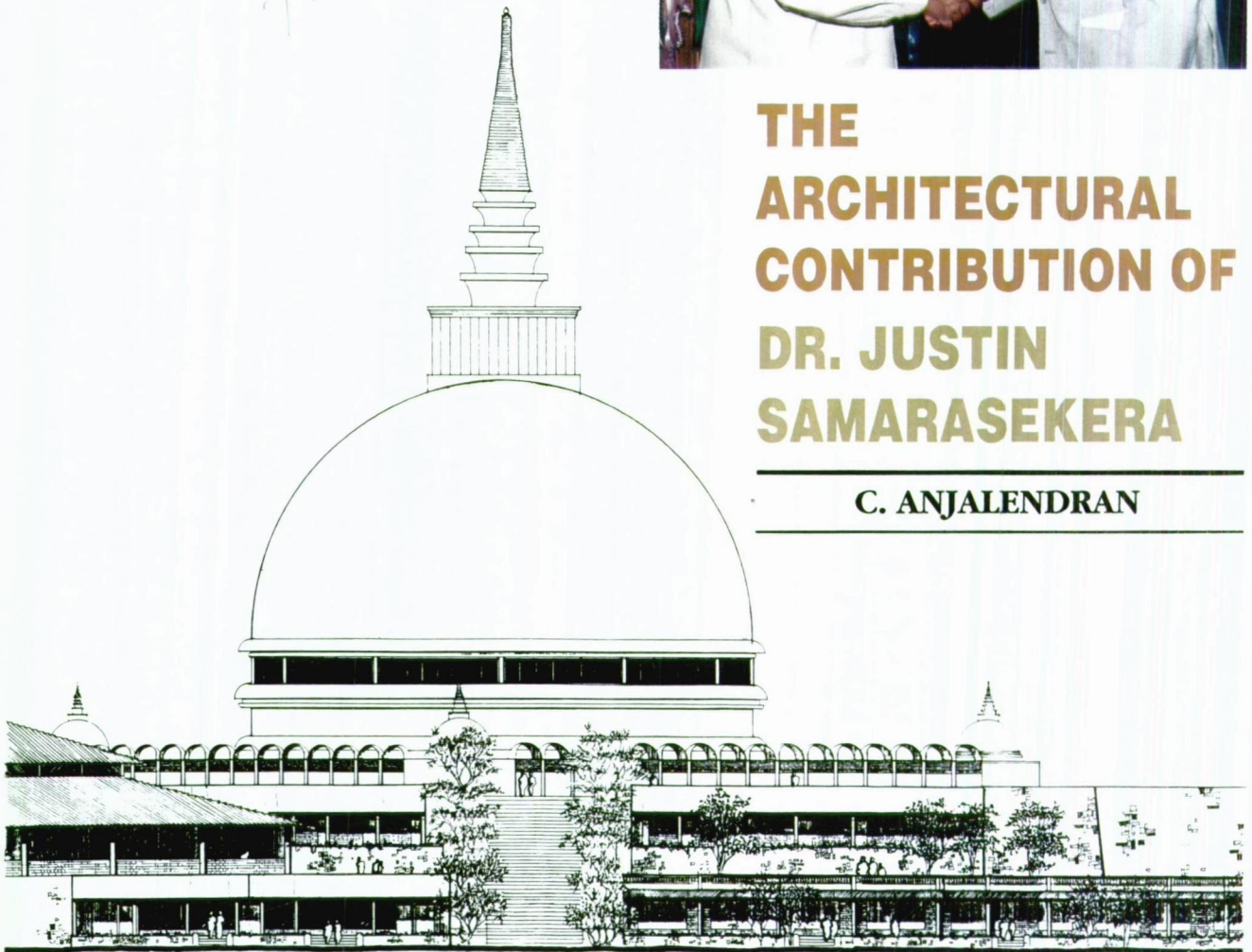


Dr. Justin Samarasekera  
with Minister  
Nimal Siripala de Silva



## THE ARCHITECTURAL CONTRIBUTION OF DR. JUSTIN SAMARASEKERA

C. ANJALENDRAN



Justin Samarasekera was one of the pioneers of the profession of architecture in Sri Lanka, being one of the founder members of the Sri Lanka Institute of Architects. He was also instrumental in providing the ground work for the eventual establishment of the Faculty of Architecture, and has been tireless in his efforts in the cause of improving architectural education in Sri Lanka. Dr. Samarasekera's reminiscences of the foundation of the institute and on architectural education may be found in the Ceylon Institute of Architects Journal 1965-66, and the SLIA Silver Jubilee issue of 1982. For this work in the promotion of the profession of architecture and architectural education, he was made an Honorary Fellow of the SLIA in 1982 and received the SLIA Gold Medal, its highest honour in 1996.

His contributions to the profession and the field of architectural education are well described by the late Architect Gemunu Fernando in his citation for Honorary Fellowship. In further recognition of his services to architectural education, in 1982 the University of Moratuwa conferred on him the D.Sc. (Hon.Causa).

In the face of all the recognition given to Dr. Samarasekera through these awards and publications, none indicate in any specific detail, his architectural contribution, rather than his contribution to architecture. What seems to have been forgotten is that Justin Samarasekera established and headed one of the earliest home-grown architectural practices which was the training ground for many of the senior architects in Sri Lanka.

