

CHANGING WITH THE TIMES

Soaking the ambience

In 2014 the chronicler copied group photographs from the web which are photos of framed pictures on the club walls. Sometimes framed pictures were photographed directly. They help to consolidate the past in order to link it to the present.

The only person known to the chronicler from his playing days is Trevor Rajaratnam who is an office bearer. But the Colts is no longer a predominantly anglicised environment. In this sense it reflects the changes that Colombo and Sri Lanka has undergone.

Social evolution

Over 141 years the Colts has evolved socially. From being a predominantly Burgher monolingual club at its inception it gradually turned into a multiracial monolingual club and remained so until Sri Lanka gained independence. Then it gradually became a bilingual club where most of its members thought in English. Now it is a bilingual club where, presumably, the majority think in Sinhalese and Tamil. Culturally, the club today is vastly different to what it was in the 1800s. A predominantly anglicised club has been transformed into a club which is more representative of Colombo, if not Sri Lanka, as a whole. It has always been inclusive, but more so today.

The Colts has always been a multi-ethnic club where cricket and the general camaraderie overrode ethnic and linguistic differences. Today it has reached the pinnacle of that ideal. In addition, cricket at the Colts is now a game for both sexes.

New found glory

In the past, ex Wesleyans, Josephians and Peterites filled the ranks of the club, with the addition of a few Royalists and Thomians. The chronicler does not know enough of the club to be able to speak of the sources of its current cricketers. What is uncontested is that any young cricketer, from any school, will feel at home at the Colts. More importantly, whereas in the past the best school cricketers ignored the Colts in favour of the SSC and NCC, in recent times the Colts have enjoyed a larger bite of the cherry.

But there is commonality between what the players of the 1800s were and what they have been for the past quarter century, in terms of the glory they have brought to the club and their reputation as competitive cricketers. And just as much as religion never played a significant role in the 1880s it doesn't so now. Good cricket and a passion for it is what matters most.

The legends would be proud

If the likes of Alan Raffel, Tommy Kelaart and A.C. Van Geyzel were to return they probably would not feel at home initially. But they would no doubt be pleased with the quality of the cricket played by its members and the facilities available. In fact, many of those who played for the club from the fifties onwards would probably feel envious when they ponder as to how much better cricketers they would have been if they had access to the facilities available today.

A Colts state of mind

The chronicler never thought that he would ever enthuse about the Colts again. In 1980-81 when he was Sri Lanka for two years, he felt strangely dissociated from the club. But now his Colts fervour has been reignited by the changes the club has undergone. He feels that today he could be more of an active Colt than he could have been forty years ago. The old crowd is no more but the better facilities and the new sense of purpose and direction would make him feel comfortable and driven.

Interestingly the early achievements of the club are in a sense the story of *belle époque* Colombo. From 1890 to 1910 the Colts were at their strongest. By some strange coincidence the next best era in Colts cricket occurred between 1990 and 2010. And the latter achievement is all the more creditable considering the competition.

Although fifty years ago the chronicler ceased being an active Colt, despite subsequently acquiring a myriad of interests and passions, and despite there being other sources of Sri Lankan nostalgia for him, from the Royal-Thomian to his two years in rural Sri Lanka conducting anthropological research, he still lives in a Colts state of mind. In other words, he has never stopped feeling special because of his Colts identity.

The chronicler feels privileged to have been associated with a club with a unique place in Sri Lankan cricket history. Hence, the surprise he felt, and then the immense surge of pride which overcame him, on his first glimpse of the club in March 2014. He realised that the Colts has always been in his soul, because he never felt the same visiting the Oval, the scene of his most famous achievement, or visiting his old school.

Mirroring the new Colombo

The chronicler's first impression of Colombo in 2014 was how modernised it had become. This is reflected not only in the clean and tidy take away/eat in cafes but by the services advertised (fashion, furniture, bathroom fittings, clothes, sports gear etc). Apart from government buildings the shop signs are mainly in English. Even Sinhalese translations keep the English pronunciation (e.g. The Gift House).

There is a great emphasis on service and clothes. Ties are *de rigueur* for the taxi drivers who man Kangaroo cabs. The checkout ladies at the Cargills outlets are dressed smarter than their counterparts at Woolworths or Coles.

Yet, surface appearances are deceptive. While women in Colombo look chic in the western sense, they speak Sinhalese. Colombo is now a Sinhalese speaking city. While forty years English was the predominant mode of communication even at *thosai* cafes, today the patrons at Maccas are Sinhalese speaking.

But in order to survive the Colts couldn't rely on the old crowd with their wit and humour but no business acumen and visionary foresight. Its composition had to reflect the changes taking place in the broader society and its leadership handed over to people raised in the new cultural milieu and who have the contacts and the organisational ability required to negotiate all hurdles and overcome all challenges.

Modern day Colts heroes

The Colts finally began to win competitions on a regular basis from the nineties onwards. A change in fortunes has paralleled a socio-economic change in the club. Management and players are now bi-lingual, and they have reversed the club's fortunes by bringing in business acumen, talent and above all – achieving success on the field. The majority community have inherited the legacy of a minority community and restored the club's reputation to what it was when the club and its cricket team was ethnically less diverse. In this way the club has achieved interracial unity and obtained the strength and vitality to ensure that a unique legacy will endure and prosper. To those who guided the club through the lean times and ensured its success when the tide turned, and to all those on the Colts hall of fame, the chronicler says a big thank you to them for enabling people like him to flaunt their Colts affiliation.