

CPS 75 YEARS: IT'S TIME TO RESTORE PLANTER-PROFESSIONALISM ONCE AGAIN!

By DYAN A. SENEVIRATNE [Associated with SL plantations between 1969 & 2007]

The Ceylon Planters' Society celebrates its Diamond Jubilee [1936 – 2011] this year. 70 years of a human is often referred to in biblical context as, 'Three Score & Ten – a full chronological life span of man! Well don't let our beloved CPS be weighed down by age! Let there be a new beginning and focus once again to restore professionalism and 'attention to detail' amongst those present and future Sri Lankan planters. **You have inherited a rich tradition. Sustain it!**

In this article of mine I shall strive to show the reader examples of 'attention to detail' and making one realize that the 'Planter' is a multi-talented, forward thinking leader with constant zeal! Let us never make him feel inadequate and/or insignificant in the macro-image of the 'plantation industry' where the new investors are constantly demanding 'high growth' and bottom-line enhancement – buzz terms indeed! Simply put: don't put the cart before the horse – ever! The profits will come – eventually. But plantations are not for 'quick fix', Fly-By-Night' speculators!!

In reality today, Sri Lanka has the dubious distinction of having the lowest yield/ha [YPH] and consequently the highest cost of production [COP] out of all four major tea producing countries - namely India, China & Kenya. And if we don't look sharp, lesser tea nations such as Vietnam, Indonesia and even Turkey may overtake us!

I recall when the writer was an Assistant Superintendent under the legendary Ranjan Wijeratne at Demodera Group in 1971 planters from Indonesia were sent to SL and directed to us to learn tea nursery techniques. Today planters from SL are sent to Indonesia to learn the ropes!!

When I was the Manager of Pettitagala Estate, Balangoda [1979-1984] its YPH was raised from 1100 to 1950 kg/ha, whilst at same time reaching the highest NSA amongst SLSPC estates; similarly when I managed SL's largest tea plantation - Hapugastenne way back in the mid eighties its YPH was raised from 1500 to above 2500 kg/ha. Same story for Diyagama West - the then largest plantation in the upcountry - YPH was increased from 1200 to 1900 plus when the undersigned managed those large estates. This is not meant to blow my own trumpet but to merely state that if Superintendents of estates could increase their YPH, and thereby reduce overall costs; up the NSA whilst at same time enhancing capital value of property with Replanting of large tracts of land and maintaining all fields in spotless weed-free condition **and** attending to all essential agronomic practices including effective draining, deep forking, mulching, establishing of high and low shade, constructing terraces etc, why not now? In addition we – most of the 'then superintendents' maintained all their estate roads and field paths in first class order.

The workers were a happy lot – most of us spoke Tamil fluently and took pride in not only beautifully manicured tea plantations but also keeping their work-force contented by attending to their needs expeditiously. Visits to workers' abodes were de rigueur! And effective follow up action even more important. **The estates were abuzz with activity and enthusiasm!**

Speaking to a former well respected Director of the TRI recently he disclosed that many of the present-day planters are unable to effectively nurture a young tea plant to maturity! This is whilst most of the plantations – at least the large commercial plantations are wallowing in the mire of low productivity, oscillating between 700 & 1500 kg/ha – anything higher are exceptions!

RE-PLANTING & INFILLING MUST BE 'ON-GOING'

It would be logical to get on to a well planned, coordinated and simultaneous twin-pronged tea re-planting and infilling program that is sustainable and oriented to achieve 3000 kg/ha plus where the re-planted areas are concerned. A Tea plant CAN be brought to maturity in 24 months IF effectively and enthusiastically monitored from selection of mother bushes to nursery environment to creating the 'right conditions' in the field. Extensive soil rehabilitation should never be a nominal operation. Plant your Mana as close as possible, then lop every 45 days; fertilize every other lop and you'll have enough rich, carbonic matter within 12 months!

