

IN MEMORIAM

P.P. Manikam - Appreciations

by S. Thambyrajah

P P. Manikam passed away on 7 August and his mortal remains were cremated at the General Cemetery Kanatte on 9 August 2001. Manikam hailed from the Kundasale area from a highly respected and well known family of the area. He qualified as an engineer and joined the public service. He was the General Manager of the Steel Corporation, when that institution was directly under the Ministry of Philip Gunewardena, known as the "Boralugoda Lion." In fact, Manikam was a social worker in the true sense and he gave special preference to the under-privileged and exploited sections of the community. While he was a Consultant at NORAD, he was one of the primè movers in establishing the Kotagala Labour Foundation and he did a lot of spade work in this regard.

Manikam was greatly devoted to the improvement of education in the plantation sector. He spent much of his time and energy in over-viewing the Patana German School of education and encouraged members of the upcountry Tamil community in education, while at the time helping in providing for technical training to school drop-outs. He was also, for a time, a member of the Official Languages Commission. He was quite proficient in all three languages, and often he would quote from the *Thirukkural* and *Bhagawat Geeta* in Tamil. He had a wide knowledge being an exhaustive reader.

I came to know Manikam when I was functioning as the chief accountant of the Ceylon Workers Congress at their head office in Colombo 7, during the period 1986 to 1988. Actually it was a casual acquaintance to start with, but gradually we got closer and he tutored me in the engineering aspects of the C.W.C. Headquarters building. At the same time he helped

to prepare the statistics, project analysis of the membership, and how the financial commitment to a major building operation could be tailed off over a period of 5 to 6 years. In fact, it was Manikam's forte to prepare statistics and project reports. He did all the backroom work and shunned publicity. Thereby others got the credit. I left the C.W.C. in 1988. Manikam came and met me and inquired whether I would be interested in organizing a Foundation for plantation development. I agreed. For one year in 1989, he and I did the spade work, and Chandra Schafter provided a little space in his office for preparation. Thus emerged the Udayam Foundation, a registered public company and voluntary social organization established in September 22, 1989. All credit has to go to the late Manikam for his initiative, and from 1989 until his death he was the Chairman, unanimously re-elected every three years.

Another of Manikam's initiatives was the publication of the book *Ilankai Malayaka Thamilarin Panpadum Karuththu Nilayum (The Culture and Ideology of the Plantation Tamils of Sri Lanka - Volume 1)*, edited by Karthigesu Sivathamby, Professor of Tamil, University of Jaffna. This book is an Udayam Foundation publication. Last year the Education Department took 400 copies of this book to be sent to government schools. I was in the process of discussing the preparation of Volume 2 of this book with the late Manikam and also a project report for talent-finding in music in the plantations. We were hoping to meet the Indian Commissioner in this regard, when all of a sudden Manikam passed away. Manikam is also the author of the book entitled, *The Plantations in Crisis—An Overview* (Social Scientists' Association, 1995). The country has lost the services of a person who devoted a lifetime for public duty and the Tamils of the upcountry have lost a guide, philosopher and friend.

by Das Miriyagalla

Panchanathan Pillai Manikam, a man of simple but extraordinary qualities is no more. He worked tirelessly for several public institutions. But probably he was best known as the first General Manager of Steel Corporation at Oruwala.

Until he passed away at the ripe age of 82 on August 2001 he was quiet alert both mentally and physically and was deeply involved in the study and progress of public sector ventures. Even though it is possible to find many who could be compared with him in his commitment and devotion to work, Mr. Manikam had some special qualities which made him an extraordinary man.

He considered all who worked with him big or small equally important and that each had an important role to play. He never took a decision on a short term even medium term basis. It was always after an analysis on a long term basis. He believed in a society free of ethnic and religious barriers, so much so that religious rites were performed at his funeral by Buddhist monks from four different temples.

One could see today the infrastructure at Oruwala with a large playing field lined with rows of Na trees at the boundaries and landscaping near the water tanks with birdlife, due largely to the efforts of Manikam whose main task of course was to spearhead the Stage I of the Steel Project. His dream was to see Stage II and Stage III for Steel Making, and Iron Ore processing. Even though one could say that he died not seeing them, he actually saw the Stage II in the form of a large residential middle-class village for over 3000 families at the boundary of the steel complex leading to Koratota and a real Satellite city of Colombo with all modern amenities with original Steel premises as Stage III in the millennium year.

Mr. Manikam was fortunate to see all three stages of the Steel Project, but in a form different from what he originally wished. He lived a complete life full of action and saw his dreams come true at Oruwala. He always enjoyed meeting those who worked with him and was a happy man at the regular Steel Fraternity functions which he attended with his wife Kamala who played a major role in his success at Oruwala.