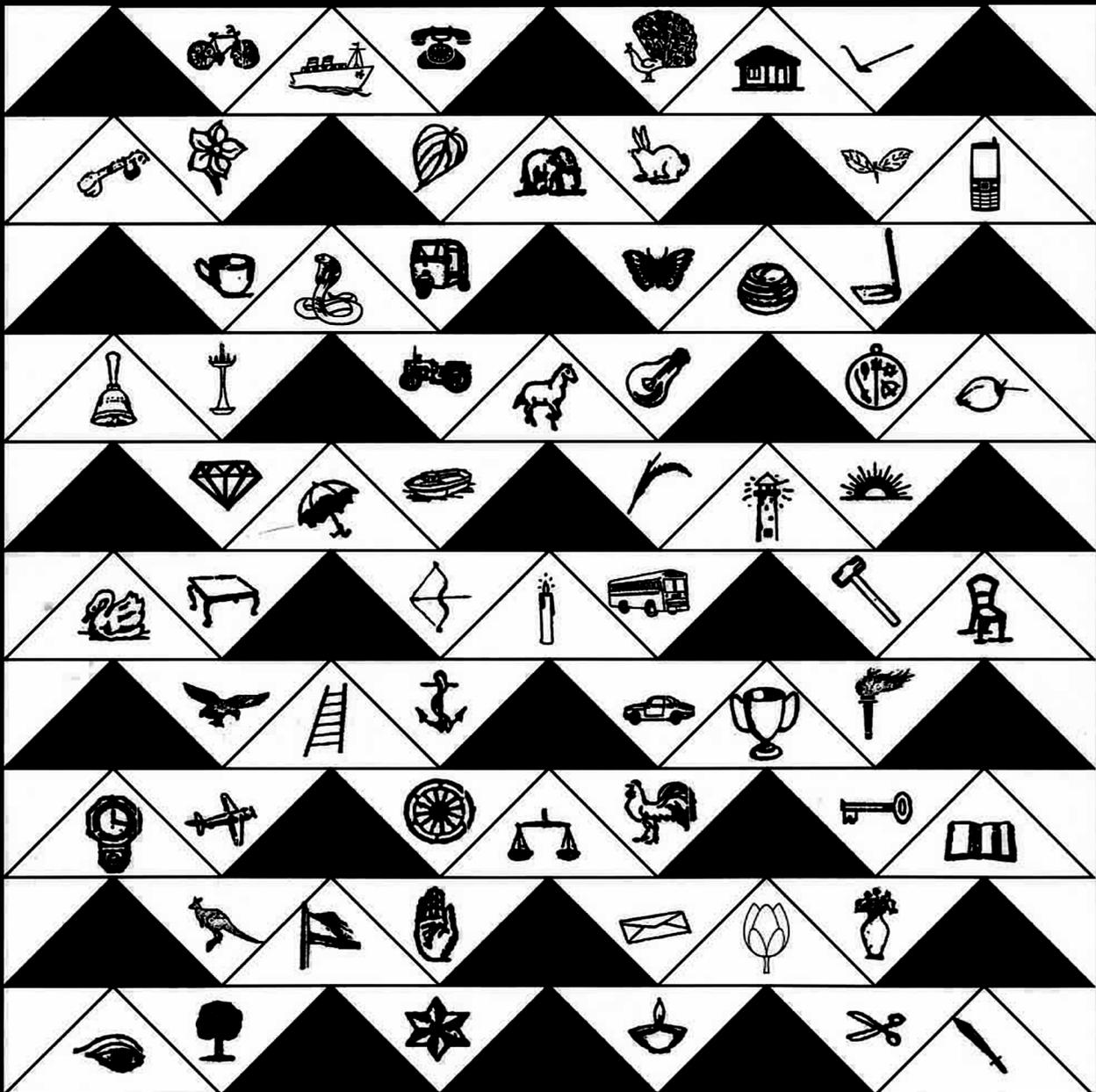




Universal Suffrage

1931-2016

From Donoughmore Commission to Election Commission





Participation in Governance

“Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives.”

“The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures.”

