

A book with the title "Journey of Sri Lankans in Victoria" published by Victoria's Sinhala Cultural and Community Services Foundation was launched in May this year. It has been generously funded by The Victorian Multicultural Commission. The editorial board comprised the President of the said Association, Dr Olga Mendis, HLD Mahindapala, Dr Noel Nadesan, Jainudeen Azoor, Ms Sithy Marikkar, and Johann Jayasinha. However, the message from the editorial board clearly states that what it did was to "alter words for clarity and or comprehension". In other words, it only worked on the grammar of the material provided to it. It is clear that Dr Olga Mendis has been the de facto author of this work.

The purpose of this work has not been spelled out anywhere. This is a flaw that has cast its shadow over the whole effort because purpose determines effort and output. However, it may be reasonably expected that a book of this nature should attempt to reveal how Sri Lankans who expatriated to Melbourne have coped with their settling problems, gained access to working careers, integrated into mainstream society, raised their families, and lived their lives here. Such an account would be of enormous value to researchers and policy makers and also a guidance to prospective migrants.

The fundamental requirement is that the book should have covered an adequate number of Sri Lankans living in Victoria. A sample selection is inevitable but that should have been based on stated criteria designed to offer an authentic representation of the Sri Lankan community. The book is seriously flawed in terms of these requirements. It is estimated that there are some fifty thousand Sri Lankans in Victoria. The book contains only 200 families and the selection of the families has been dictated by arbitrary considerations. I remember announcements over one of the Sinhala community radio channels calling for those interested to give details for inclusion. Non-listeners of this channel-both Sinhalese and non-Sinhalese were, thus, not aware of the project. It is also well-known that the author had personally contacted a few people of her liking to come forward and list themselves. The methodology adopted in compiling the book has, therefore, at best been slipshod and arbitrary and at worst biased and partisan.

Omissions in the book are staggeringly vast. So many are the names of well-known, community leaders, social workers, scientists, entrepreneurs, media persons, writers, actors, artists, etc who have been omitted that a separate book of at least the same size as that which is out will have to be written to just list their achievements. Heading this list of omissions is the name of Dr Rodney Arambewela, our Hony Consul for twenty years! If you like, I will rattle off just a few of the other many big names of community leaders who are excluded in the book They are Malini Jayasinghe, Gamini Fonseka, Derrick Junki, Wimal Wimalasooriya, D.B. Kuruppu, LB Ekanayake, Mahawela, Sam Weeraratna, Prabhat Milton, Asoka Perera, Kingsley Ediriweera Marina Ediriweera, Daya Silva,

Daya Dayananda, Nimal Jayalath, Thilak Wijewardane, Mihiri Dissanayake, Swarna Upadasa Vajira & Sonia Fernando, Vipula Godamunne, Nanda and Eileen Ranatunga, Poly Weerakkody, Tony & Astrid Edirisinghe, Keerti Rajapaksa, Eric Perera, Dr D Jayasekera, Ananda Jayasinghe, Vinitha Jayasinghe, Bandula Jayasinghe, Dr. Ranjith Hettiarachchi, Dr Tilak Gunatilleka, Dr Nihal Heenetigala, Rohana Karunarathne,

details of her childhood in Sri Lanka - e.g. about winning an award in an art exhibition while in grade five. Is it great information for the reader to know how much one spent for the first plane ride or how much one's first salary in Rupees was? Or how one met one's childhood sweetheart when the latter was singing "Sweet Boy" in a bar? Surmising that the sweet boy was a reference to one's self? Or how some lady had no control



how he campaigned and won a seat in a predominantly Anglo-Celtic electorate.

Take a look at the pictures! The author or her Association activities appear several times. Not only is the Hony Consul ignored in word in the book. He is also ignored in the pictures. Even the National Day celebrations organised by him annually- arguably the most successful and pomp of all celebrations of the community- has been circumspectly ignored. Is this a case of being mean-spirited?

This, surely, is an irresponsible, sloppy, and disdainful way of handling a public project of this nature. For this, the Sinhala Cultural and Community Services foundation is to be blamed for not doing it right by the community. Secondly, it is surprising that the Victorian Multicultural Commission (VMC) should have parted with scarce resources without calling for expressions of interest from competent Sri Lankan organisations/persons, evaluating such applications, making a selection, giving objectives and guidelines for the survey, and adopting a proper monitoring procedure in order to ensure a good result and value for the taxpayers' money. There is something wrong about the way the VMC gets about its work. Is multiculturalism an excuse for profligate spending from the public purse?

MORE OUT THAN IN

the funny flop of the first book on sri lankans in melbourne

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Gamini Perera, Tissa Amarasekara, Jagath Edirisinghe, Bandu Dissanayake, Upa Upadasa, Jayasri Chandrajith, Jayampathy Unantenne, Dr Chakra Wijesundera, Dr Senaka Perera, Nimal Alwis, Nimal Ekanayake, Padmakumar Ediriweera, Professor Padmasiri Perera, and Victor Silva. There are some 160 Associations that play a prominent role in the community although only 15 have been named.

The author may, perhaps, take cover behind the argument that these persons did not respond to the radio advertisement. In that case, the author should have changed her methodology in order to get the desired outcome; or in the alternative abandon the project as unrealizable rather than come out with a misshapen product.

A well-funded project like this should have been carried out with the thoroughness that it deserved and by a representative survey team of Sri Lankan expatriates selected for the purpose. There is no indication that such a team had been handpicked.

There is no sense or uniformity in the space allocated for the different stories. For instance, while Dr Olga Mendis and her family have been allocated over six pages, Mutumudalige Violet and Sandra Ockleshaw have only three lines and Sumeda Wimalaratne has just one sentence to her credit. Furthermore, the stories predominantly relate to life and work in Sri Lanka. Dr Olga Mendis relates minute

over her binge-drinking husband? Or what transpired in one's first job interview?

One cannot blame the various contributors as the latter have not been provided any guidelines on the basis of a format. Such a format would have helped to bring out just the kind of issues we have referred to above. Take the case of our MP, Jude Perera, as an illustration: How interesting and instructive would it have been if his account revealed the remarkable tale of how he managed to get selected by the Labour Party and



Shyamon Jayasinghe

SPICE CORNER

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