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“40 Years of History”

40th Anniversary Commemorative Register

Sri Lanka's Nature

**“Why do we keep losing the forests for
Elephants?”**

by Nilmini Ikemoto / Amarasinghe

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The Nature Conservation Society of Nishinomiya

Sri Lanka's Nature

“Why do we keep losing the forests for Elephants?”

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Japan-Sri Lanka Friendship Association, Kansai

“Ayubowan!” “Hi, everyone!” In the language of Sri Lanka, “Ayubowan!” means “May you be blessed with long life!” I say it again. “Ayubowan!” Now, everyone, please repeat it after me, “Ayubowan!” Thank you! We say it all the time in the morning, in [Fig.1 Nilmini Ikemoto / Amarasinghe](#) the afternoon, and in the evening.



We say it clasping our both palms together in front of the chest just like the way you Japanese do before having each meal. To tell you the truth, I am really delighted to have this wonderful opportunity to introduce to you my home country, Sri Lanka, commemorating the 40th anniversary of The Nature Conservation Society of Nishinomiya.

As you know, Sri Lanka is an island nation located in Southern Asia, which is 1.5 times as large as Japan's Kyushu island, and 0.8 times as small as Hokkaido island. The population is 22 million.

Do you know Wicky san, Mr. Anton Wicky. Yes! He was loved by a lot of people. Because of the TV program, “Wicky san's One-point English Conversation, which began in 1979, and it ran for fifteen years. He is from Sri Lanka too.



[Fig.2 Sri Lanka](#)

And here's my mother, Ms. S. Wickrama Arachchi, she is 70 years old now,” I am really grateful to her! I would not be here today without her! And this is my husband. Yes, he is Japanese. When I say that I am married to a Japanese, many people often ask what my husband is like. He is a man just like this. He really loves fishing! He fished up a big fish called “opaleye”



[Fig.3 My Beloved Husband](#)

(Fig. 3) , which is the third biggest one at the record of that time in Japan. And on a fine day, he again fortunately fished up a real big fish, 165cm long in the Indian Ocean. Can you guess what kind of fish it was? It was a mermaid. Yes! It's me! He fished me up, not a fish, and I was very happy to get fished up by him. Of course, I believe he was much happier than I. Now we have two children, the older goes to college and the younger goes to junior high school.

Sri Lanka is located 6,800km remote from Japan. It takes 9 hours to get there by plane. We have direct flights from Tokyo. The time difference is minus three and a half hours. Sri Lanka is really beautiful, which is called “Pearl of the Indian Ocean.” Colombo was the capital before, but now Kotte is the official capital. Its formal name is Sri



Fig.4 Sitting President Maithripala Sirisena

Jayawardanapura Kotte. It is the longest name among the capitals in the world.

We changed the government this January. We have 8 world Heritage sites in our country. The new President, whose name Maithripala Sirisena, is from an ancient city, Polonnaruwa, which is one of the world heritage sites. He grew up in a farmer family and he is going to make much of agricultural policies.



Fig.5 Former President Mahinda Rajapaksa

Sri Lanka also made the first female Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike in the world, which was in the year of 1960. The gentleman dressed in white (Second from the right) is former President Mahinda Rajapaksa, who is very popular. He ended the civil war which had been fought for 26 years. I am not so sure, but it may be in September last year that Japanese Prime Minister, Mr. Abe visited our nation. Former President Rajapaksa made much of tourism policies, building highways and others, but the life of ordinary people did not get better off. That is why he lost the last President election this January.

Sri Lanka used to be Ceylon. It is widely known for the delicious tea, Ceylon tea. I am sure that you know ‘Gogo no Kocha, Tea in the Afternoon.’ In Japan, they use 100% of Sri Lankan tea leaves. I often visit and teach children at many schools in Japan. They are happy to hear this tea story and cannot help crying out with joy. Yes, they really scream happily like this, “That is tasty! I am a big fan of it! I really didn’t know at all that tea is from Sri Lanka!” And they get to love Sri Lanka as well as me.