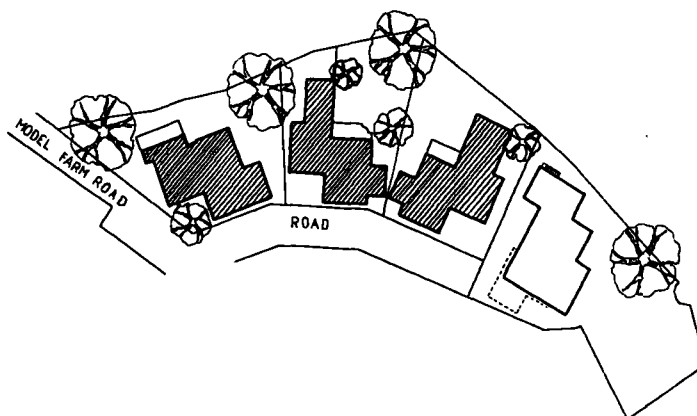
Briefly, Justin Samarasekera completed his architectural education at the JJ School of Art, Bombay in 1943. Having joined the PWD in 1946, he became its chief architect in 1956. In 1963 he established the practice of Justin Samarasekera Associates.

During his long architectural career spanning half a century, Justin Samarasekera has been a self-proclaimed modernist, following the 'International Style'. He has in that time built a variety of buildings, such as neighbourhood housing, low-rise apartments, exhibition pavilions, libraries, markets and so on. All these have been designed with great conceptual foresight, and serve their purpose amiably even today, and hence merit comment and celebration.

In 1956, Justin Samarasekera with three colleagues bought approximately 120 perches at the edge of the old city limits, bordering the cemetery and the Golf Links which ensured an air Lung despite future urban sprawl. There he designed one of the first 'neighbourhoods' of four houses. Three of them were built, with annexes on the upper floors. All are served by generous accessway, and have gardens overlooked by verandas. Justin Samarasekera himself resided in one of these until 1995.

More recently, in 1992, at Issipathana Mawatha he built 3 flats and on the uppermost fourth floor level a one-bed roomed penthouse for himself with superb views of the surrounding tree tops. The power for the electronically controlled front door, and for the main lights in the penthouse are provided by solar panels. Since all these flats are less than 2000 sq.ft. each, maximum tax-benefits were possible.

