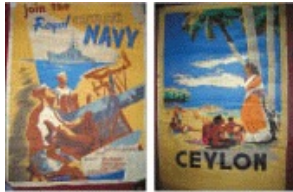


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Vintage Posters Of Ceylon - A Coffee Table Book Like No Other

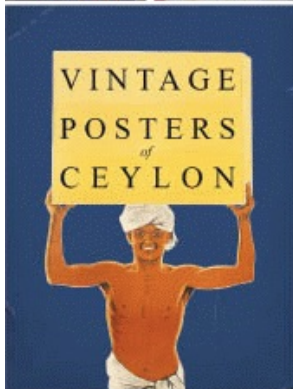
By Sumaya Samarasinghe



Coffee table books are often aesthetically beautiful. One buys or receives them as gifts and after perhaps going through the photos and captions once or twice, the book is carefully placed on a low table for everyone to see and never to be opened again.



Vintage Posters Of Ceylon by Anura Saparamadu manages to amalgamate both valuable information thanks to some in depth research, as well as a creative and stunning layout rarely seen in locally produced books of the same genre. This is a book that one actually wants to read, slowly and carefully for its beautifully written text and the 300 incredible posters which are a feast to one's eyes.



Royal Ceylon Navy, Beach, Temple and Zoo

Often considered as something temporary to be stuck on a wall and ripped off shortly after being created, Vintage Posters Of Ceylon gives the poster a brand new meaning and life. They are works of art by artists whose names often remained unknown, despite laboring for hours and days on stunning pieces which would have a very short life span. This book will hopefully set records straight and enable many of us to discover or re-discover some forgotten and unique talents who will at last be acknowledged for their true worth.

Saparamadu began collecting posters around five years ago with the main criteria of them having to be 'vintage'.

"I only collect 'vintage Ceylon' posters and except for a few cinema posters, everything I have is pre-1972 when Ceylon became Sri Lanka. If a poster has anything to do with Ceylon, I would buy it regardless of what it advertised. When we started planning the book, we decided it would be easier if we split the posters into different categories."

The book is divided into seven categories: Tea, travel, war, cinema, government, consumer goods and miscellany; and that itself covers such a wide range of interests that every reader is bound to find a section he can relate to.

The author says that the price of posters can vary tremendously and for example, airline and travel posters are highly collectible and cost a lot more than others like tea or consumer goods.

“Vintage posters run from a few dollars to thousands of dollars depending on the rarity and desirability of the poster. Not surprisingly, hand drawn Ceylon posters from the 1930s and ‘40s are highly collectible amongst collectors all over the world who specialise in travel and airline and cruise ship liners. For example posters by C.K.L. Samarasinghe go for thousands of dollars whereas a Sinhala movie poster will sell for about Rs. 2000. I am in touch with every major poster dealer in the world and have requested them for ‘Ceylon’ posters. I have also bought posters through antique dealers both in Sri Lanka and abroad. Some posters I bought on the internet but now it is quite rare to find unique posters on the net as most of what is available, I already have.”

Lack of available data is often one of the main issues encountered by people working on topics which require some form of research. Saparamadu too had to deal with some challenges.

“It was very difficult to find really old consumer goods posters as they were all thrown out by various kades in favour of newer ones. I was looking high and low for old cigarette and arrack posters but never managed to find one. I wanted to include a few hand drawn posters from the 1971 JVP insurrection, but it was impossible to find one. I even contacted JVP leaders to see if they had any in their libraries but to no avail. That was the one big regret I have.”

According to the author, the level of creativity put into the creation of a poster today has severely decreased.

“If you look at the old hand drawn silk screened posters by C.K.L. Samarasinghe or G.S Fernando, you see how much work has gone into creating them. Today with Photoshop, you can create a poster within a couple of hours and that old creativity has got lost. In the olden days, artists would come up with a creative concept and then draw the poster by hand. Interestingly most of the really famous posters were products of poster competitions. The sponsors of the competition did not give too many specifications except that the poster must reflect the goodness of the product; everything was upto the artist, from the design to the tagline.”

Copyright issues never even came into play because no one ever copyrighted posters and this once again re-iterates the lack of acknowledgment most of these incredible artists had to live with during their entire careers. “They (the posters) were meant to be pasted on walls for a few weeks and then torn down and replaced by another poster. Posters were neither books nor art, but temporary advertisements that were meant to promote a product. In any case the posters are more than 50 years old, so I don’t think copyright laws even apply anymore.”

Vintage Posters Of Ceylon can serve as a reference book in many fields as the author has made it as comprehensive as possible. Those working in advertising, filmmaking or even fellow collectors can find in this book a valuable source of information. While there have been a dime a dozen coffee table books on architecture, butterflies, flowers or animals, one of 'Vintage posters of Ceylon' is a unique concept never attempted before. Anura Saparamadu who had previously showed off his flair for writing in his debut novel *When Life Gives You Lemons Make Limoncello*, confirms with *Vintage Posters Of Ceylon* the versatility of his talent and interests.

Vintage Posters Of Ceylon is a coffee table book which is not meant to remain closed on your art deco table, it is there to be read and enjoyed more than once as each new experience is better than the last.