



### Launching of the AISLS' *STAR OF ISLAM* Webpage

<https://www.aisls.org/digitization/star-of-islam/>

Star of Islam newspaper copies are now available on open access through the South Asia Open Archives platform. This project was the pilot digitization initiative of the American Institute of Lankan Studies [AILS] under AILS' conservation and digitization program working with endangered historical material in Sri Lanka. It was a collaboration between AILS, Sri Lanka Malay Association and South Asia Open Archives. Link:

<https://www.jstor.org/site/south-asia-open-archives/saoa/star-of-islam-26318857/>.

The Star of Islam weekly, totaling 43 volumes, was published in Colombo during 1939-1940 and was founded and edited by Maas J. Majid, a past secretary of the Sri Lanka Malay Association (SLMA) and a prominent political writer of his time until his death in 1940, and was succeeded by Enver C. Ahlip from April 6, 1940. It was printed and published at the Colombo Adana Press located on Glennie Street, Colombo 02., and was distributed from over fifteen locations across the island acquiring a global readership. Several additional copies printed later in the 1940s are available for consultation at the Department of National Archives. The publication gives an insight into cultural and current affairs of the Muslim world and colonial Ceylon at the onset of World War II and includes questions and debates surrounding pan-Islamic identities, religion and science; the military history of the Ceylon Malays; ethics in war; and Malay representation in the Ceylon Legislative Council.

Photo above: Dr. Vagisha Gunasekara [AILS] and Mr. Maas Juragan Majid, Custodian of the Star of Islam restored archive at the Sri Lanka Malay Association 97th Founder's Day commemoration at SLMA

Photo Above: Dr. John Rogers [AISLS]- center, with Ramla Wahab-Salman [AILS]- left and Mahina Bongso {Sri Lanka Malay Association} – right, at the handing over of the restored and bound Star of Islam at the AISLS Office in Colombo.

**“The restoration and digitization of endangered material such as the ‘Star of Islam’ belonging to the Sri Lanka Malay community has enabled sustainable preservation as well as provide an opportunity, for anyone to retrieve and access historically significant events and details, simply and efficiently using any smart device. We are indeed privileged and grateful to have partnered with AILS on this invaluable project.”**

*Taslim Rahaman, Sri Lanka Malay Association  
(President, 2017-2018 & 2018-2019)*



Photo Above: Dr. John Rogers [AISLS]- center, with Ramla Wahab-Salman [AILS]- left and Mahina Bongso {Sri Lanka Malay Association} – right, at the handing over of the restored and bound Star of Islam at the AISLS Office in Colombo.

# A WALK AROUND OUR NEIGHBOURHOOD

[HTTPS://WWW.AISLS.ORG/COLOMBO/A-WALK-AROUND-OUR-NEIGHBORHOOD](https://www.aisls.org/colombo/a-walk-around-our-neighborhood)



Phusathi Liyanaarachchi



Mithsandi Seneviratne

**A WALK AROUND THE NEIGHBOURHOOD** – is an *AILS* website feature researched and written by Phusathi Liyanaarachchi [AILS] with Mithsandi Seneviratne [AILS]. Dr. Vagisha Gunasekara [AILS], Dr. John Rogers [AISLS] and Ramla Salman-Wahab [AILS] provided editorial support for this electronic publication. . The essay stemmed from a curiosity to understand the historical significance of AILS' current neighborhood since the office

moved to Wellawatte in Colombo 6 end June 2020. The 'walk around the neighborhood' was enriching as it exposed alternative histories that may have been pushed aside as unimportant in the grand narrative of this city that never rests. While the prominence that the Fort and other central parts of Colombo gain in popular historical narratives holds testimony to the pivotal role they played in connecting trade and transport to the city at large, a great deal of stories that lesser Colombo seeks to tell are often ignored in favour of such already photographed, written-about histories. The interest, for this particular write-up, Phusathi writes, begins in the very junction close to our office. Its old name "Redhimola Handiya" (The clothes-mill junction), a colonial legacy, still persists and comes to life through stories of its past-workers and residents of the area. The area has given into high-rise structures, increasing its land value over the past couple of years. The Article expands on:

**1. Wellawatte Spinning and Weaving Mills (6-minute walk from Fonseka Terrace, Havelock City now stands where the Mills once were)** - the namesake mills that wove themselves into the tapestry of life of the surroundings - and the connected History of Labour Unrest.