When planting tea comes along - ensure that **each** planting 'hole' is of required dimensions; **only the best nursery plants** go out to the 'Clearing' – that is an absolute must! The formative period of the first 14 months are critical as is the retention of moist conditions in soil by copious thatching, prevention of erosion of life-enhancing top soil; the high/low shade is already established **before** introducing tea plants –once again a critical factor – often overlooked! The timely and judicious ground and foliar nutrient applications need to be emphasized. Of course the young plant needs to be 'framed' so that its primary and secondary braches would blossom to support a vibrant, potential plucking table – the economic base of each bush and by extension the entire field that would directly contribute to the overall productivity of the whole plantation.

So the raising of the YPH of the nucleus plantation is a sine-qua-non for reasons obvious – higher productivity would lower costs significantly. Many today take easy way out by opening their factories for Bought Leaf Operators – this is a 'Double Edged Sword' – Quality of leaf is adversely affected. One then is at the mercy of unscrupulous Leaf Collectors. B/Leaf per se is not an evil option but it should not be the primary source of leaf. Each estate unit should be self-sufficient. Then taking on B/Leaf under strict conditions and monitored daily would be a bonus!

NON-PRACTICAL BUDGETS BEING THRUST ON PLANTERS?

Today we see tinkering of budgets a.k.a. 'Estimates' in plantations – Managers are 'handed over' budgets that are mostly un-workable with nominal amounts 'allowed' for each item under say, 'Draining, Thatching, weeding etc based on, at times, inflated crops! Managers are mortally scared to 'over-spend' ANY such item. Efficiency appears to be – you are given 1000/- rupees as 'budgeted' and if you 'spend' 950/- you are a good boy – regardless of the 'ground situation'!

We reduced costs then by increasing our yields! Not by fudging figures whilst dropping overall standards, withholding essential macro/micro nutrients and weakening our primary assets – our tea bushes! We did not make the capital value of our plantation units decline as is sadly evident by observing state of 'estate roads' for instance; akin to dried up river beds!! And 'New Clearing' appearing like deserts with young twiggy plants, wine-glass shaped, making a Herculean effort of surviving the rigors of sun, wind and drought and/or excessive rains! No wonder many – especially those in Finance look at 'tea Re-planting' as an absolute waste of funds – **it would be a waste if we go on re-supplying 70% dead plants each year!** The expected returns would not even reach levels that the old-seedling fields [that were uprooted] gave! Do sub-standard work – constantly looking over shoulder at those accursed un-workable budgets and that would be the result – useless clearings that would have to be later abandoned!

On subject of intensive Infilling, one RPC that appears to have got this right is Malwatte Valley Plantations with its '**Zero-Pottal**' policy – a pragmatic method of infilling – avoiding singletons and concentrating on large to medium vacant blocks that had been rehabilitated first. 'Doubles' are also carried out but carefully nurtured and protected and before long sturdy plants ensue. Vacancies or '**Pottals**' would soon be a thing of the past – at least that's their aim at MVPL.

Reverting to Re-Planting - Managers should be given an overall total budget for entire clearing; and not itemized allocations for each sub-item. Because each acre / ha of land has its own peculiar issues to deal with. For example some sections may need more intense draining or terracing or thatching as the case may be. **Need-based budgeting based on practical experience ensuring quality is essential. We have to move away from earlier practice of forcing down throats of Superintendents un-workable estimates that only look good on paper but of no value overall!**

People have often asked me how on earth I did increase YPH / Productivity / lowered costs in all tea plantations I managed during my tenure with the industry of 38 years. My answer is simple:

Look after the **SOIL, BUSH & PEOPLE.**

The response is one of incredulity – like, has this guy lost his marbles??!!

Yet ponder the above 3 elements – how would your tea plant/bush grow without the support, moisture & nutrients from the soil? Many are under the mistaken notion that 'soil' is only an inert

medium of only offering 'anchorage' to the bush – wrong!! I could go on writing reams on subject of soils suitability vis-à-vis primary crops on plantations but would avoid doing so in this brief article as I would bore readers no end!!

OUR HIGHLANDS & FERTILE RAIN-FED LOWLANDS – IDEAL FOR TEA, STILL!

