Scientists

Arthur C Clarke – Great Contributor to Global Communication

Arthur C Clarke, as we all know, is a scientist who made scientific predictions which have become true affecting the whole world. This world famous science fiction writer selected Sri Lanka to spend his latter half of his life as a honorary citizen. Because of him, Sri Lanka got a world-wide publicity. He celebrated his 88th birthday recently in Colombo. This article briefly reviews retrospective of his journey through his life.

Arthur C Clarke was born to a farm family on December 16th Sunday 1917 at Mindhead, a little hamlet at Summerset in England. His father was Charles Wright Clarke, and the mother was Nora Mary Wills. Clarke was born at his grand mother's house. At the time of his birth his father was in action at battlefield in France.

Little Arthur received his early education Huisis Grammer School in Mindhead. While at school, often he used to read science fictions. Later he wrote articles to school science magazines. The teacher highly valued his articles and gave sweets to encourage small Arthur. To-day, Arthur C Clarke mentions these stories with gratitude. His father faced untimely death when Clarke was just thirteen. The untimely death of his father left Clarke very lonely and helpless. Therefore, he spent most of his time observing sea and night sky. At the age of seventeen Clarke observed the sky using a telescope made by him.

Clarke's father had served as an engineer in the Postal Department before the Second World War. As a result, Clarke got a job to be a minor employee in the same department. It was his first job. One day during the night duty he watched how telex messages were received. As a result, his attention was drawn to this method of communication. The end result of this attention was that Clarke became the father of communication. At the age of 17, he created the communication method with a beam of light and that was written in golden letters in his life. One specialty of this invention was that, using a light beam, to transmit signals ultimately converted to sound at the receiving end.

Clarke's mind was strongly drawn to the "Atomic Energy and Rocket Technology" that was begun at the beginning of World War II. Out of the two, his attention was drawn especially to rocket technology. In 1934, Clarke was busy with rocket design and he carried out experiments with one of his friends Jim Aulborough at his mother's farm. At that time Clarke was nicknamed as 'Scientific Sid', and even today whenever he presents a book to his colleagues he signs as 'Sid'.

Clarke joined The British Civil Service in 1936 and served until 1941. During 1941 to 1945 Clarke served in British Royal Air Force as a Technical Engineer. There he was involved in radar experiments.

He saw that the very rocket technology invented to destroy man could be used for the benefit of man. While he was employed as an Air Force Officer, he carried out experiments involved with rocket and satellite technology. There he was able to develop a sound foundation for the use of satellite technology for communication. His concept was published in 'Wireless World' a leading journal in Electronics in 1945 October issue, and this concept was made known to the public.

After Second World War, Clarke studied in Kings College in London University and obtained a Degree in Bachelor of science with a first class honors in 1948. Thereafter, he joined the British Interplanetary Society, and carried out further investigations. He served as the President of the Inter Planetary Society from 1947 to 1950 and then again in 1953. To day he is a member of both British and American Interplanetary Societies.

Arthur C Clarke is recognized today as the foremost scientific fiction writer. He started his writing career in 1949-50, solely as a way of earning some money. Many of the prediction in his books came true. At the age of 35 (1952) Arthur C Clarke won the International Fantasy Award for fiction writing. This encouraged him to write more books on the subject. 'Childhood End' was written in 1953. Two of his predictions made in this book have come true. That is by analyzing DNA in the cells could give scientific evidence for identification of unknowns. The second prediction leads to the discovery of Birth Control Pill. Since 1956, in every International Science Fiction Writers Conference, Clarke's creations were appreciated. In 1960, The International Academy of Space Travelers admitted him as an honorary member. In 1962, Clarke won The

Kalinga Award; the highest award that could be won by a writer.

