



**Ceylon 1505 – 1948 AD**

**Portuguese 1505 – 1658 AD**

**Dutch 1658 – 1796 AD**

**British 1796 – 1948 AD**

I arrived with them in an era long past  
And gone when I began recording these memoirs  
Through the discovery of genealogies.

What were they like?  
There is scope for endless surmise.  
Ordinary men, no doubt, renamed by  
Empires and their histories as conquerors  
Subjugators, adventurers, exploiters  
Before they became dust.

Were they not also the scapegoats of those times?  
Would they have been out of work, jobless  
Without that vast global enterprise of trade and  
Commerce, barter and exchange?

No, no one holds a brief for their acts  
Now demanding the confessions of the penitential.

They make sabre-cuts in memory, fleshed out,  
Re-living the past, their history part of mine,  
The continuance of which, with abbreviations and  
Accretions jotted down on these pages filled  
With my own interpretations and interpolations,

My pyramid constructions with all the labyrinthine  
Mazes I tread in my search, observe that more  
Than language changes.

Have I a history of my own  
Or is my history a contrivance formed  
From that of others? An account autobiographical  
Out of those numerous biographies, written  
Or still to be written.

I find myself, the narrator,  
The story-teller in the market place  
Providing both prologue and epilogue  
To what each one imagines a saga.

Their only voice is mine,  
But did they, as individuals  
Want to be remembered?

Drinking in the moisture  
From the dews and heavy rains  
Sweeping over the lands,  
Theirs was the ancestral seed,  
I the hybrid vine, the full gourd,  
The root entrenched seed.

Is survival necessitated in these times  
By the exploration of an individual history?

I find myself and my ancestors  
Poles apart linguistically, geographically,  
Yet grapple with those invisible strangling  
That entails much more than the scrutiny of  
Document with the fading inks in archival toms.

I have to find answers to my unending  
Train of thought, my unanswered questions  
For which the answers are merely hypothetical  
Or at best, do not even exist.

Answers once discovered would spell finality  
To the quest, ending the search which is my  
Own unmartial exploration and that is not what  
I want at all, truth for me is not a strutting  
Peacock with emblazoned plumage outspread in  
A mating dance, truth rather is the rusting cannon  
On the green grass of a museum and ruined forts  
Dotted along, seemingly impregnable, the sea coasts.

So the question must go on, like the search,  
With their relentless, ruthless scrutiny.  
I face my accusers but accuse no one  
Who calls me the outsider, myself.

***I Search Myself Through History***

Extract from a poem by Jean Arasanayagam from her publication Colonizer / Colonized, Writers workshop books, Published by P. Lal, Calcutta, 2000



**Sri Lanka**

January 14th 1896

The drive through the town and out to the Galle Face by  
the seashore, what a dream it was of tropical splendours,  
of bloom and blossom, and Oriental conflagrations of  
costume! The walking groups of men, women, boys, girls,  
babies – each individual was a flame, each group a house  
afire for color. And such stunning colors, such intensely  
vivid colours, such rich and exquisite minglings and fusions  
of rainbows, and lightnings! And all harmonious, all in  
perfect taste; never a discordant note; never a color on  
any person swearing at another color on him or failing

to harmonize faultlessly with the colors of any group the  
weaver might join. The stuffs were silk – thin, soft, delicate,  
clinging; and , as a rule, each piece a solid color; a splendid  
green, a splendid blue, a splendid yellow, a splendid purple,  
a splendid ruby, deep and rich with smouldering fires –  
they swept continuously by in crowds and legions and  
multitudes, glowing, flashing, burning, radiant; and every  
five seconds came a burst of blinding red that made a body  
catch his breath, and filled his heart with joy.

Mark Twain Following the Equator: A Journey Around the World  
(London 1900) Vol.1 pp 16-22, 310



IMAGE LEFT  
Martin Pieris Anuradhapura, 2010  
digital fibre print, 60 x 60cm

**Martin Pieris**

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## Serendip – Lanka 543 BC

**Vijaya 543 – 505 BC**

**Panduvasudeva 504 – 474 BC**

WHEN the Guide of the World, having accomplished the salvation of the whole world and having reached the utmost stage of blissful rest, was lying on the bed of his nibbana, in the midst of the great assembly of gods, he, the great sage, the greatest of those who have speech, spoke to Sakka who stood there near him: 'VIJAYA, son of king Sihabahu, is come to Lanka from the country of Lala, together with seven

hundred followers. In Lanka, O lord of gods, will my religion be established, therefore carefully protect him with his followers and Lanka.

When the lord of gods heard the words of the Tathagata he from respect handed over the guardianship of Lanka to the god who is in colour like the lotus.

And no sooner had the god received the charge from Sakka than he came speedily to Lanka and sat down at the foot of a tree in the guise of a wandering ascetic. And all the followers of VIJAYA came to him and asked him: 'What island is this, sir?'