Some TRI scientists used to proclaim that much of SL's tea estate soils are 'old' and would not lend itself towards producing healthy, vibrant tea bushes. Whilst certain areas may be too steep and / or constantly buffeted by strong winds, many of the so-called sterile soils or at least their condition symbolizes poor management over an extended period of time; however ***much of it is reversible***. I recall when I was manager of Pettigala Estate, Balangoda, its Lower Division had been ear-marked for 'village expansion' as its soils according to both Visiting Agent's and TRI's 'advice' was gravelly and mostly devoid of 'top soil'. Notwithstanding such advice I went ahead and replanted 4 acres after attending to 14 months of 'intense rehabilitation'. The resultant VP tea became a cover of vibrant 'healthy green'; handing over of productive tea land was shelved! Much of the old tea fields were thereafter re-planted as was the 'factory block' considered un-plantable – now thriving VP tea fields. I would have been sacked if I had been planting today for going against 'advice' of VA & TRI! The unbounded creativity of planters should not be shackled!

AIMLESS 'DIVERSIFICATION' IN THE PAST WAS A WASTE OF RESOURCES

The aim should be to increase the national YPH of our tea [RPCs and Smallholders] with a **reduced** extent and diversify all other areas for productive pursuits. 'Diversification' became a hastily contrived 'escape strategy' during the JEDB/SLSPC era! For instance if a field was 'difficult' to manage – full of weeds, prone to illicit plucking, too far from worker quarters etc they used to 'diversify' on to forestry [a few gum trees here and there!] or spices – a sprinkling of clove trees, coffee trees, passion fruit etc without ever pondering that the same issues might crop up later or worse robbed with impunity! Result? Productive tea / rubber lands being abandoned!

COMMERCIAL FORESTRY & OTHER VENTURES YET UNTAPPED

Thankfully all present RPCs have identified commercial forestry as a viable venture. After all it would cost around Rs 32/- to manufacture just one kilo of tea, using imported oil as opposed to a mere Rs 8/- to manufacture one kilo of tea using fuel-wood. It has been analyzed that the plantation sector alone would need around 4,000 hectares of commercial forestry.

Yet it is not only 'Forestry' that the plantations need to diversify. A planter has only got to use his imagination and creativity and he'll see so many other potential ventures that would bring in the \$\$\$. Fuel-wood, high value timber, export oriented greenery / vegetables [we are crying for 'veges' nationally too!] fruits, cut-flowers, inland fisheries, dairy farming, livestock [piggeries, poultry farming etc]; rain-water harvesting, commercial wind-power, hydro-power, solar power grids, agro-tourism – hang gliding / trekking, photo-ops, eco experiences – well its mind-boggling, really!

A plantation should not be perceived as a mono-crop venture anymore; rather as resource-rich lands that abound with natural resources aplenty – innovation and creativity would work wonders!

SOILS ARE NOT A STERILE ENTITY. DON'T MAKE IT SO!

There are no 'quick fixes' of making soils fertile. We need to get our basics right and have bags of patience; besides meticulous planning and timing of any agro-operation is all so important. Also we must strictly abide by the 'Rules' of Mother Nature when it comes to 'planting' in all its facets!

Yet before I get onto the 'The Tea Bush' – think of soil pH vis-à-vis tea, soil porosity, soil compaction, moisture retentive qualities of soil; moisture percolation ability as against water running off on surface; cat-ion exchange capacity etc. There is an absolute necessity to establish lateral and leader drains; to deep fork, to mulch and thatch soils; to bury prunings perhaps; to attend to stone / live terracing on a need basis etc. If ignored your soils would be soon depleted of its moisture retentive qualities and fast descend to that of compacted, gravelly and worse, sterile soil that would encourage surface run-off, making even make NPK applications a waste!

YEILD PER HA – A MUCH ABUSED AND MISQUOTED TERM!

When some wise-guys of the Tea Industry glibly yap about Yield per Hectare do they ever pause to consider the following significant factors germane to YPH:

