

Keynote Speech

‘*Forces* in the History of Sri Lanka

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When we look at the earliest history of humanity, one phenomenon stands out: that of early migration. It began, so to speak, with Adam and Eve and the expulsion from Paradise. In reality it was about 'Out of Africa', and the settlement worldwide of Homo Sapiens. Some 65,000 years our species spread over India and the Indonesian Archipelago, 30,000 years later the Vedda come to Sri Lanka, followed much later by Sinhalese and Tamils. Migration, is that a force that determines history? Is the 'Force of Migration' as strong and universal as the laws of physics? Wagenaar makes a stroll through the history of Sri Lanka, wondering which 'pull and push' factors had impact on Sri Lankan destiny. From the 6th century BCE onwards migration carried possibly elements of conquest, that started with the arrival of the Sinhalese. New waves in the Common Era certainly had a more aggressive character, and eventually the arrival of the Cholas around 1070 and the invasion of the warlord Kalinga Magha in 1214 led to a fundamental change, namely the move of the Sinhalese monarchy to the southwest, resulting in the establishment of the Kotte kingdom.

In this Transitional Period we see new migrational movements, the arrival of the Salagama, the Karava and Durava. These groups, like also the Muslims and the Chetties, managed to fit into the Sinhalese society, which was more agriculturally oriented. It led to a completely new phenomenon: the emergence of a multi-ethnic and multicultural society. This can be seen as an essential change, surpassing in importance the developments of the 16th century. Certainly, the arrival of the Portuguese and the establishment of colonial rule led to a tragic break in the history of Sri Lanka, but the modern character of the littoral in the southwest can be seen as having had a greater and more lasting force.

Lodewijk Jacob Wagenaar



Born in Alkmaar in the Netherlands in 1945, Lodewijk Jacob Wagenaar served as the s curator of the Amsterdam Museum, Lodewijk Wagenaar (1945) traveled to Sri Lanka in 1980 to participate in the design of the Dutch Period Museum in Colombo. Since then he has been involved as a researcher and trainer in various museum and scientific projects in Sri Lanka. One of his pioneering

work includes the exploration of the impact of the Dutch colonial administration on Sri Lankan society during the 17th and 18th centuries. Research of Dutch East India Company documents, kept in the national archives in Colombo and Jakarta, has been utilized to reflect on the 'Dutchness' of Dutch Colonial Ceylon, based on which he developed the concept of 'Cultural Implant,' in order to explain the transient character of the Dutch colonial presence on the island. The urban settlements of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) were rather isolated pockets within a vast territory of Sinhalese (and in the north: of Tamil) society. The 'Dutch' cultural lifestyle was limited to those urban places, and after the British take over in 1796 most of it faded away. The 'cultural implant' was a temporary one, of which only some 'echoes' still can be heard – a few Dutch words absorbed in Sinhala and Tamil vocabularies.