*United Nations Universal Declaration of
Human Rights - 1948*



Universal Suffrage

1931-2016

From Donoughmore Commission to Election Commission

Editor

Sugath Watagedara

Publication

Sri Lanka Election Commission,

Sarana Mawatha,

Rajagiriya.

Universal Suffrage

1931 - 2016

From Donoughmore Commission to Election Commission



1931-2016

Universal Suffrage in Sri Lanka
85th Anniversary Commemorative Volume

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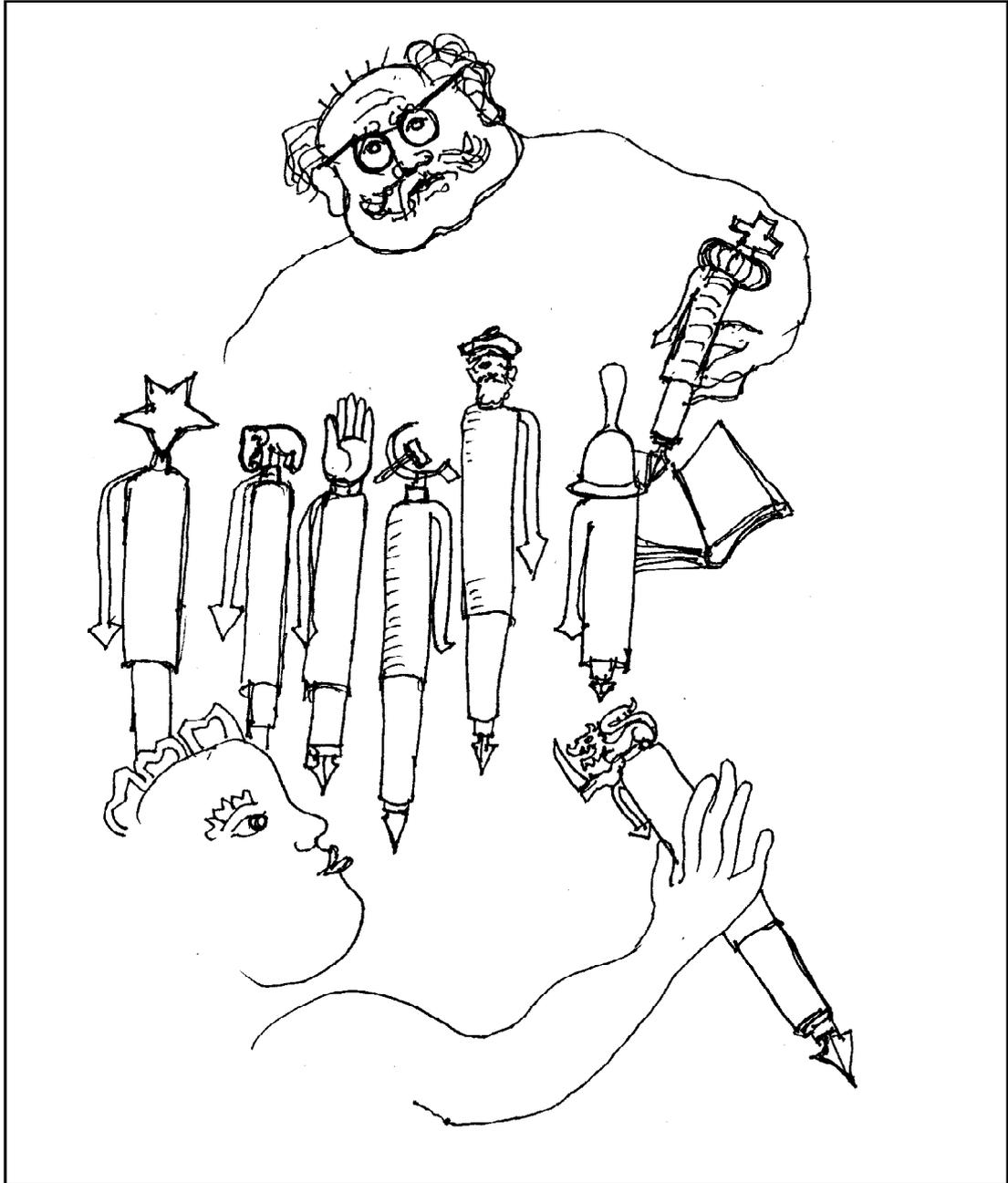
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Introduction and Preface