- [1] 'Stand' per ha [No of bushes standing per ha] here do they take 'census' of bushes at each pruning? Stand 20 years ago may be significantly reduced today, if no infilling done! How can we term a 'tea acre / ha' thus if its bush population is only 3000 / 7500 per acre/ ha? **[Read on below]**
- [2] Mixed stand or exclusively seedlings – if so 'Old Seedlings [prior to WW11] or New Seedlings or 'Clonal Seedling' seed taken from cloned mother buses. OS were planted on the 'Up & Down' system and not planted on the contour. Hence its Stand much lower than if planted on contour.
- [3] Pure VP Block – if so mixed clones or separated into Clonal blocks. VP tea by and large if with similar stand should yield at least 3 times more than OS tea. However certain clones are higher yielding and would thus produce more than some of the say, darker pigmented clones.
- [4] The vibrancy / health of bushes overall – here soil moisture / shading [or lack of it] NPK inputs – ground / foliar; then degree / harshness of tipping / plucking impact on bush growth / yields
- [5] In a typical 4-year pruning cycle did one attain the 'Maximum Spreading Potential' [MSP] of the bush by its 18 month post-pruning? Each bush must spread to its maximum spread within 18 months after pruning. This can be ensured by trained pluckers and close monitoring. In short – better the spread higher the number of potential plucking points on plucking table!
- [6] Are all bushes 'pluckable' – here there are possible constraints – e.g. height, bushes tables covered with creepers, bushes located on too steep a terrain, bushes skiffed at 'last plucking round' to counter excess height etc. Unattainable heights mean unplucked tea bushes. Period!

MONITORING OF QUANTUM PER PICK PER ROUND

There are countless areas of bush management, to say the least! However one glaring factor that supervisors miss out is to monitor the quantum per pick at each plucking round. The 'totals' of each round should not vary more that 5 to 8% plus or minus. If there are high variations per pick one could safely assume that only a part of the field is plucked but shown as totally plucked or some leaf is robbed by people of adjoining estates or worse illegal plucking under moon-light where such leaf is siphoned off to shady Green Leaf Collectors! Or simply 'false' plucking rounds!

LET US TACKLE 'WEEDING' SCIENTIFICALLY!

If plucking is the costliest and most labour intensive operation on a 'tea-estate' then a 'close second' is the cost of NPK Fertilizer and of course weeding – ground condition maintenance. I recall what terrible times we had trying to keep our estates weed-free in the early days of my career. Much of the 'Weeding' was done using implements such as 'Scrapers' which did much harm to soil as it would loosen it and expose it to be washed away during the rains. Weeding was considered a 'necessary evil'! Yet along with my maturity as a tea planter I realized how easy it would be if we realize that 'weeds' like any plant need sunlight, moisture and 'good soils' to thrive. All 3 elements need to be present for weed growth. Moisture and 'good soil' cannot be reduced or eliminated; however sunlight if controlled would significantly lessen weed growth – hence Mulching and 'Thatching' on weed-seed-free surfaces would ensure weed free conditions! Apart from mulching and thatching, bush-to-bush merger of tea bushes would effectively reduce sunlight penetration towards triggering off germination. Germination is from seed availability – which came to being from flowers of weeds. So weeds must be 'tackled' before flowering!

The use of herbicides on large commercial tracts of tea lands are needed – if used judiciously and timed. Some pre-emergent weedicides need to be sprayed on bare ground before pruning along with the Dolomite Applications. These two operations done **once in 4 years** in a 4-year PR Cycle field would reduce excess soil acidity plus effectively reduce weed-seed germination on pruning when sunlight starts to stream in and would otherwise trigger large scale germination. At 'Tipping' and thereafter at each plucking round for 18 months one only needs to uproot manually the few weeds that spring forth until bushes have merged – after which weeding per se is not an issue if bush to bush merger was achieved during 18 month period after pruning.

The trick is to proactively tackle the question of weeding or 'Ground Condition Maintenance' – go for it [manually or chemically] before flowering of weeds. This is absolutely essential. Today I see

spraying of herbicides being carried out on tall 'flowering weeds' that are seen even above the tea bush table – the 'spray drift' would effectively scorch much of the side branches besides being a waste of funds as herbicide are ineffective on mature weeds or weeds with a rhizome!

