

Editor's Note

In this volume we, the authors, honour and celebrate, individually and collectively, the work of Gananath Obeyesekere, one of the most inspiring and provocative anthropologists of our time. Professor Obeyesekere's work, prolific by any standards, covers a wide range of subjects and crosses disciplinary boundaries. It nevertheless falls within two broad academic areas, anthropology and Asian Studies. With the exception of two papers, this collection consists of Asianist work from different disciplines —Anthropology, Religion, Sociology, History, Art and Languages.

In the course of his long and distinguished career, Professor Obeyesekere has accumulated a very large number of students, friends and colleagues, making the task of editing a collection like this both easy and difficult, easy because there is no scarcity of willing and eager contributors, and difficult because of the practical considerations of limiting the collection to a manageable size. Coherence was another issue. While it is desirable to have a collection of essays focussed on a single theme, that choice brings along with it the question of what the theme should be, and the constraint to leave out eager contributors merely because their chosen topic does not come within the bounds of the selected theme. For this reason I decided to ask our contributors to write on any subject of their choice. When the contributions arrived however, it was possible to bring about a degree of coherence by grouping them into categories that evoked different areas of Professor Obeyesekere's wide-ranging work.

This serendipitous development is reflected in the resonance the titles of these categories have with some of the broad areas within Anthropology and Asian Studies where Professor Obeyesekere's work has made a lasting impact. Within each category the papers are arranged in alphabetical order.

I incurred many debts in planning and carrying out the work on this volume. My first and foremost debt is to the contributors for their enthusiastic response to my invitation to participate in the project, and their patience with the pace of the project. Several of our authors went far beyond their particular contributions to assist me in various aspects of the progress of the volume. I owe a very special debt of gratitude to Patrick Olivelle for his role in identifying a publisher, his cheerful response to numerous editorial and technical questions, and his keen interest in the volume in many other ways. My colleague at the University of Virginia, John Nemeč, gave generously of his time in the early stages of the planning of the volume, including technical assistance where my deficiencies are vast, and offered to do more. Outside the circle of contributors Michael Schwartz, one of the most discerning readers I know, took on the very difficult and time consuming task of peer reviewer, and in many cases, offered valuable editorial advice. Ranjini Obeyesekere made valuable suggestions and a detailed reading of one paper. Matters of state prevented my friend and fellow Obeyesekere student Sarath Amunugama, M.P., from participating in this as co-editor which he very much wanted to do, and he joins the contributors in the spirit and meaning of this celebration. My family, Indrani, Kala and Rajiva, are unfailing supporters and allies.

I can truly say that this volume would not have been possible but for the initial enthusiasm of a dedicated and socially committed daughter of Sri Lanka, Radhika Coomaraswamy, and an equally dedicated and socially committed son of Sri Lanka, Ponnadurai Thambirajah (Thambi). It was at Radhika's original invitation that I undertook the task of editing this volume, and Thambi's abiding interest was a source of inspiration and strength. Their institute, the International Centre for Ethnic Studies (ICES), was indeed eager to publish the volume in Colombo, Sri Lanka, an offer I had to reluctantly decline due to the problem of distribution that a book published in a small country faces.

No words of thanks and acknowledgement can measure the degree of cooperation I received from Federico Squarini, the editor of the *Serie Alti Studi SEF-Manohar* in which

this volume is published. Federico was always eager to give me the benefit of his expertise and experience, and extended support well beyond what was officially due, showing a great deal of patience and understanding during all stages of the production of the volume.

Karen Hall and Julie Lassetter of the Department of Anthropology, University of Virginia, provided able, generous and courteous office assistance. Sriyantha Walpola supplied the excellent photographic portrait of Professor Obeyesekere that constitutes the volume's frontispiece.

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