(Exterior photo India Pavilion; Exterior photo and interior sketch Paper Corporation Pavilion available) In 1965, the race course premises which had become vacant when gambling was made illegal, became the venue for the International Industrial Exhibition. Justin

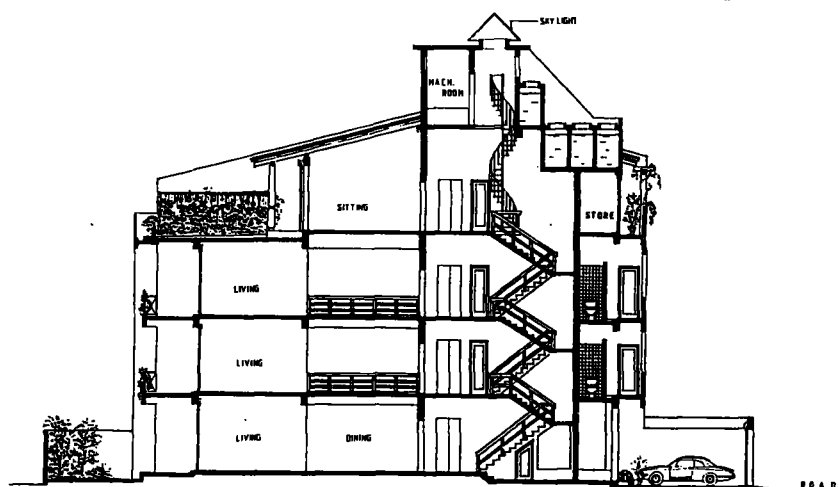


Samarasekera Associates notably designed the stalls for the India Pavilion and the Ceylon Paper Corporation Pavilion. Assistance for these were provided by the young architectural diploma graduates from the College of Technology at Katubedda which Justin Samarasekera was instrumental in establishing in 1961.

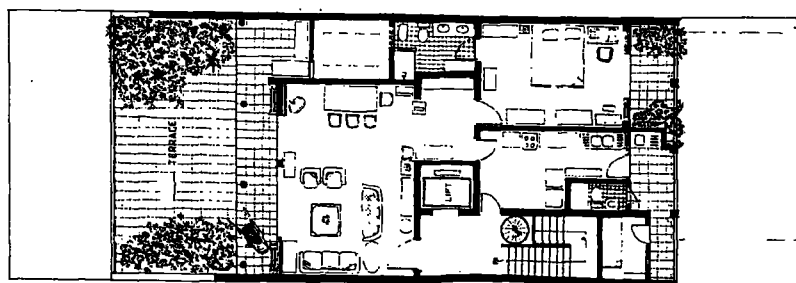
The India Pavilion, assisted by S. Kulasinghe, was an unusual structure made of a series of inverted plywood pyramidal umbrellas. The Pavilion of the Ceylon Paper Corporation, assisted by Anura Ratnavibushana, seemed to have been conceived as a modern

'Vesak' lantern. It was essentially a rectilinear frame structure infilled with frosted glass, and painted panels by Ismeth Raheem, that were illuminated from within. The strict geometry was counterpointed by the sinuous vesak lanterns that were hung inside.

(Interior perspective sketch available) In 1973, assisted by Lochana Gunaratne, Justin Samarasekera designed the Library for the present University of Kelaniya to accommodate 120,000 books. This is a smart and stately two storey building with a basement, with two central lightwell courtyards on either side of the entrance link, covered by an exposed roof-truss with northlights. With a



Section Through Staircase



Third Floor



seating capacity of 600, it presently serves a student body of more than 3000, and only just inadequate prior to the main examinations.

(Interior photo) – (necessary)

In 1976, in time for the non-aligned conference, a new market was designed for Kollupitiya to replace the old one which was derelict. It is a contemporary built up POLA or traditional market accommodating 68 stalls and 80 parking bays. With staggered floors separated by a light courtyard which encourages shopper interaction. Designed for easy maintenance and free of smells, it is still a pleasant shopping experience. For this project Justin Samarasekera was assisted by Mihindu Keerthiratne.

