

A close-up portrait of Ranil Wickremesinghe, a man with short, graying hair, looking slightly to the left with a neutral expression. He is wearing a white collared shirt. The background is a warm, golden-brown color.

RANIL Wickremesinghe

Four time Prime Minister of Sri Lanka

A Political Biography

Sampath Bandara

Translated by Vijita Fernando

Ranil Wickremesinghe is the Prime Minister of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka.

He had equalled a world record by being sworn in as Prime Minister on four occasions, with Britain's William Ewart Gladstone (1809-1898) and Sri Lanka's Dudley Senanayake (1911-1973). He also established a preference voting record in Sri Lanka with 500,556 votes in the 2015 General Election.

Ranil Wickremesinghe, longest serving leader of the United National Party (UNP), the largest and oldest democratic party in Sri Lanka, has completed forty years in his extraordinary political journey.

This is a comprehensive political biography of Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, with over 75 rare photographs.



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Preface

Writing Honourable Ranil Wickremesinghe's biography, I consider as the most momentous event in my nearly twenty five years of journalism.

Writing a biography of a leader in power is a challenge; a responsibility fraught with danger. It is a creation that should be done with infinite care with no mistakes and its contents should be one hundred percent accurate.

I am surprised at the confidence Mr. Ranil Wickremesinghe had in me in this connection. I wrote the biography with his permission and when I requested him to read the draft, he neither told me to remove any part of the contents, nor did he want anything added. He did not ask me to change anything, even a single word. This is a freedom one can hardly expect from a political leader who granted permission and gave me an unexpected freedom to write. I offer my sincere thanks and gratitude to him for giving me full freedom in this quest.

I also offer my sincere thanks and gratitude to the Prime Minister's youngest brother, Mr. Channa Wickremesinghe who helped me with a great deal with coordination when writing this biography.

I spent a long period of five years researching Mr. Ranil Wickremesinghe's life and service to find accurate information and ensure their accuracy. I read a large number of books, spent time in the National Archives among dust laden half torn volumes and long hours at the National Museum Library.

Of Mr. Ranil Wickremesinghe's six decades of living, almost four decades have been involved in active politics. As he is directly involved in politics today, my work is a political biography.

I am indebted to Mr. Kavan Ratnayake, Chairman and Managing Director of Lake House, who constantly encouraged me during the process of printing this work. I also offer my sincere gratitude to Hon. Sagala Ratnayake, Minister of Law and Order, Southern Development and Chief of Staff to the Prime Minister Hon Ranil Wickremesinghe.

I must record here my gratitude and affection for the help given me in this process by my nephew, Dhamsiri Bandara Karunaratne who is custodian of the Aluthnuwara Dedimunda Devalaya, and the Chairman of Sri Lanka Cashew Corporation. Udayana Seneviratna, Dr. Dhammika Yatigammana, Vijitha Herath (England), Jaliya Weliwatte, and my numerous other friends who were an unending source of encouragement to me. And my sincere thanks goes to Gratiaen Award winner Mrs. Vijita Fernando for her excellent, readable translation from Sinhala to English. For their assistance in printing this biography so elegantly, I offer my thanks to the Managing Director of Sarasavi Group of Companies Mr. H. D. Premasiri and Publishing Manager of Sarasavi Publishing Mr. Sripali Perera. I offer my sincere thanks to the General Manager of Sarasavi Group of Companies Mr. Prema Pinnawala, Publications Advisor Piyasena Wickramage, Creative Manager Saman Indika Lokukaluge, Page Layouter Roshani Tharangika Kumaradasa, Proof Reader Sarath Senapathi and to all those who were of unfailing assistance to me in the process of my writing this biography.

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About the translator

Reputed journalist Mrs. Vijita Fernando is the winner of the President's Excellence in Journalism Award and the Lifetime Award of the Editors' Guild.

As a creative writer in English she has published two collections of short stories and a novel. Her short stories have been broadcast on the BBC World and Latin American Services, anthologized in local, South Asian and Asian collections and in three collections of South Asian stories by the Oxford University Press.

As a translator from Sinhala to English, she has translated about twenty five Sinhala creative works and about five hundred short stories most of which have been published in the press here and abroad. She has won the Gratiaen Award, two Ian Goonetilleke awards of the Gratiaen Trust and six State Literary Awards for her translations.

In recognition of her contribution to Sinhala and English literature, she was awarded the prestigious 'Sahitya Ratna' in 2011.

Biographies and Political Biographies

An Introduction

Biographies occupy a very important place in non fiction literature. Biography has a long history. The first biographies published in England belong to the Middle Ages (500 -1540). They were written in Latin to extol the virtues of saints.