To keep your plantation absolutely weed-free is not by using implements but by the 3-pronged strategy of manual / chemical & cultural [thatching / bush-merger]. One important point to remember is if one takes over an estate 'riddled with weeds' you cannot have low weeding operational costs during the first 3 months. If for instance your 'estimated cost of weeding is Rs 400/ per ha you simply cannot do your weeding at such costs initially. You may have costs of even Rs 1,000/- per ha to start with. However it would gradually reduce along with the 'weed population'. Sadly some Principals and Colombo Bosses insist that Managers 'show' such costs 'within the estimate' from Day One. Result? ***One significant section of the plantation would be in heavy weeds and may not even be 'fully plucked' – thus materially reducing the YPH!***

YIELD PER HA BASED ON 'REAL' GROUND SITUATION

So the Yield per ha means much more than a mere figure. However it is vital that all estates, 40 hectares and above at least are re-surveyed field by field; excise areas with large boulders, mini forest blocks, gardens etc. So the survey should actually reflect the tea area per se. Furthermore those fields having less than a minimum stand, say 7,500 per ha or 3000 per acres should be temporarily removed from 'Revenue Extent' – the reason for poor YPH should be ascertained; then get onto a proper Replanting of field. Infilling could also be considered but it should be done for fields having around 65% stand so that a max percentile of 35% could be tackled. If Infilling is carried out at each pruning then the question of a dwindling bush stand does not arise!

CULLING OF WEAK BUSHES

During much of the late 60's and 70s I recall that culling of weak bushes together with uprooting of dead bushes were done 24 months before pruning in mature fields and such areas squared off and planted densely with a suitable grass such as Mana [Guatemala was less preferred because of its tendency of crowding the surrounding healthy tea bushes] and then lop Mana @ 45 days and fertilize with Grass Mixture such as U.625 every other lop, i.e. 90 days. And so when pruning is eventually carried these grass blocks have been adequately rehabilitated. Infilling then is carried out as an essential post-pruning operation along with applying 'Limbox'; Mosing & Ferning well before 'Bud-Break'; 'Draining' mostly to reach its original 'Lateral Drain dimensions'; repairing all broken stone terraces; deep forking and even burying of prunings in fields with 80% stand and above. The idea was to ensure retention of healthy bushes and introduction of new bushes that would replace the old, moribund and indeed dead bushes. Naturally even our so-called old seedling fields were not only 'fully covered' they yielded at close to 2000 kg/ha or more!

Infilling amidst poor / senile seedling tea is also futile because of the disproportionate nutrient demand of the younger bushes and consequently the bush returns for plucking – some bushes would be ready for harvesting whilst the others of the old seedlings would be in 'bud-stage'!

Once your 'soils' and bushes [with proper stands] are nurtured the estate is going to 'sing' with delight! It is commonsense at play, really. No rocket science needed here!

From 'Soils' & 'Bushes' – I now get on to the vital 'People' of a plantation.

'PEOPLE' ON ESTATES

'The People' are all those attached to plantations – typically the workers, staff and executives; yet one should also take the children and 'pensioners' into the equation too as they too would have a hand in total productivity! Anyone who is directly and or indirectly affected by activities on a plantation: would form the definition of 'people' on a plantation!

Let's take the pluckers – those who are entrusted with harvesting tea bushes of an estate to begin with. The usual practice is when a child – usually a female is around 15 to 16 years they are selected to pluck certain 'old fields' [that can do least damage to the plucking table!] or some

are supposed to be tutored by an experienced plucker and after a few months of such 'training' they are drafted in to the main gangs of pluckers. The question of planned and structured HRD type initiation does not really get the attention it should receive!

I remember when I was managing SL's largest tea property – Hapugastenne, I realized that in order to extract its potential I had to recruit at least another 100 pluckers pronto. The problem was that all the resident pluckers were already deployed on plucking! I was then compelled to source my pluckers from a radius of 3 to 4 km from the divisional boundaries by sending out motivated 'scouts' who were briefed on the 'profile' of the pluckers requested – at least physically – we did not want emaciated runts to begin with! Surprisingly quite a few sturdy-looking young females turned up – most of them had never 'touched' a tea bush, leave alone plucking them! However most of them had done their O/L – some even had passed their O/L in Science subjects! Plucking would have been furthestmost from their minds! So I called them 'Harvesters' and gave them attractive T-Shirts with the term 'Harvesters' emblazoned only after I carried out a crash course of 3 weeks on theory of plucking even giving them botanical terms relevant to the tea bush and leaf, photosynthesis, transpiration, naming the different leaves etc and do's and don'ts of plucking with appropriate scientific terms in Sinhala – that struck a cord with them and they gradually changed their attitudes And didn't they take down literally everything I uttered – keenness personified! Then we got onto to the practical side of training plucking aided by my champion pluckers, capping it off by selecting the best three trainees at a 'test' based on theory & practice!