Built on a podium on the edge of the river the Bodhi Chaitiya in Kalutara was completed in 1965. (Elevation available) The 158 ft. high DAGABO or reliquary is built of a 9" RCC shell enclosing within it a four storey shrine. In 1969, Justin Samarasekera Associates designed and built one of the first Industrial Estates in Achuvelli in Jaffna (Exterior Site sketch available) In 1979 Justin Samarasekera designed the Physics and Chemistry buildings for the University of Colombo in a modern idiom to blend with the surrounding buildings of the

late British period. In addition to these Justin Samarasekera Associates designed SLFP Party Headquarters in 1970 (exterior perspective available), and completed the CWE building in 1981.

The main buildings of the Sri Pada college of education which began in 1982, shows a radical departure from

earlier held views of strict modernism in the extensive use of the vernacular. The first phase was completed in 1989 with the assistance of his daughter Nela de Soysa, and the project is still expanding.

Furthermore, of more than a dozen hotels done by JSA two are noteworthy. The 100 roomed Wornel's Reef in Beruwela, completed in 1974 has a sea view from every room. At the 60 roomed Yala Safari, completed in 1976, the building sited between sea and lagoon, uses rustic material to blend with the surrounding scrub jungle.

Justin Samarasekera's main contribution to architectural history is the vast and enumerative detailed sections on Architecture and Town Planning for the periods of 1935-56 & 1956-78 for the updating of the Mahavamsa. Unfortunately this has only been published in Sinhalese to date.

Among his presentations, perhaps the most charming and informative is his tribute to



*Indian pavilion Industrial Exhibition 1965*



*Paper mills Corporation Stall Industrial Exhibition 1965  
Facade divided to four with large mural, entrance & glazing.*

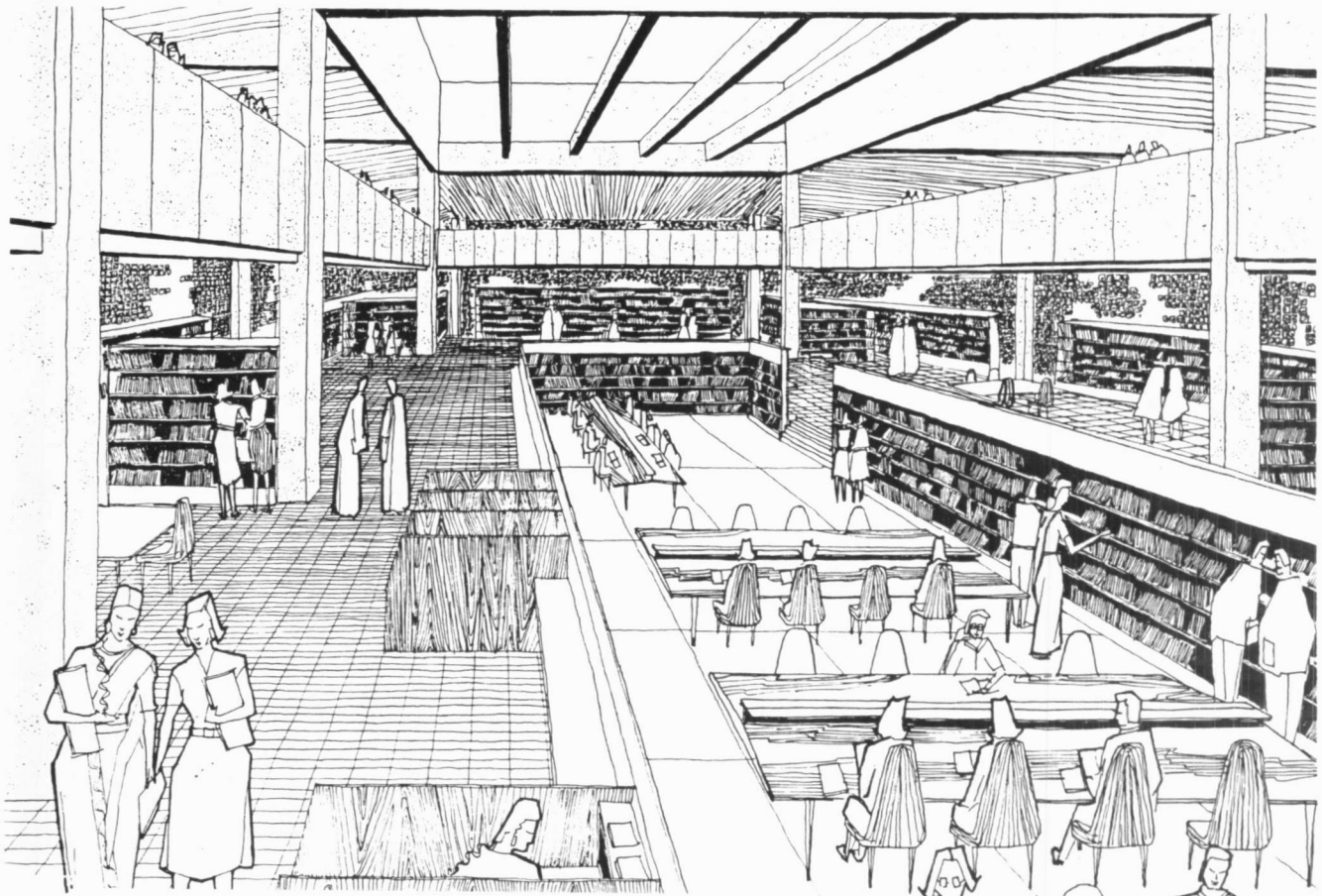
fellow mentor, colleague and friend Homi Billimoria who was also the chief architect at the