The first autobiography ever written in the Western World was a '*Confessions*' by a Catholic Saint Augustine (324 - 430 A.D.) who was also a Bishop in the city of Hippo in Algeria, and published in 397 A.D.

This book is a confession of the process of how after living a meaningless life as a non believer, one's life can change after embracing the Christian faith. *Confessions* is a massive work of 13 volumes.

The first biography written in English by Thomas Moore's (1478-1535) is '*The Life Story of Richard iii.*' This was published in 1513. It was in the same year that the '*Prince*' by Niccolo Machiavelli was published.

'*Autobiography of Benevenuto Cellini*' was published in 1728 and occupies an extremely important place in the early stages of biography publications.

It is quite certain that the first biographies written in Sri Lanka were also the life stories of Christian saints. In 1886 J. H. Abeysekera wrote the biography of Saint Paul. The next year a biography of Saint Louis written by Rev. Manuel, was published.

Apart from life stories of saints, the first ever written biography published in this country was the biography of Poet Kalidasa by Hetty Wakandage Joseph Andrew Fernando as '*Kalidasa Charithaya*' in 1887.

'*Sambuddha Charithaya*' written by Weragama Punchi Bandara was published in 1890. This was probably the first written book on the life of the Buddha when printing was introduced to the country.

In 1896 D.C.M. Ratnayake's '*Christu Jeevitha Kathawa*' was published by the Lanka Religious Writing Society.

The '*Buddha Charithaya*' written by J.H.S. Abhayaratne was decorated with illustrations by artist Louis Richard Henricus and was published in 1897 as '*Jinaraja Wansaya*'.

At the beginning of the twentieth century there were several biographies in Sinhala. Among them were James Perera's '*Sri Wickrama Rajasinghe*' in 1900, a biography of Saradiel written by W. Marthelis Appu as '*Utuvangkande Saradiel Appuge Jeevitha Kathawa*' in 1902 and '*Soysa Charithaya*' by C. Don Bastian in 1904.

The author of *Soysa Charithaya*, C. Don Bastian was the editor of the '*Dinapatha Pravurthi*' considered as the first Sinhala daily paper (begun in 1895). He was also a pioneer producer of stage dramas in Sinhala. Jeronis de Soysa (1797-1862) began his business ventures on a very small scale and became the richest in

the country of his time. The biography describes his life. Later it was translated into English as the '*de Soysa Saga*'.

Published in 1904, this is a massive work of 900 pages. The Sinhala version of Jeronis de Soysa's biography was considered the biggest ever biography written in Sinhala, till the Sinhala translation of J.R. Jayewardene biography (in 4 volumes and 1846 pages) was published.

Biographies can be divided into two main categories. The first is the Autobiography. The Oxford dictionary explains it as 'an account of a person's life written by that person.' The other category is the Biography which the Oxford dictionary describes as 'an account of a person's life written by someone else'. This current work '*Ranil Wickremesinghe – a Political Biography*' belongs to this second category.

'*Memoirs*' (a word derived from the French language) or Diaries are works that can be included in the genre of biographies which record the lives of persons. Anne Frank's '*The Diary of a Young Girl*' belongs to the category of memoirs.

'*Words*' by Jean - Paul Sartre (1964), Pablo Neruda's '*Memoirs*' (1974), Simone de Beauvoir's '*Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*' take pride of place in literature recalled through memory. Oscar Wilde's '*de Profundis*' (from the depths) written as a letter to a friend while Oscar Wilde was in prison is a memoir, albeit a sad one.

Apart from these, there are pictorial memoirs illustrated with photographs, line drawings and sketches and attractively produced. These are called '*Pictorial Biographies*', '*Illustrated Biographies*' or '*Life in Pictures*.' One of these was published in Sri Lanka for the first time in 1984 when '*D. S. Senanayake –*

a Pictorial Biography' was printed by the government press and published as a national archives product. Professor K. M. de Silva has written the foreword to this biography. It contains 152 historically valuable black and white photographs. This was published on the occasion of D. S. Senanayake's birth centenary. Another valuable addition to this genre is '*Mahatma Gandhi – His Life in Pictures*' launched for the first time in 1954 by the Indian Ministry of Information and Broadcasting.

'*The Life of Samuel Johnson*' written by James Boswell paved the way for a new direction in the art of biography. Samuel Johnson (1709-1784), a renowned poet, writer and an editor was the editor of the first English dictionary. Boswell's biography of Samuel Johnson is still considered as one of the excellent biographies ever written. '*Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*' was published in 1791. Critics claim that the profound influence of these two outstanding literary works can be seen in subsequent biographies and autobiographies.

In his foreword to '*Pin Athi Sarasavi Waramak Dennay*', a biography by Professor Ediriweera Sarachchandra, there is a brief introduction to autobiography. '*Upan Da Sita*' by Martin Wickramasinghe is also an autobiography popular among local readers.