Introduction

The two correlated events i.e. the 85th anniversary of the introduction of universal franchise to Sri Lanka and the establishments of the Sri Lanka Election Commission fell in the two consecutive year 2016 and 2015 respectively. In commemoration of these two events the Election Commission launched the Publication of “Universal Franchise: From Donoughmore Commission to Election Commission” because it is pertinent to the Vision and Mission of the Commission. “A nation that protects universal franchise” is the Vision of the Commission and “Raise critical consciousness among all stakeholders, ensuring the protection of people’s rights and conduct free, fair and credible elections efficiently and effectively that safeguard the people’s sovereignty and universal franchise based on democratic principles” is its Mission.

In order to build a nation that protects universal franchise we all should understand its values and all stakeholders should be educated on it. Print media is one facet of this exercise. The launching of the publication “Universal Franchise: From Donoughmore Commission to Election Commission” was an occasion where academics and leaders of the public opinion were invited to one platform. The response of various social groups expressed at the launching of this volume at the Bandaranaike Memorial International Conference Hall (BMICH) on the 30th November of 2016 and thereafter, was encouraging. The credit should go to everybody who toiled to make the event a success. A special introduction like this was not made in the first print of the book. This introduction is made in the second print in taking such response into consideration.

Undauntedly this Publication will fulfill the needs of the general readership and also the academia. We have a wealth of eighty-five years experience of universal franchise. But this subject warrants more and more dialogues, debate and discussion because it is the way to accrue benefits of universal suffrage. It is a political instrument as well as a democratic path to resolve the issues of life. It is therefore necessary to be educated about it, and to practice it appropriately. This volume provides a sound foundation for the purpose. This is an advanced step towards reaching this goal.

This book is reprinted due to two primary reasons. Firstly, the first print was sold out in no time. Secondly, there was a need to eliminate some technical shortcomings in the first print and to present a more advanced version. There may be pitfalls when carrying out a task in a short period of time and such errors need to be rectified. We are happy to incorporate several new articles also in this print. It is our bounden duty to express thanks to those who immensely contributed in the process of printing the book and make it available for the reading. Our sincere thanks are due to Mr. Sugath Watagedara who edited this volume, to those who wrote articles, to Mr. S.H.Sarath who designed the graphics, to Mr. Channa P. de Silva who assisted the editing and all officers of the Election Commission, to the Government Printer and her staff to the Officers of the Parliamentary library and other librarians who supplied very rare pictures and to others who assisted though their names are not mentioned here the academia, media personal and social groups who expressed views on the first print.

Mahinda Deshapriya
Chairman
Election Commission

Preface

Among many programmes fielded this year (2016) to commemorate the 85th anniversary of the receiving universal franchise by Sri Lankans and the 1st anniversary of the establishment of the Elections commission, this publication is launched for the benefit of the general readership, researchers and all those who participate in the electoral process.

This scholarly publication “Universal Suffrage (1931-2016); from Donoughmore Commission to the Elections Commission” covers significant and historical events of modern Sri Lanka. The book also discusses not only the history, but also sociological, political and legal aspects of the subject. However, the common theme of the book is centered on the exercise of Universal Suffrage from 1931 to the present, the internal and external factors that influenced the exercise of the franchise and the social, political, economical and cultural factors which had a direct impact on it. The theme, therefore, binds the past, present and future.

The study of history conveys the wealth of human experience of the past to the man of the present and the future (Gunawardene 2005:1). Many of the human experiences mentioned here belong to the British colonial era, but their effects are evident even today. On the other hand, some residuals of caste based feudal system, which were in existence in Sri Lanka prior to the British colonial period still remain with us. Though it has been alleged that the Colebrooke–Cameron proposals 1829 were successful in replacing the caste based feudal system with capitalism, there are also counter arguments that have emerged from time to time. Britishers who were living in this country at the time were aware of the elected Parliament in the Great Britain and the role of their traditional monarchy, but they hardly attempted to import the British system here. Historically the country was not matured to absorb such system.