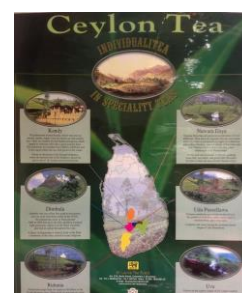


Fig.6 Tea Production areas

Now, I am going to talk about the places producing the famous tea. The central part of the country is 2,000 meters above sea level and it is cold throughout the year, the weather is just like Japanese autumn. On the other hand, the places along the coast, it is very hot like summer all the year around. The temperature is around 30° C. Sri Lanka is a small country. We can get to the mountains by train from the seashores just in 4 hours. So we need to prepare summer clothes as well as winter clothes for the trip. But please give it a try, it’s worth it! You can view truly

wonderful and beautiful scenery.

There are mainly six principal regions planting tea - Nuwara, Eliya, Dimbula, Kandy Uda Pussellawa, Uva Province and Southern Province. The Fig. 6 is marked by different colors. The tastes are subtly different with unique flavor in each place. The leaf-picking work is done by women. Many of them are Tamils. There are two types of Tamils. Ones of them are those people brought in from India by England to cultivate tea during the colonial era and the others of them are natives there. I am Sinhalese, we are the majority of Sri Lankans, 70% of the whole population.

The export quantity of tea is the biggest in the world. In fact, the quantity of production in China or India is bigger than that of us, but there is much more consumption in their own countries.

As I said before, we have 8 World Heritage Sites in our country, and they are loved by many people within and outside Sri Lanka.



Fig.7 Sigiriya Rock Fortress

The very most famous one is “Sigiriya, a fifth century AD Fortress,” which is a tremendous huge rock, 200 meters in height. It is said that long ago, there was a king who built a palace on the top of this rock and decorated its sides with colorful frescoes. On a small plateau about halfway up the side of this rock he built a gateway in the form of an enormous lion. The name of this place is derived from this structure — Sihagiri, the Lion Rock. Sigiriya today is a UNESCO listed World Heritage Site. It is the most visited historic site in Sri Lanka. We can find many paintings of beautiful women on the surface of the rock.

Sri Lanka is a nation that used to have a lot of kings. The Buddhas’ images and temples are registered as World Heritages, which were made after the introduction of Buddhism. They are as huge as the pyramids of Egypt.

Dambulla cave temple also known as the Golden Temple of Dambulla is a World Heritage Site(1991) in Sri Lanka, situated in the central part of the country. It is the largest and best-preserved cave temple complex in Sri Lanka.

There are more than 80 documented caves in the surrounding area. Major attractions are spread over five caves, which contain statues and paintings. These paintings and statues are related to Gautama Buddha and his life. There are a total of 153 Buddha statues in those caves.

Polonnaruwa, the second most ancient kingdom of the country is one of the World Heritage Sites. And the Gal Vihara is a rock temple of the Buddha situated in the ancient city of Polonnaruwa in North Central Province, Sri Lanka. The central feature of the temple is four images of Buddha, which have been carved into the face of a large granite rock.



Fig.8 Reclining Buddha's Image

The images consist of a large seated figure, another smaller seated figure inside an artificial cavern, a standing figure and a reclining figure. Reclining image represents the peacefully dying Buddha attaining Nirvana. Standing image represents Buddha who is praying under the Bo tree after he attained enlightenment.

Sri Lanka used to be a colony of several nations for around 450 years since 1505 AD. First, it was that of Portugal, Netherlands and then England. It achieved its independence in 1948. The name of it was changed to Sri Lanka, a Sanskrit word, meaning "The Sacred Island" from Ceylon in 1972. The English called the island as Ceylon.

In 1985, a very beautiful House of Parliament and a general hospital were built in Kotte thanks to the ODA of Japan. And then, this city became the official capital. The civil war for 26 years was ended in 2009. My sister's husband died during the war. He was a colonel, working as a commander for the intelligence headquarters. Still now, there are a lot of land mines buried in the northern part of the country and they are deadly dangerous. So the Tamils originally living there still cannot go back to their home. Japanese government sent 164 million Sri Lankan rupee in order to remove those land mines this March.



