

Archaeology, a Calling: Professor Sudharshan Seneviratne

K.L.F. Wijedasa

Professor Sudharshan Seneviratne, who passed away on January 17, was a renaissance man. As a student in the Primary School of Ananda College, Sudharshan played the lead role of the Prince in the play “Mal Kumari” staged in 1959. I came to know Sudharshan when he joined the Senior Prep Form. On the first day of the class that I was teaching, I inquired from every student what they intend to do after their school careers. When it came to Sudharshan’s turn, he confidently said that he intended to study archaeology.

I was surprised to get such an answer from a boy that young, and when I questioned him, he said that he had already read the *Mahavamsa* and the *Deepawamsa*. When I mentioned this to his elder brother, later Professor Harsha Seneviratne, the Gynaecologist, he told me that when Sudharshan was in the Middle School, he had gone to the G. A. Perera Second-hand bookshop and bought the book *Indian Archaeology* by Mortimer Wheeler, the famous archaeologist.

I recall telling Harsha(lal), his brother, that it must be a “Sasara Purudda” and suggested to him that Sudharshan should go to another teacher, Nimal Abeywardena, brush up his Maths and get through the GCE O. Level exam first. Later in his school career, he was the Head Prefect and the first captain of Rugger at Ananda. In 1969, his final year, he was awarded the Fritz Kunz Prize for ‘the best citizen produced by Ananda’. Sudharshan was a thoroughbred, illustrious Anandian.

At the end of his school career, he proceeded to India for higher studies. He graduated from Hindu College in Delhi University and did his doctorate in archaeology at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, under Professor Romila Thapar. Professor



Ancient Lanka: Volume 4 (2025)

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Thapar considered Sudharshan one of her best students and they shared a long friendship throughout his life.

After his Indian sojourn he came and saw me and wanted to get an academic appointment at a University. I directed him to Professor Sirima Kiribamune of the University of Peradeniya and he was readily offered a post as Lecturer. Later Prof Kiribamune told me that Sudharshan is a wonderful person and a true professional. At Peradeniya he worked with the students very closely and they, in turn, responded to his academic and personal guidance. He accompanied the students on many field trips and excavations throughout the country. I know that one, along the Malwathu Oya from Anuradhapura to Manthota was a very exciting experience for the students. But the privations on these trips may have affected Sudharshan's health.

He played a leading role in the Jethavanaramaya and Abhayagiriya restoration in Anuradhapura. He was also instrumental in establishing the Museum at Sigiriya and the Maritime Museum in Galle Fort. The Bataleeya crafts centre was his brainchild – an incentive to traditional craftsmen to earn a living as well as improve their skills, whilst being a unique tourist attraction.

He was appointed as Sri Lanka's High Commissioner in India in July 2014 and did much to enhance and broaden the relationship with India through his many friends and ex-colleagues there. It was a relatively short assignment of approximately one year. Later, from December 2020, he was Sri Lanka's High Commissioner in Bangladesh where he worked very effectively to expand and strengthen relationships between the two countries. He was an admirer of Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore and was aware of my interest in Tagore, Rabindra Sangeeth and Bengali literature. On his return from Bangladesh in mid-2023, he gifted me with a clay wall plaque of Gurudev Tagore and a table runner and table mats depicting folk art of Bangladesh.

On his return Sudharshan was appointed Executive Director General in September 2023 to head the Secretariat of the Indian Ocean Rim Association based in Colombo. Unfortunately he became unwell and passed away a few months later. Sudharshan's wife, Harsha, was much more than a help-mate and a soul-mate. She was an integral part of Sudarshan's interactions with his students too, often joining field trips. Harsha also dedicated herself to caring for her husband's many medical needs, enabling him to lead an active, productive and fulfilling life. There was a very close and special bond with their daughter, Shavera, too. Sudharshan was her hero cum role model – a very worthy one.

Professor Sudharshan Seneviratne was replete with many great qualities – commitment, professionalism, integrity, empathy, gratitude, humility. A wonderful human being. May his journey through Sansara be short and peaceful.

Note: Unfortunately, the author, Mr. K. L. F. Wijedasa passed away in November 2025, at the age of 93 and this appreciation is being published with the permission of his family. An earlier version was published in the *Sunday Times, Sri Lanka*. Address any correspondence to: shavera.s@gmail.com