Universal Suffrage was granted to this country in 1931 not because of any uprising instigated internally but due to the efforts of the members of the Donoughmore Commission, who were concerned of the challenges encountered in Europe, the Great Britain being in the forefront. For Sri Lanka it was a historic coincident. According to Whitehead (1938:11) the progress of civilization is not wholly a uniform drift towards better things. It may perhaps be well understood, by a comparative study of certain events over thousands of years of history. Donoughmore proposals suddenly emerged and had lived with us, influenced our lives for a long time and continues to do so even today.

Universal Suffrage, which was granted pursuant to the proposals of the Donoughmore Commission, is an historic event which is important not in the context of that era, but also for today and for the years to come. Donoughmore proposals aimed at building a more progressive social and political environment by way of establishing democratic values in the society in place of the feudal social values existed at that time. Even today we are confronted with the same challenge. This book attempts to analyze such challenge through an historical as well as sociological perspectives.

This book belonging to the field of sociology with treatises of social science and political science should contain debatable ideas. Debate and dialogue generate new knowledge. It is controversial whether social sciences build concrete theories like natural sciences or pure sciences. That is why Giddens (1974) said that the root of the problem faced by social sciences is that they also have to follow the path of the modern analysis of nature. Broad space available for pure sciences or natural sciences to carry out guided experiments on nature is not available for social sciences.

It is not easy to control the social behaviors, which are the subject matter of social sciences. Walsh (1977) stated that natural sciences are linked with the world around us and are based on sense perceptions. History however is different. It emphasizes the past and utilizes memory impressions. History is a study about the past and the essential part of it is human existence, namely, the experiences and activities.

According to the above analysis our memory and impressions are different. Something I view is viewed by another person in a different way and described in a different manner. If so, is history subjective or objective? If it is subjective, is the reality of history relative to the person who describes it? Though this is a common problem faced in social sciences, after the Industrial Revolution, we tend to analyze social sciences too according to the premises of natural and pure sciences. Some are inclined to think that revealing the truth in several philosophical view points is helpful to reveal various profiles of the truth. Today it is a philosophical issue.

E. H. Carr (1961), a scholar in the philosophy of history has studied the issue in depth. He believed that one should read about the author, the social class and the environment he belonged to, before starting to read history. He pointed out with facts that the facts of history are flawed by the author because he selectively chose the facts and therefore the history does not remain unpolluted. Although it means that social sciences including history should be looked at with doubt, there seem to be no paradox in the oriental traditions. Kalama Sutta of Digha Nikaya (1970) is a good example in this regard which reads as follows:

”Of course, Kalamas, it is necessary to be doubtful and suspicious. You are in doubt when there is reason to suspect. Nothing should be accepted merely by hearsay or because it is inherited or because they are written in the books, or because it can be logically accepted or theoretically correct or because they look good, or because they fit in to our views or because the person who told this is a trustworthy person or is our teacher. When you know for yourselves that these qualities are unskillful; these qualities are blameworthy; these qualities are criticized by the wise; these qualities, lead to harm and to suffering when adopted and carried out,’ — then you should abandon them. When you know for yourselves that, ‘these qualities are skillful; these qualities are blameless; these qualities are praised by the wise; these qualities, when adopted and carried out, lead to welfare & to happiness’ — then you should enter and remain in them.”

Accordingly, despite the fact that there is a foundation of ethics in the criteria of truth, it should be emphasized that the principle of precision is not discarded. Candidness of its consideration can be seen through the freedom accorded by the Lord Buddha to his Disciples to ascertain whether He had attained the enlightenment. (Majjhima Nikaya 1:1970)

It is not the intention to instruct the reader how to read this book but we would like to point out that being doubtful and inquisitive, will lead to the progress of society. However, it is emphasized that doubt is not for the sake of suspicion, but for the exploration of the path to the truth (Watagedara 1994). Same is applicable in the case of this book.