Fig.9 The 2nd President Jayawardene



Fig.10 Dividing and Governing Plans(in 1945)

Do you know this gentleman?(Fig.9) He is Mr. J.R. Jayawardene, one of the Sri Lankan Presidents. It was thanks to him that Japan was not divided and governed. There was a plan to divide Japan into several parts and govern it like the Fig.10 just after the WW II. Sri Lanka was air raided by Japan army in April, 1942 at Colombo and Trincomalee where Britain's army base was. The war World War II was ended on August 15th, in1945.

Japan would not be prosperous and peaceful as today if it had been divided and governed like the many other countries. When the peace treaty was held in 1951, the then Ceylonese Finance Minister J.R. Jayawardene participated in it and made a really important and helpful speech to the then Prime Minister Shigeru Yoshida. A major player in providing support for a post-war free Japan was the delegation from Ceylon.

Mr. Jayawardene spoke in defence for a free Japan and informed the conference of Ceylon's refusal to accept the payment of reparations that would harm Japan's economy. His reason was "We in Ceylon were fortunate that we were not invaded, but the damage caused by air raids, by the stationing of enormous armies under the South-East Asia Command, and by the slaughter-tapping of one of our main commodities, rubber, when we were the only producer of natural rubber for the Allies, entitles us to ask that the damage so caused should be repaired. We do not intend to do so for we believe in the words of the Great Teacher, Buddha, whose message has ennobled the lives of countless millions in Asia, that **"Hatred ceases not by hatred, but by love."**

Minister Jayewardene's speech was received with resounding applause. Afterwards the *New York Times* stated, "The voice of free Asia, eloquent, melancholy and still strong with the lilt of an Oxford accent, dominated the Japanese peace treaty conference today." And then, Sri Lanka and Japan built a good relation the following year. Since then, we have been helping each other for these 63 years until now.

By the way, there is plenty of nature in Sri Lanka. Now, I would like to introduce it to you. I have already introduced our delicious tea, so now, let's talk about jewelries. We have 70 famous jewels in our country. These people are Britain's Royal family members and they wear the jewels of blue sapphire from Sri Lanka. (Fig.11) And my name is Nilmini,



Fig.11 Royal Family Members

"Nil" means blue, and "Mini" means jewel, that is to say, the name of "Nilmini" means "Blue Jewel," which is Blue Sapphire. To tell you the truth, I am really delighted and grateful to my mother for giving me such a beautiful and elegant name.

Next thing to introduce to you must be a variety of delicious fruits. Bananas, Mangos, pineapples, papayas, avocados, durians and rambutans etc. Even bananas, we have twenty kinds of them. To talk about palm, the coconut, we always use coconut milk for cooking and also drink them. It has liquid inside tasting like POCARI. We can make Sri Lanka



Fig.12 Variety of Delicious Fruits

Curry by using soft meat inside it. It is said that coconut oil is effective to control and Alzheimer' s disease.

And comes next, Sri Lanka is the kingdom of spices. (Fig. 13).

There are a variety of herbs, of course! These spices are very good to our health. Ayurveda is known as a new medicinal science, but to tell you the truth, it is a traditional therapy originated from 5,000 years ago. This is a method of treatment using medicinal



Fig.13 Precious and Useful Spices

spices and herbs and getting us relaxed mentally as well as physically, which attracts many people' s attention all over the world.

In Japan, because many people want to get skin-treatment, anti-aging, fatigue-relieving, stress-reducing and so on, Sri Lankan cuisine and Ayurveda cuisine are getting loved and more and more popular.

Now to talk about animals, we have the biggest animals both on the land and in the sea. Yes, they are elephants and blue whales. (Fig. 14) I think that there are no other countries than Sri Lanka where we can see both the biggest animals in a country. The whale can be watched between in November and April in the southern ocean area.



Fig.14 Blue Whale!

The whales are 30 to 33m in length, weigh 200 to 220t. Their blood vessels are big enough to pass the body of an adult human being through, and more surprisingly, their heart is as big as a compact car. Other than these animals, you can see leopards and peacocks too! Peacocks are so many as well as monkeys. There are many kinds of them.

However today' s main theme I want to talk about must be elephants. There are 40,000 Asian elephants in the world, and we have 6,000 of them in Sri Lanka. The survey in 2010 shows that there are 8,500 of them, it seems that they are increasing a little more. In Sri Lanka, elephants have been living along with Buddhism culture, so the Buddhist activities cannot be carried out without them.