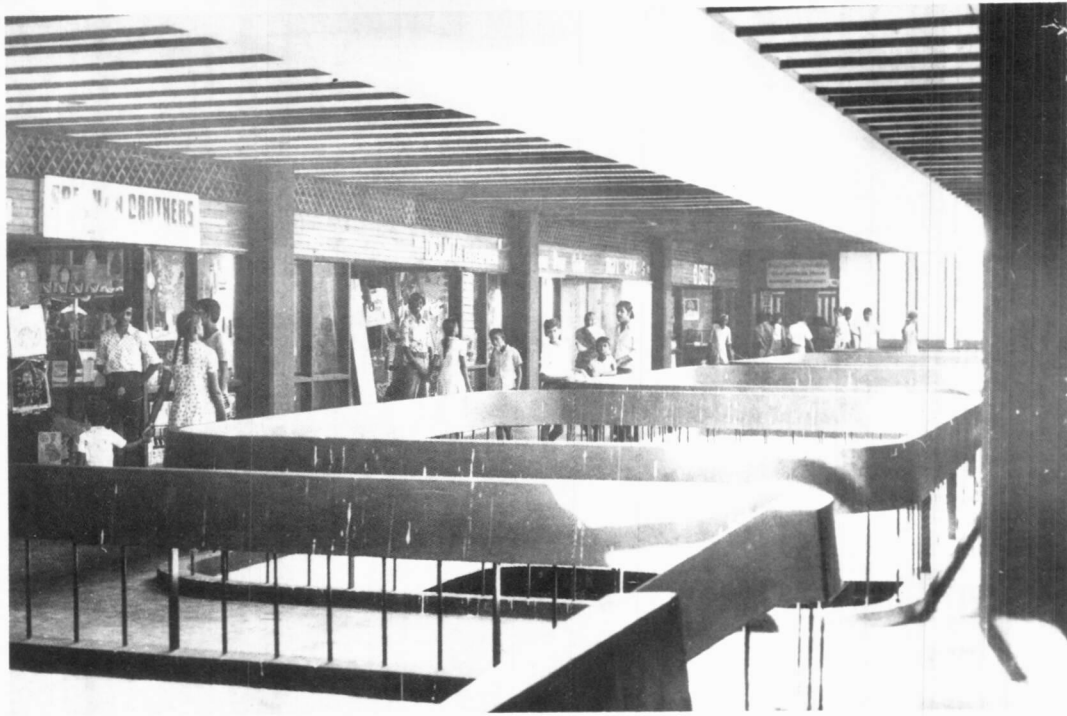
PWD and the first Professor of Architecture. "The Homi Billimoria Commemoration

Lecture" was presented to the University of Moratuwa in March 1988, and is also published here.