The first visit to Sri Lanka by Arthur C Clarke was by accident. In 1954 December he was traveling to Australia to take part in a diving programme. The ship was anchored in Colombo for four hours. After visiting Colombo city, his mind was strongly attracted to its beauty. In 1956, he again came to Sri Lanka, and visited ancient places such as Sigiriya, Polonnaruwa, Anuradhapura and Adam's Peak. Later he traveled to South West sea coast, places like Unawatuna, Ravana Great Base and other similar places. After this experience he decided to adopt Sri Lanka as his place of abode. It was a great honour to Sri Lanka by the announcement of a world famous science author of his decision. In return he enjoys a great satisfaction of living in one of the most beautiful islands of the world, and getting respect of its people. In 1957, the Government of Sri Lanka offered him the 'Resident Guest' award of honorary citizenship.

Arthur C Clarke has written around 100 science fictions. Out of them "2001: A Space Odyssey", "2010: Odyssey Two", "2061: Odyssey Three" and "3001" have been translated into Sinhala. Highly popular Science Fiction Films from books of 2001, 2010 based Space Odyssey one and two were produced.

Even though, Arthur C Clarke today lives as a bachelor, he was married in 1953 to Harylin Mayfield, and was divorced in 1964.

In 1962 February while in a shopping spree in Colombo, accidentally his head was hit hard against a low lying door way. As a result, his physical health was seriously affected and to day he uses a wheel chair for his indoor activities of daily work.

Clarke involved not only in scientific matters, but also artistic activities. He had great liking to watch traditional country dancing and fire walking. Together with some Sri Lankan scientists like Carlo Fonseka, Clarke was involved in scientific investigations on the religious ceremony of fire walking. The first colour film produced in Sri Lanka was "Ran Muthu Dûwa" (The Pearl Island), and producers were Clarke, Wilson and Johnclas. In 1978, he acted as an English Judge in the film "Beddegama" (Village in the Jungle) produced by Lester James Pieris, and thereby becoming an actor. He has written a number of scripts for Radio and Television programmes. Out of them "Mysterious World of Arthur C Clarke" and Arthur C Clarke's "World of Strange Powers" produced by Yorkshire Television in England became very popular.

For the wellbeing of Sri Lanka, Arthur C Clarke has predicted a number of prophesies. In 1995 he called that cricket is a game that wastes time, the time such spends for watching cricket in most inactive time spend by a man. In his book "Deep Range", Clarke has stated that by 2050, the only religion that blossoms man's mind in Buddhism. He advised the Government that Sri Lanka's time should be advance by ½ an hour, but it was implemented in 1995.

Arthur C Clarke has received a number of awards and honours from a number of institutes in Sri Lanka. He was the Chancellor for Moratuwa University from 1979 to 2002, almost for two decades.

He was the Chancellor of International Space Academy from 1989 to 2002. In 1989 he received 'CBE' an award made by the Queen of Great Britain. In 1986 he received "Vidya Jyoti" award offered by the President of Sri Lanka. Accordingly, titles "Sir" and "Vidya Jyoti" are used in front of his name.

For his scientific hypothesis made in 1945 that world can be a communication village using an Earth Stationary Satellite System, he received a cash prize of US$ 50,000. He donated the entire prize money for the establishment of Arthur C Clarke Centre at Moratuwa. This institute is a magnificent gift given to Sri Lanka by him. The institute to day functions under Ministry of Science and Technology, in developing Electronic communication Information Technology and transfers knowledge on astronomy related technologies. In 1996, Japan gifted Sri Lanka a 45 cm computer operated Cassergrain type telescope and it was installed at Arthur C Clarke Centre at Moratuwa.

Arthur C Clarke has received various awards from the world at large for the services he has rendered. In 1992, February 2nd two first covers with two stamps were issued for the service he rendered in world communication for fifty years. That day Arthur Clarke mentioned recalling his past that "We all are a postal family. I first worked in Bishop Lydeared Post Office. These days I never dreamt of anything like this". In October 2005 Arthur C Clarke Centre in Moratuwa held a well attended Science Exhibition commemorating 60 years service for the Communication Concept. During that year he was awarded the highest Presidential Award 'Sri Lankabhimanya". All Sri Lankans wish Arthur C Clarke a long life to continue his services to the world.

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