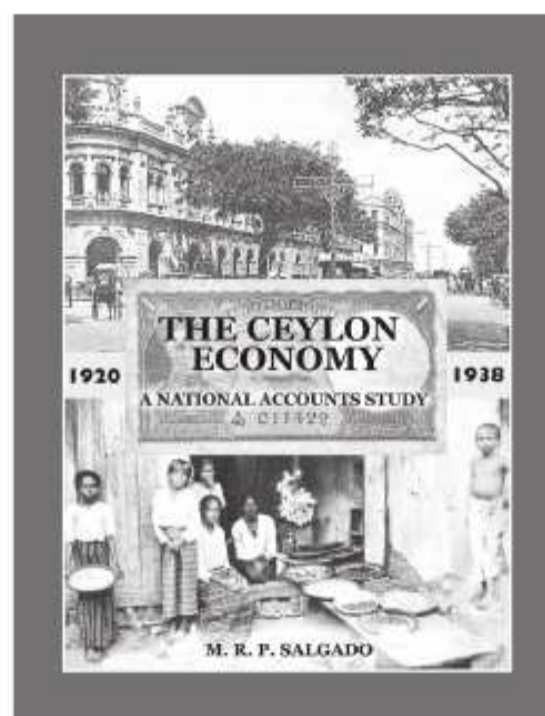
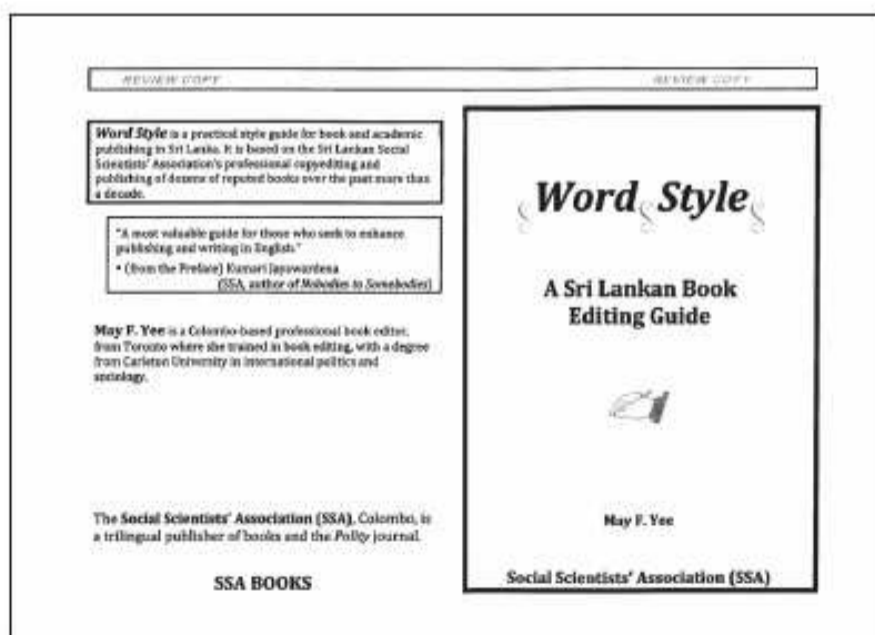
<sup>26</sup> A. Ratnavibhushana, "Government Film Unit : Centre of excellent tradition in documentaries" and "The Awakening of the Local Documentary Cinema", trans. Somachandra Wijesuriya in *inesith*, 1986.

<sup>27</sup> V.Tampoe-Hautin, "Le genre documentaire et les Film Units dans la construction d'un cinéma national au Sri Lanka (1930-1960)", *Idées et représentations coloniales dans l'Océan Indien*, (dir.), Norbert Dodille (no. 17 coll.), Paris : PUPS, mai 2009 pp. 629-641.

<sup>28</sup> A.J. Gunawardana, R. Crusz and A. Ratnavibhushana, (eds.) *Lester James Peries : Life and Work*, Colombo : Asian Film Centre, 2005. ■

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