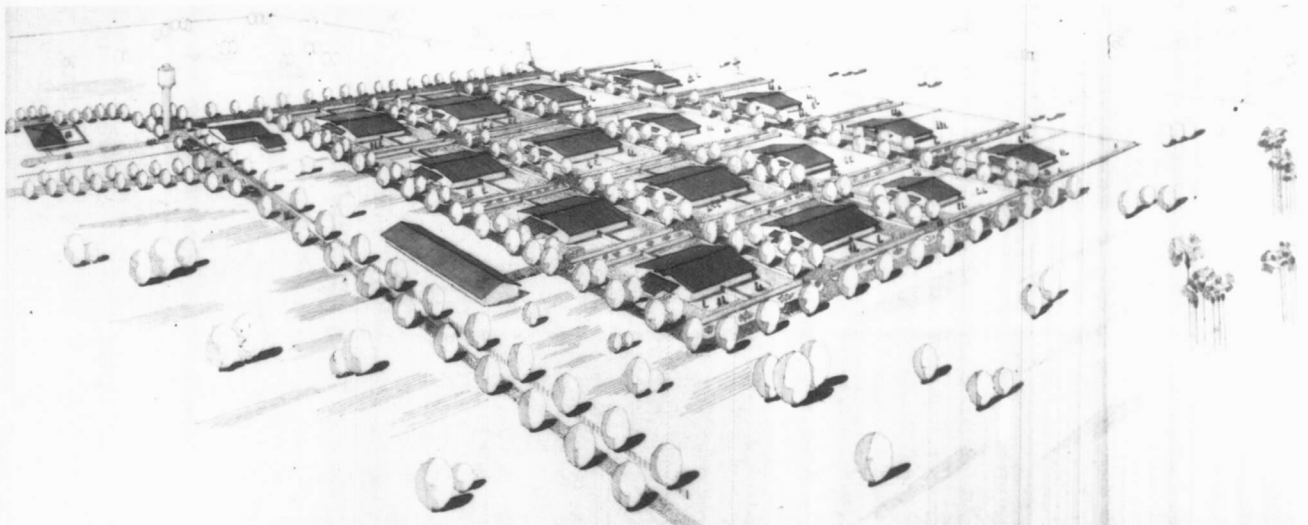
Justin Samarasekera's concern for a green architecture may be found in his presentation of "A present day Chinese Village eco system" to the Fellow Academy of Science in May 1989. His interest with cultural links with Sri Lanka may be found in his address to the Royal Asiatic Society in March 1993 on the "Person Connection to our Heritage".

His personal overview of world architectural history and its relationship to Sri Lanka has been presented along many themes such as 'Aesthetics in Civil Engineering, Nervi-the Creative Artist', 'Innovation is the mainspring of all creative genius', 'The Architect and Community', 'The Architect in National Development' for various institutional sessions and international forums in Sri Lanka, such as ARCASIA.





*Kollupitiya super market, Trade stall either side of the light well connected by stairs and landings.*



*Industrial estate Jaffna 1970 Providing Infrastructure for new business opportunities*

His address 'Building a new to preserve and venerate the past: the cities of Anuradapura and Pollonaruwa' at the Third International Congress for Architectural Conservation and Town Planning in 1987 has been published by the Heritage Trust of London.

Justin Samarasekera's Main contribution to architecture has been through the sustenance of a practice, which has for

a long time nurtured a younger generations of architects and provided them the grounds for their own experimentation. His long held modernist beliefs allowed the practice to maintain a consistence that provided the essential background to this experimentation.

To this day Dr Samarasekera is active in all respects, being the current Chairman of the Board of Management of the SLIA school of architecture. He has

even taken up new hobbies in the last few years. Recently, he held a one-man exhibition in his most current medium of expression, painting, and titled "Impressions of an Octogenarian". Justin Samarasekera epitomises Donne's famous quotation, "to live each day as if it were ones last; never apathetic; never flustered, never attitudedizing, here's perfection of character".