**2. The Polytechnic (19-minute walk from Fonseka Terrace)** Founded in 1901 in the Pettah, at a time when the education system and the labour market were at a disjunct, 'The Polytechnic Ltd' was the pioneer training center in secretarial management, typewriting, shorthand, bookkeeping, and other office management skills that allowed young people to start or advance in their careers.

**3. Second Hand Bookstores (31-minute walk from Fonseka Terrace)** is also home to a number of bookstores of significance. While the Rizwie Book Shop (formerly known as the Zachariah Book Shop, which was owned by Rizwie's father) and Daniels Bookshop mainly focused on school textbooks and stationery at their onset, the Senanayake Bookstore and Deen the Bookman specialized in second hand books ranging from detective novels to classics and poetry. Each of these have unique histories of their own.

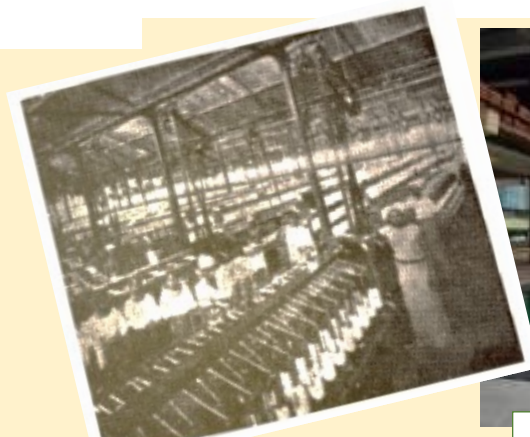
**4. W.A. Silva Museum (10-minute walk from Fonseka Terrace)** Established in 2018, the W.A. Silva Museum is the first museum dedicated to printing and its history in Sri Lanka. The museum gets its name and its home from the popular Sinhala novelist W.A Silva.



Dinkar Muthukrishna with visitors at the Polytechnic. Courtesy Muthukrishna Family: ceylonguide



**5. Wellawatte Canal (25 minutes to canal outlet)** The Wellawatte Canal was built as a flood outlet in Wellawatte in 1874. Although many believe it to be the work of the Dutch, the canal was actually commissioned by C.P. Layard, the British Government Agent of the Western Province.



1907 – The Wellawatte Weaving Mills



Replacing the Old Weaving Mills, the Iconic Havelock City is rising up Next door to AILS



**SAOA**  
South Asia  
Open Archives



## SAOA/ AILS Open Archives

### Publication of Edward VIII, Prince of Wales' visit to Sri Lanka in 1921

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/saoa.crl.31571842>



Above: One Rare Photograph of Prince Edward VIII in Kandy, Ceylon in 1921

Consisting of 23 pages with rare photographs, this Archive made possible by a private collection, reveals interesting and hitherto unknown episodes labelled Many Unrehearsed Incidents of the Prince's visit, including a story of how the Prince won the hearts of every ex-service man by insisting upon shaking hands of 1300 odd men and women comprising of Ceylonese, Burghers and Europeans who attended the parades in Kandy and in Colombo. His visit to the sacred Temple of Relics in Kandy and witnessing the Perehara [procession] with the participation of 132 elephants and also the Prince's visit to the Royal Botanical Gardens will be fresh news for many.



Image: Handing over the restored album to owner Ramya Jirasinghe [1<sup>st</sup> from left] at the AILS Colombo Office by: 2nd from left, Dr. Vagisha Gunasekara [AILS], Phusathi Liyanaarachchi [AILS] & Ramla Wahab-Salman [AILS]