According to the Oxford Concise Companion of English Literature, over 3500 biographies and autobiographies are published in the world annually. Political biographies of famous politicians and their autobiographies have become an attractive literary genre for readers.

'Gandhi Before India' is a most beautiful and readable biography I ever read. It is a Pre-eminent and Classic work by Ramachandra Guha (perhaps the best Indian contemporary

non-fiction writer). It is volume I of the Mahatma Gandhi's biography.

A biography of J.R. Jayewardene by Professor K.M.de Silva and Professor Howard Wriggins '*J. R. Jayewardene of Sri Lanka: A Political Biography*' can be considered as one of the best political biographies ever written in Sri Lanka. This work was first published in London in two volumes and contained 1090 pages. E.W. Surendra's translation into Sinhala of this biography in four volumes was published in 1997. During the time Professor K. M. de Silva was Professor of History at the Peradeniya University, Howard Wriggins was Professor of History at the University of Columbia. The introduction to the biography notes that the two professors spent 15 years writing this biography. This work can be called a complete biography of J.R.'s political life. It also portrays the country's politics over a number of decades.

The authors of this biography note that there was no critical work of post war politics in Sri Lanka and that in writing this work they felt this lacuna. They were in the view that, if there had been a serious and comprehensive political work on post war Sri Lanka such as 'The People's Peace : British History (1943-1989)' by Kenneth O. Morgan which is a serious and deep analysis of post war politics in Britain, their period of writing could have been considerably shortened.

There have been biographies of almost all famous politicians who lived before and after the Second World War, in Sri Lanka. But the only autobiography was written by Sir John Kotelawala titled '*An Asian Prime Minister's Story*' containing 204 pages launched in London in 1956 by John E. Harap & Company. Written under 20 themes, it has 13 photographs. The Sinhala translation by K. H. M. Sumathipala as '*Agamathiwarayakuge*

Jeevitha Kathawa (the life story of a Prime Minister) was published by M.D. Gunasena and Co. Sumathipla is the author of 'History of Education in Ceylon', a research study of the history of education,

Apart from this work, J. R. Jayewardene has written and published his memoirs in 1992 titled '*Men and Memories-Autobiographical Recollections and Reflections*'. This 186 page work was published by Vikas Publishers of New Delhi. Gunadasa Liyanage's Sinhala translation of this work was titled later as '*Yugayaka Piya Satahan*' (Footprints of an Era). But this cannot be called a complete biography of J. R. Jayewardene.

Apart from biographies of Sir John Kotelwala and J. R. Jayewardene no other politician in Sri Lanka has had his or her autobiography or memoir published.

Political biographies written in Sinhala do not seem to go far back into history, as I see it. Jawaharlal Nehru biography written in 1941 by D. W. Wickramarachchi was published by Victor and Company in Colombo.

When writing about biographies of politicians, I must make mention of H. A. J. Hulugalle, Bradman Weerakoon, Malalgoda Bandutilaka, Ranjith Amarakeerthi Palihapitiya who have written a large number of biographies. The Mahatma Gandhi biography written by Louis Fisher and translated into Sinhala by W.A. Abeysinghe is a commendable, excellent work. So is Abeysinghe's biography of Martin Wickramasinghe in three volumes titled '*Maha Gathkaru Vatha*' (The Great Writer) consisting of 1426 pages.

My attention had been drawn to two biographies of Tamil politicians written in English. They are A. Jeyaram Wilson's

biography of S.J.V. Chelvanayakam and S. Thondaman's autobiography '*Tea and Politics*. Both are excellent publications demonstrating various aspects of Tamil politics in the country.

I cannot predict what position my own creation '*Ranil Wickremesinghe, a Political Biography*' will occupy in the political biographies so far written in this country. It is something that should be done by my readers. There may perhaps be a correct judgment or a critique sometime in the future.

Sampath Bandara

Contents

Prologue	25
Childhood and School days	28
Faculty of Law and Politics	32
Stepping into Active Politics	35
Political Career Begins	37
The Youngest Deputy Minister	40
A Cabinet Position at Twenty Nine	45
National Youth Services Council (NYSC)	46
New Avenues in Education	51
A New Era for Industry	57
Protecting the Party amidst Problems	62
Prime Minister at Forty Four	66
Leader of the UNP and the Opposition	71
A Wife for a Great Man	72
The Batalanda Commission	76
Into the Presidential Stakes for the First Time	77
Most Preference Votes in the Country	80
Over Four Lakhs of Preference Votes	85
Entering the Peace Process	87
Tours of India, Britain and America	95
Among Asian Heroes	97
Most Funding from Japan	98
Unlimited Service	99
A General Elections before Four Years.	103
The LTTE Blocked Ranil's Path to Win	105