VILLAGE LASSES TRANSFORMED INTO CHAMPION PLUCKERS

Within a mere six months down the road these very same young 'village lasses' became champion pluckers themselves, beating those experienced ones hollow! This trained and motivated group of pluckers certainly helped me towards establishing records in YPH hitherto never ever reached and exceeded thereafter! So pluckers need to be carefully selected and thereafter vigorously trained both in theory and practice before they are sent out to the fields. We need to motivate them. We need to listen to their issues/ woes at home; we need to know what type of food they consume; they need to be aware of the importance of consuming milk, eggs, pulses etc. We need to check their blood and see if they are anemic. If so immediate action be taken with iron supplements etc. **Before looking at quality of the estate, I believe in improving the quality of my workers – overall!** Isn't this then fundamental without looking at workers and / unions with an adversarial bent? **Workers are not a 'cost' to be cut! Instead a motivated work-force you love would and indeed could do wonders that were hitherto unimaginable!!**

Plucking was and is the costliest item on a tea plantation. It requires much planning, training, motivation of gangs, monitoring physical / mental aspects of pluckers etc. Yet it beats me why there's minimum supervision by many estate bosses and their assistants on this vital aspect!

THE ESTATE MEN MATTER TOO!

Which brings me to the next matter under 'People' – the other workers apart from pluckers: usually the male 'sundry' workers – here too one must identify the inherent talents of each and every worker – looking into historical data / kanganies' assessments and decide further on what type of further training they need depending on their physical attributes, general behaviour and of course the needs of the estate – both short and long term. For instance on one estate, on my assumption of duties I found that there was an apparent dearth of 'Pruners' – the young SD [Assistant Superintendent] had been 'told' that that was it! I called for the checkrolls of the past 4 years and lo and behold, quite a few chaps who had feigned ignorance on how to handle a pruning knife had in fact been gaily pruning! On further probing it was revealed that most of the pruners had decided on a plan to inform the new 'Durai' / PD or Boss [the young SD had also been relatively new] that they did not know how to prune! [Pruning is considered one-of-the toughest physically taxing jobs on a tea estate] I did not adopt a confrontational course but spoke to each of the 'actors' on a one-to-one basis [addressing them together would have been suicidal!] and before long they were smiling, willing and able pruners!!

Similarly the estate's executive staff – Manager and executive assistants must keep a record of each and every worker and then by extension even their dependents – one must know their

names [including their nick-names!] details of their houses / toilets / gardens and more importantly their proven competencies and potential. Would they fit [pruners apart] in as good carpenters, masons, even cooks? One has only got to look at the bigger picture – we did during the pre-computer era. How easy record keeping of such magnitude would be in today's context!

THE PLANTER SUPERINTENDENT – STILL THE PIVOT!

The estate Superintendent in my book should be the sole authority. Yes he could either make or mar a plantation. It is therefore absolutely essential that one looks into all possible aspects before recruiting a young man to take job of planter-creeper and thereafter to rise up as an Assistant Manager and finally to being a fully fledged Manager.

An athletically sturdy man would be preferred; yet one must not ignore the intellectual part of it! Remember iconic figures like Ranjan Wijeratne, Ken Balendra, Sepala Ilangakoon etc were planters at one time. I can think of one brilliant planter in today's scene – I would unhesitatingly select Dr Dan Seevaratnam – for his intellectual capacity, profound depth of knowledge and of course proven expertise. Not many of the other plantation bosses in present context could hold a candle to him! I would however pick Roshan Rajadurai as someone with a massive thirst for knowledge and a tenacious attitude. I would wish him all success in the years ahead.

SOME OF TODAY'S RPCs

Some of the present day RPCs have some excellent tea and are indeed managed very well. I could pick out RPCs like Watawala, Bogawantalawa, Talawakelle, Kelani Valley – that still appear green and robust! They could however still intensify their Replanting ratios and innovativeness! The James Finley estates have shown the rest about establishing Forestry on a scale never seen earlier. Similarly there are numerous resources on plantations, waiting to be counted & multiplied!