'The island of Lanka', he answered. 'There are no men here, and here no dangers will arise.' And when he had spoken so and sprinkled water on them from his water-vessel, and had wound a thread about their hands he vanished through the air.

Mahavamsa Chapter 7 "The Consecrating of Vijaya"

THE prince named VIJAYA, the valiant, landed in Lanka, in the region called Tambapanni on the day that the Tathagata lay down between the two twinlike sala-trees to pass into nibbana.

Mahavamsa Chapter 6 "Coming of Vijaya"



## Anuradhapura 337 BC

**Pandukabhaya 437 – 367 BC**

**Devanampiya Tissa 307 – 267 BC**

**Duttha Gamini 161 – 137 BC**

WHEN he was thus left victor in battle, PANDUKABHAYA went thence to the dwelling-place of his great-uncle Anuradha. The great-uncle handed over his palace to him and built himself a dwelling elsewhere; but he dwelt in his house. When he had inquired of a soothsayer who was versed in the knowledge of (fitting) sites, he founded

the capital, even near that village. Since it had served as dwelling to two Anuradhas, it was called Anuradhapura, and also because it was founded under the constellation Anuradha.

Mahavamsa Chapter 10 "The Consecrating of Pandukabhaya"

WHEN the ruler of the earth, Pandukabhaya, the intelligent, being thirty-seven years old, had assumed the rule over the kingdom, he reigned full seventy years in fair and wealthy Anuradhapura.

Mahavamsa Chapter 10 "The Consecrating of Pandukabhaya"



## Sigiriya

**Kāśyapa I 477 – 495 AD**

THEREUPON the wicked ruler Kassapa sent forth his groom and his cook. But he was unable (through these) to slay his brother, he betook himself through fear to Sīhagiri which is difficult of ascent for human beings. He cleared (the land) round about, surrounded it with a wall and built a staircase in the form of a lion. Thence it took its name (of Sīhagiri). He collected treasures and kept them there well protected and for the (riches) kept by him he set guards in different places. Then he built there a fine palace, worthy to

behold, and dwelt there like (the god) Kuvera.

Cūlavamsa Chapter 39 "History of the Two Kings": 1 - 6

NOW in the eighteenth year the royal hero Moggallāna came hither at the information of the Niganthas with twelve distinguished friends from Jambudipa and collected troops at the Kuthāri-Vihāra in the Ambatthakola district. When the King heard of it he thought: I will seize and devour him, and though the soothsayer declared it to be impossible, he went forth with an array of forces. Moggallāna likewise (set forth) with an army ready to battle, accompanied by his heroic friends, like to the god Sujampati who fares forth to fight

with the demons. When the two hosts fell on each other like two seas that have burst their bounds, they fought a mighty battle. Kassapa espying a great stretch of swamp in front of him, turned his elephant to seek another road. When his troops seeing that, with the cry: "Friends, our commander here flees"! broke up in disorder, the troops of Moggallāna cried: "we see their backs"! But the king with his dagger cut his own throat, raised the knife high and stuck it in the sheath. Moggallana carried out the ceremonies of burning, glad at his brother's deed.

Cūlavamsa Chapter 39 "History of the Two Kings": 20 - 28

## Polonnaruwa

**Vijayabāhu I 1055 – 1110 AD**

**Parakramabāhu I 1153 – 1186 AD**

THEREUPON King Parakkamabāhu, the hero, to whom all right-minded people were devoted, set about the rebuilding in grandeur and beauty of the superb city of Pulatthinagara (Polonnaruwa) which had reached such state that nought but the name remained, and which no longer sufficed to make manifest his superlatively royal glory. The monarch now had a high chain of walls built which on all sides enclosed the fortified town and was larger than the town

wall of former kings and gleamed with its coating of lime bright as autumn clouds. Then after he had built around this three walls each in turn smaller than the other, he laid down various streets. Then he erected around his own palace and around his whole dwelling a second inner wreath of walls and built thereupon a palace seven storeys high, furnished with a thousand chambers, and adorned with many hundreds of pillars painted in divers hues. It was richly supplied with hundreds of alcoves which were like to the summit of the Kelāsa mountain and were radiant with manifold ornaments of climbing plants and flowers. It had doors and windows of gold large and small, well divided walls and stairs and offered conveniences for every season. It was adorned with many thousands of various

beds which were made of gold, ivory and the like and had costly coverings. The height of its splendour was reached in the royal sleeping apartment which was ever immeasurably resplendent with a thick bunch of pearls suspended at its four corners, white as moonbeams and gleaming so that they laughed to scorn the beauty of the divine Gaṅgā. (The sleeping apartment) was adorned with a wreath of large golden lampstands which breathed out continually the perfume of flowers and incense. With the network of tiny golden bells suspended here and there and giving forth a sound like the sound of the five musical instruments, the palace made known, as it were, the rich fullness of the merits of the King.

Cūlavamsa Chapter 73 "Account of the rebuilding of Pulatthinagara": 55 – 69