**SAOA**  
South Asia  
Open Archives



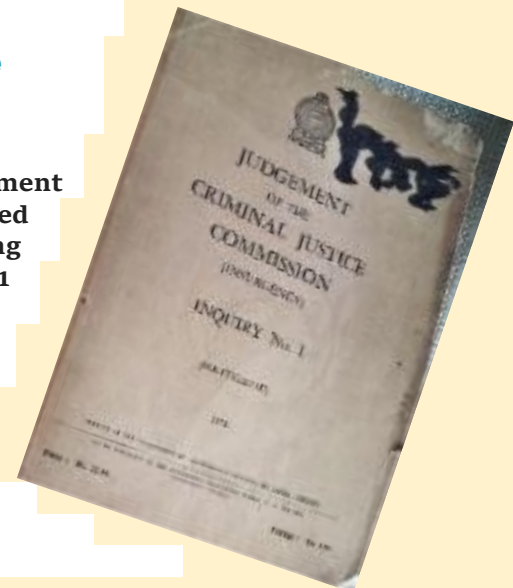
## SAOA/ AILS Open Archives

### Publication of Judgement of Sri Lanka's Criminal Justice Commission (Insurgency) 1976

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/saoa.crl.31570027>

Consisting of 450 pages, the Publication captures the proceeding and the judgement of the Commission which was established by Warrant dated 16th May 1972 issued by H.E. William Gopallawa who was the Governor General of Sri Lanka following the 1971 Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) insurrection (also known as the 1971 Revolt) which was the first of two unsuccessful armed revolts conducted by the communist Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) against the Government of Sri Lanka (then Ceylon) under Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike.

Image Right: The Original Manuscript of Judgement of Sri Lanka's Criminal Justice Commission [1976]



# AISLS ZOOM SEMINAR SERIES 2 ON “NEW RESEARCH IN SRI LANKAN HISTORY

September 24, 2021 - **Seven Pashas for Ceylon, or exile and the limits of Muslim community**

**Michael Laffan (Princeton University)**

DISCUSSANTS: John Rogers (AISLS), Eric Tagliacozzo (Cornell University)

This presentation, taken from a chapter of Laffan's forthcoming book, *Islam under Empire*, revisits the story of the exile of seven demoted Egyptian military leaders exiled to Colombo with their families in 1883. First focusing on British anxieties about their potential for stirring up the island's Muslim communities, it tracks their relative integration while not losing sight of the disagreements that saw the famous Ahmad Urabi both lauded and loathed before his eventual return to Cairo. In the process, too, it asks just what the Muslim community was, and where the Malays, once praised as the most loyal of imperial subjects, figured in the story.



Michael Laffan

October 1, 2021 - **Historicizing marine science in Ceylon, 1850-1925**

**Tamara Fernando (Institute of Historical Research, London)**

DISCUSSANTS: R.L. Stirrat (University of Sussex), Debjani Bhattacharyya (Drexel University)

This paper traces the emergence of marine biology and oceanography as nascent disciplinary formations in the context of colonial Ceylon. It uses research and scientific reports published on the pearl-bearing oyster to reflect on the links between industry, science, and empire in the late nineteenth-century, focusing on the incentives for knowledge-production around the sea and its creatures, especially on the northwestern littoral of the island. Tamara argues that the oyster in the nineteenth century was transformed from a resource at sea to an individuated creature, but then relegated to the environment once more by the 1920s. This narrative explores themes of colonial finance, infrastructure, scientific expertise, scientific specimens, local labourers and intermediaries and the role of technology.



Tamara Fernando

October 8, 2021 - **Birth control and reproductive rights in Sri Lanka**

**Darshi Thoradeniya (University of Colombo)**

DISCUSSANTS: Nira Wickremasinghe (Leiden University), Douglas E. Haynes (Dartmouth College)

Paper traces the career of family planning in Sri Lanka from its pre-history of the fragmented birth control movement under colonialism to the re-branding of family planning as 'reproductive health and rights' after the International Conference on Population and Development. Although the history of family planning in Sri Lanka resembles much of the careers of family planning programs undertaken in other countries during the same period, it does have a number of particular aspects. As a country colonized by Western powers over a period of four centuries (1505 to 1948) and thereafter becoming a development 'model' for South Asia in 1970s, Sri Lanka offers a more inclusive conceptual framework to understand how policy decisions taken in the global North fails to have the same impact in the global South.



Darshi Thoradeniya

October 15, 2021 - **The significant place of geology for Ananda Coomaraswamy**

**Janice Leshko (University of Texas at Austin)**

DISCUSSANTS: Jonathan Spencer (University of Edinburgh), Romita Ray (Syracuse University)

There are many claims concerning the significance of Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy (1877- 1947) and his writing about South Asia. While his time as the Director of the newly established mineralogical survey of Ceylon (1903 to 1907) is widely acknowledged as an important aspect of his development, exactly what this means remains unclear. This is in part due to faulty assumptions long held about the nature of his work there. Janice's project reframes the perception of Coomaraswamy through a careful consideration of the surviving evidence of his mineralogical efforts. How did his participation in newly developing sciences (geology), practicing new technologies (photography) and contributing to new periodicals and various new events (exhibitions) leaven his Sri Lankan experiences and shape his scholarly studies even after he abandoned his scientific career?