They train some of them and use them for the ceremonies. Adorning them with some gorgeous garments and light them up, and parade 80 to 100 elephants along with drums or flutes music. (Fig. 15 Perahera festival) People from all over the world come to Kandy City in the central area to view and enjoy it. Especially, once in a year, they show the Sacred Tooth Relic of Lord Buddha, they choose the greatest elephant and carry the image on its back. And other than that, a lot of elephants are used for tourism business.



Fig. 15 Perahera Holy Festival

And you know what? We built an orphanage for elephants in Pinnawela for the first time in the world. They take care of baby elephants that get hurt or get lost in the woods. There are a lot of tourists visiting the orphanage. The orphanage is taking care of 70 to 80 baby elephants and can be seen the scenes of them coming friendly near those tourists. You can even bottle feed baby elephants with milk.

In Yala National Park, you can view the wild life of elephants. There are 24 natural parks in Sri Lanka. The tea farm lands are 500,000 acres, Botanical gardens covers 2,500,000 acres, and there are also 350 waterfalls and 25,000 lakes. There are a lot of lakes, which is because kings made a lot of them in order to produce a lot of crops.

There are 16 rivers more than 100km long, the longest one is 335km which is 16% of space of the nation. Yala National Park is located on the southern end. The tsunami caused by the earthquake off the coast of Sumatera Island, Indonesia in 2004. It is 4,000km remote from the seismic center. But many any tourists coming to the park were victimized, 19 Japanese died too at that time. And there are many leopards in the park.

4% of the forests disappeared these 10 years. It may be necessary if we need to develop economically but I cannot help feeling a little sad. I hope that we can develop economically and protect our precious nature at the same time. Elephants live in the dried areas and go to the nearest rivers or lakes. They enjoy playing with water and washing their bodies too.



Fig. 16 Enjoying Bathing!

They sometimes smear the mud to protect their bodies or skins from the heat of the sun. So they cannot live on without water. In Sri Lanka, there are a lot of elephants and in fact they are good friends and helpful partners to us. They live together with people and help people with agricultural and religious activities.

Unfortunately, we are experiencing severe trouble recently. The Fig. 17 shows two elephants nosing in a shop that I think is a mobile phone shop, and I don't think that they are buying phones there.



Fig.17 Elephants Shopping?

There are more and more people. They cut down the forests, build their houses and cultivate lands around them. Elephants are losing their place to live, cannot get their food, so they have no other way but to come to the places people changed into crop fields. And they get into trouble to come across with the people. There are some people who even take up the guns to shoot these elephants. It is a truly sad thing. And there are some elephants that eat garbage get sick.

There are railways from the mountains to the seashores, but there are no fences to protect elephants or other animals. They walk across anywhere and often get hit by the trains. One or two of them are killed each month. And some of them fall into the traps for catching wild boars and get hurt heavily and die. There are also baby elephants fall into the holes here and they cannot climb out. Usually, there are no one near around and they cannot be saved. If fortunately the holes are large, their parent elephants come and save their baby elephant.

During the civil war, The terrorists composed of the Tamils occupied one third of the country and they control almost the whole forests. So there are a lot of land mines there. Elephants don't know about it. They step on them and get hurt and killed.

A greater problem, one that also exists in Japan, is the rich living abroad that order ivory for high-end piano keys, name seals, and



Fig.18 Encountering an elephant on the way to school - safer on a bus!

they only kill an elephant, they can receive large sums of money. Now there are even people who capture young elephants and sell them. For this kind of business, one elephant can sell for 50,000 to 170,000 rupees within the country. In some cases, hunters kill the parent elephants in order to capture these young elephants. Because much of the country is forest, there are roads that cross through the forests connecting the various villages. Young children travel these roads on the way to school, sometimes encountering wild elephants; occasionally the elephants attack.

Recently, one organization has bought buses to provide safe transportation for these schoolchildren (Fig. 18). We ask for your support in order to carry out more of these sorts of projects. Although they are very big, elephants are actually delicate animals.