If the reader realizes the interest and devotion to discover truth and the accuracy of these articles, we are content. The short descriptions in this book about the writers of its articles will make you realize that they are written by scholars who have in-depth knowledge in the subject. We admit the fact that they have written the articles truthfully and accurately depending on their sources, irrespective of their various social and political beliefs. We emphasize that the views expressed in each article of this publication are that of the respective writers and that the Election Commission or the Editor has no bearing whatsoever on them.

A word about the policy adopted in editing the articles in this publication. No change has been done with regard to the style of writing of the authors, their authography or wordings. Editing has been done safeguarding the identity of the authors and securing uniformity. Sources are given according to the choice of the authors. There may be errors due to the short period of time available to collect articles to edit and print but we believe that there had been no any effect on the contents of the articles. When the Chairman of the Elections Commission Mr. Mahinda Deshapriya told us about 4 months ago, on the need for a publication and requested to forward a plan and commence working on it, we embarked on the task after discussing the issues that would emerge and committing maximum clarity. We would not have succeeded in this endeavor if not for his encouragement.

In the circumstances, it is our prime responsibility to extend our gratitude to all those who assisted to make our dream a reality. It is true that the Department of Elections and the Election Commission pursued action continuously to create awareness among their stakeholders. And the Election Commission focusing on research undertakings of this nature through its presentation of Participatory Strategic Plan (2017-2020) is noteworthy. This kind of complex academic missions were mostly undertaken not by the Department of Elections but by external institutions in the past. They were frequently published in English and rarely in the native Sinhala and Tamil Languages. **Universal Franchise, 1931-1981 : The Sri Lankan Experience**, edited by Professor K. M. De Silva (1981) for the Golden Jubilee celebrations of Universal Suffrage in Sri Lanka is an excellent book among them. But the ordinary reader of the day has to struggle hard to find a copy of the book and at the same time since many of such articles are not published in native languages they become beyond his reach. Had these books been published in native languages, they would have been beneficial for many.

The Election Commission in its decision to publish this book in all three languages, Sinhala, Tamil and English, has gone beyond the mere implementation of the official languages policy. It reflects the recognition of the right of all to be aware of the universal suffrage, the theme of this publication, since suffrage is common to all. This is a mammoth challenge. Our heartfelt gratitude should go to Mr. Mahinda Deshapriya, Chairman of the Election Commission, Nalin Abeysekere P.C. and Professor Ratnajeevan H. Hoole, the Members of the Elections Commission; Mr. U. Amaradasa, Director General of Elections, Mr. H.M.T.D. Herath, Secretary of the Election Commission, all other staff of the Election Commission, who in unison strived to overcome the huge challenges involved and to Mr. Channa P. de Silva, Director (Research and Planning) of the Elections Commission and Assistant Editor who together with his staff of the Research and Planning Division, coordinated and facilitated this endeavour in order to make it a success.

The spirit of this work is encapsulated in the impartial endeavor of scholarly writers who submitted articles for this monumental publication. We feel honored to mention here that it is the vast experience they possess in the research field and their indefatigable commitment which made it possible for them to submit their articles within a very short time and we wish to say a big thank you to the writers and to the translators and computer typesetters. Our gratitude is also due to all those persons and institutions which are not mentioned here by name, but contributed in numerous ways to make this a success.