Janice Leshko

October 29, 2021 - **Cashing on conflict: Dutch colonialism and social control in eighteenth century Jaffna - Alicia Schrikker (Leiden University)**

DISCUSSANTS: Mark Balmforth (University of Toronto), Danna Agmon (Virginia Tech)

This paper takes a local perspective on the history of colonial governance in 18<sup>th</sup> century Lanka. It focuses on the office of the Dutch dissava, a crucial but often overlooked figure. He was an important person who, like a joint, connected the Lankan countryside with the Dutch empire. As his title suggests the office of the dissava was local in origin, but in the coastal areas it took shape through Portuguese and Dutch colonial practice. According to Dutch regulations and work-instructions the dissava's grip on the countryside would have been extensive, but we actually know very little about his daily operations. The unique diary that was kept by the dissava of Jaffna for eighteen months in 1778-79 gives us insight in the more day-to day affairs of the dissava and helps us imagine the aspirations and impact of Dutch colonialism at the lowest level of its operations.



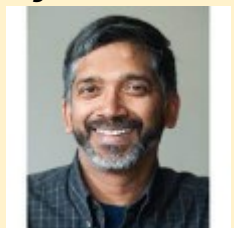
Alicia Schrikker

November 5, 2021 - **The origins of ornithology as a science in nineteenth century**

**Sri Lanka - Arjun Guneratne (Macalester College)**

DISCUSSANTS: Sujit Sivasundaram (University of Cambridge), Nancy Jacobs (Brown University)

The paper examines how ornithology developed as a science in colonial Sri Lanka to illuminate the working of 19<sup>th</sup> century science in a scientifically significant colony. As an island, the British colony of Ceylon was important for evolutionary theory; to be "islanded", to use Sivasundaram's term, was to be cut off from evolutionary processes on the mainland, and to study natural history on an island, to allow insight into evolutionary processes. Sri Lanka was easy of access compared to other equally interesting islands, and became a destination for European and British Empire scientists throughout the 19th century. The paper surveys the evolution and the connections between colonial British naturalists working on the island and their networks in Europe and the rest of the British empire and discusses the nature of scientific networks, the extent of the dependence on local expertise, and the institutions—museums, journals, libraries, funding etc. The story is told by focusing on the work of the Australian W. Vincent Legge, who, as an officer in the Royal Artillery, spent 9 years in the island amassing data to write his monumental treatise on Sri Lanka's birds, as well as serving as secretary of the local branch of the Royal Asiatic Society & reorganizing the Colombo Museum.



Arjun Guneratne



## November 10, 2021 - New Books in Anthropology Making the Right Choice – Narratives of Marriage in Sri Lanka

**Asha Abeyasekera**  
Chair – *Jeanne Marecek*

**Making the Right Choice** unravels the entangled relationship between marriage, morality, and the desire for modernity as it plays out in the context of middle-class status concerns and aspirations for upward social mobility within the Sinhala-Buddhist community in urban Sri Lanka. By focusing on individual life-histories spanning three generations, the book illuminates how narratives about a gendered self and narratives about modernity are mutually constituted and intrinsically tied to notions of agency. The book uncovers how "becoming modern" in urban Sri Lanka, rather than causing inter-generational conflict, is a collective aspiration realized through the efforts of bringing up educated and independent women capable of making "right" choices. The consequence of this collective investment is a feminist conundrum: agency does not denote the right to choose, but the duty to make the "right" choice; hence agency is experienced not as a sense of "freedom," but rather as a burden of responsibility.

**The second webinar in the four-part series of Webinars on the Museum of Religious Freedom being developed by MinorMatters was held on the 10th October 2021 at 6:00pm, exploring the relationship between Religion and the Colonial State, and the factors underlying modern religious identity formation in British Colonial Ceylon.**

**The Panelists were: Prof. Harshana Rambukwella, Ramla Wahab-Salman, Prof. Thamilarman and Moderator: Shamara Wettimuny**

The Webinar explored the relationship between the Religion and the Colonial State and the factors underlying modern religious identity formation in British Colonial Ceylon. The speakers discussed how the European colonial powers shaped the religious freedom landscape in Ceylon in terms of education and the press and explored local responses to such developments. The speakers also discussed the legacies of such colonial influence over religion in the post-independence period, the formal recognition of the association between the state and the Buddhism and its impact on post-independence constitution.



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