They often die, for example, when being transferred from one place to another; we hope you will support efforts to procure trucks better able to transfer them. Despite efforts, however, 30,000 elephants are killed for their tusks each year around the world - it is a tragedy. Also, in Sri Lanka, 80-100 humans and 200-250 elephants die each year due to accidents involving human-elephant interaction. We want to eliminate these needless deaths.

Some regions have begun building electric fences (Fig. 19) to prevent elephants from leaving the forest. There are also recent efforts to plant thorny trees, such as lemon and bougainvillea, to act as a natural fence. In the northern part of Sri Lanka, such natural fences cover 33 km and surround 10 villages. Elephants can also sense dur



Fig. 19 Installing electric fences

The smell might be part of the reason, but the fruit is also spiny; if one falls on the elephant it will hurt even the thick skin of an elephant. Because they never come close to these trees, we expect the natural fences to be effective. Hopefully they will help ...

Elephants can perform art. There are places where they perform in circuses or draw pictures. But these are not natural behaviors of elephants; they are learned. The teaching methods, however, can go so far as to be considered abuse. In Sri Lanka, too, some tourism operators force elephants to walk up to 7 hours a day with 8 people on their back at once. We must put a stop to this, and I would like to put in place some measures to help do so. If you research elephants, you' ll find lots of sad and painful stories. We must take action.

Former President Jayewardene helped bring peace to Japan. When he died at the age of 90, he donated his corneas; one went to a woman in Nagano Prefecture, and another to a Sri Lankan citizen. Following in the footsteps of the former president, I too hope to continue friendly relations between these two countries.



Fig. 20 Leaflet asking for donations of glasses

Sri Lanka donates more blood than any other country. There is also a National Eye Bank, which donates more corneas than any other country. More than 59,000 have been donated to countries around the globe, including almost 5,000 corneas to Japan alone. Whenever I give a talk or presentation, I always ask everyone to donate glasses (Fig. 20). The glasses I collect are given to Megane no Miki, a company that supports us by repairing and washing the glasses before they are sent to those in need through our Japan–Sri Lanka Friendship Association. I am so happy to be receiving so many donations today. I had a great time speaking to everyone today. Thank you.

Nilmini Ikemoto:

Born in Colombo, Sri Lanka. Came to Tsurumi Ryokuchi, Osaka in 1990 to work as a companion at the International Garden and Greenery Exposition. She married a Japanese man she met there, and has lived in Osaka for 23 years. She is also a mother of two. Nilmini teaches English at local kindergartens and elementary schools and Sinhala at the Asian Library in Awaji, while also serving as civil ambassador for the Takarazuka International Friendship Association. She has plans to teach Japanese people about spices through e-learning methods, and introduce Ayurveda treatment to them as well. Please feel free to contact her if you are interested.

<http://you.gr.jp/nilmini/index.html>

A thank you to those who donated glasses

In 1952, the then Finance Minister of Ceylon (and later Sri Lankan President) J. R. Jayewardene cited a Buddhist saying: “Hatred does not cease by hatred, but only by love.” This year marked the beginning of diplomatic relations between Japan and Sri Lanka as the Sri Lankan government relinquished their right to demand reparations from Japan. One of the results of this new partnership was that Jayewardene donated one of his corneas upon his death to a Japanese recipient; this tradition continues today as many corneas are sent from Sri Lanka to recipients around the world each year. As Sri Lanka is still a developing nation, many of its citizens cannot afford glasses for their own eyesight. With this in mind, I kindly ask you to donate any unused glasses you may have - any pair will do for those who are in need. I extend my deepest gratitude for your heeding our call and responding with generous donations.

Nilmini Ikemoto

Thank you so much!

We put out a call for donations of unused glasses to our organization and the Koshien Rotary Club in order to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the Society. Many people responded and we were able to collect 416 pairs of glasses that were then given to Ms. Nilmini Ikemoto. With corporate help we will have them cleaned and repaired before being sent to the people of Sri Lanka. We are very humbled by your generosity and are glad that a few more people will experience a better quality of life as a result. Thank you very much for your contributions.

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Donated Eyeglasses! Truly Heart-Warming!

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