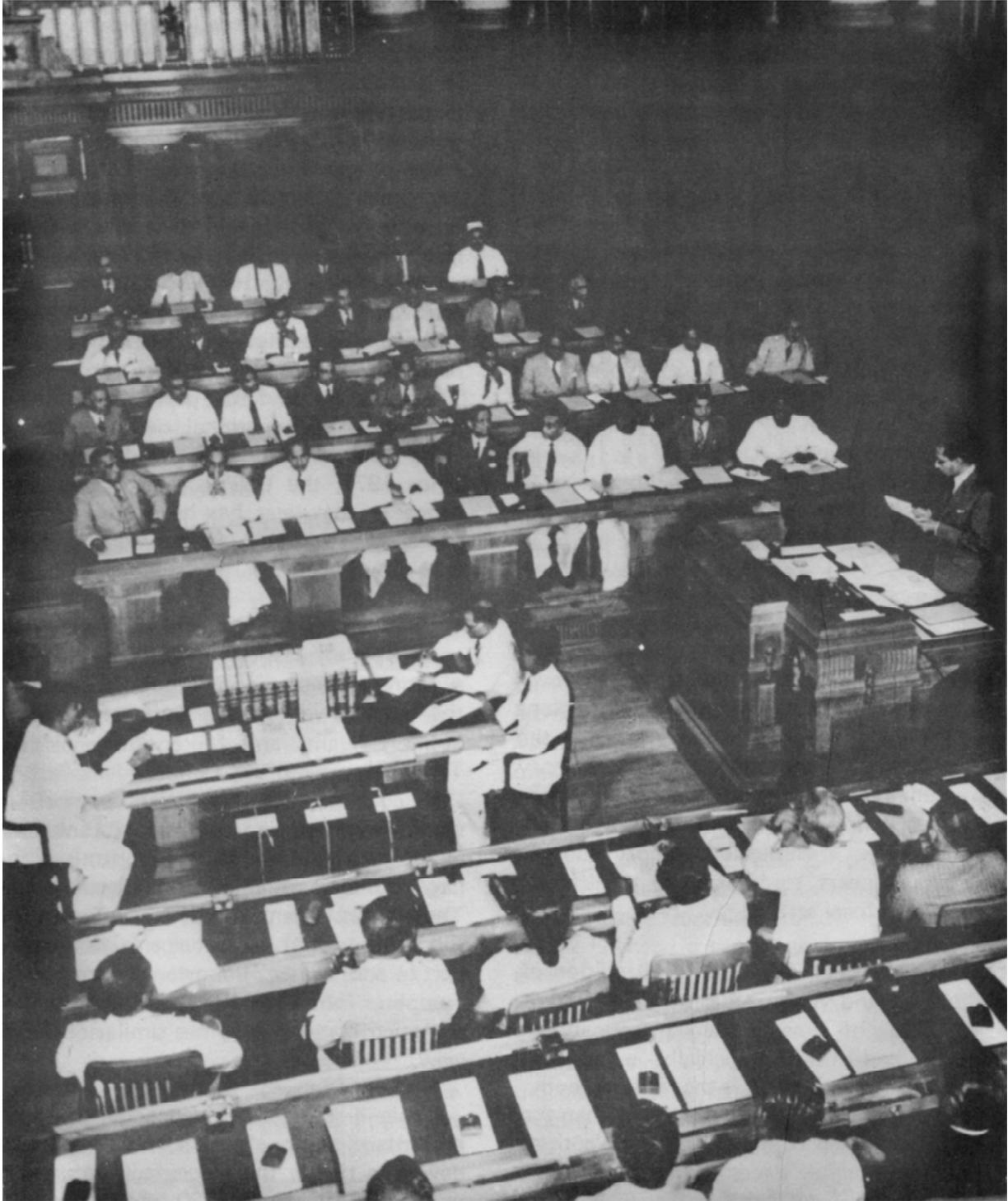
The invaluable service rendered by veteran artist Mr. S. H. Sarath to enhance the outlook of this publication with his excellent Illustrations and drawings should also be noted with appreciation. It is an historical tribute to Mr. S. H Sarath, who was invited to design the drawings for the book published in 1981 to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Universal Suffrage in Sri Lanka, has once again been chosen to design the drawings in this publication launched to mark the 85th anniversary of universal franchise. We wish to thank Mrs. Gangani Liyanage, Government Printer and her staff for the excellent printing work done within a very short period of time. Also, we must be thankful to the Secretary General of Parliament of Sri Lanka, the Department of National Archives, Department of Government Information, Associated Newspapers of Ceylon Limited, Sri Lanka Rupavahini Corporation for their assistance in obtaining necessary photographs and information for this publication, to the staff of all libraries who provided necessary material and, especially to all ladies and gentlemen of the Election Commission and to all persons and institutions, who have not been mentioned by their names here but contributed in many ways.

Finally, we wish to make a humble request to the readers of this book to kindly submit to us their views and suggestions about this academic publication. We earnestly believe that your views and suggestions would be of immense support in our journey forward.

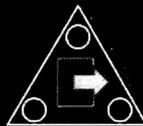
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Editor



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