Bogawantalawa run by a brilliant non-planter Sarath Fernando has shown the rest how to look at plantations from a different paradigm. He has identified the resources of each unit innovatively and indeed pragmatically. Way to go! One needs to stop and identify the latent, albeit untapped resources that each estate is blessed with and then plan and nurture parallel business ventures which need not be only Tea, Rubber, Cinnamon etc. We need to think afresh, yet the existing plantation crops need to be protected and its products enhanced by value-addition. Think!

Reverting to 'Estate Managers' – it is no use to appoint 'Superintendents' and thereafter spoon-feed him or worse, make him feel impotent! Give him the 'Big Picture' and let him come up with the suggestions. During the seventies estate superintendents would come up with proposals – a.k.a budget proposals a good six months before they huddle together to work out the annual budgets. Today the 'Clean Copies' that are handed over to Managers – sometimes I am told – a month or two after the new financial season has commenced is only an arithmetical formula!

This fixation with figures must stop if we are to resurrect this vital industry! For instance when subject of 'Re-Planting' is spoken of, many of those in authority take on a negative stance and say things like – *Don't talk of Re-planting – it is impossible with today's high costs! Re-planting is not viable because it would take seven years to bear fruit!* What gibberish! At one time we were re-planting 50 to 75 acres per year. Great planters like Sepala Ilangakoon tackled some 100 acres each year at Hapugastenne – of course he had able SDs like Ken Balendran, Charlie Ramanathan, Harold Duthi, Johnny Roelofsz etc. I should recall 'real planters' of the 60s, 70s and '80s such as Eardley Herman, Ranjan Wijeratne, Manilal Abeyawardena, Claude Abeywardene, Jivaka Atapattu, S K [Sene] Seneviratne, Leslie Marshal, A. S Rasanayagam, Vernon Tissera, Aubrey Tissera, Manthi Delwita, Tony Whitham, Wickrema De Alwis, Malin Goonetilleke etc

S K Seneviratne and Malin Goonetilleke not only did yeoman service for the tea industry in Sri Lanka they also opened up hundreds of acres in PNG and Malaysia, respectively! I must mention that Jivaka Atapattu was a dynamic planter and an innovative thinker who was far ahead of his time. It's a great pity that Jivaka is no longer in Sri Lanka as he is now domiciled in the USA.

The aforementioned gentlemen [besides yours truly!] have established fields upon fields of new VP tea in the numerous estates they managed. Surely if they had balked at that time and found excuses SL would NOT be having those 'carpets' of gold as some refer to our beautiful tea lands!

CONCLUSION: FOOD FOR THOUGHT!

In conclusion let me make a pertinent observation: It's certainly gratifying to see the number of new players entering the lucrative pursuit of exporting tea – much of it in value-added form; even branding themselves on their unique singing ability – good for them! And now Tea has been embraced by multi-nationals such as Nestle who'll be introducing Espresso Tea and even Tea capsules! Wonderful! We wish them all success as they send the Lion-Logo zooming across the globe, vying with each other for a piece of the 'cake' of tea. That's the tail-end of tea chain. Like the glory boys of Rugby – the Wing Three Quarters who plant the tries. But all the hard work is done by the burly, 'thinking' men in the Pack and 'Insides'. That analogy fits the 'people' on plantations. The planters, their staff & workers – if the Tea Industry of this beautiful island is to thrive for the next 75 years, it needs to be supported every step of the way! Our fervent plea is not to pay step-motherly 'treatment' to the **soil, bush & people of plantations!** Period!

My wish-list for SL's Tea Industry is to have a National YPH of 2500 – 3000 kg/ha with ideally located state-of-the-art 'tea-food centres' each capable of churning out 3-5 m kg MT / Annum! Each Plantation to have at least five viable non Tea or Rubber business units producing high quality food – protein, fruit, vegetables and other export oriented products, run on non-oil energy!

TEN TIPS FOR A MORE PRODUCTIVE YOU – PLANTERS OF THE CPS

[1] Health is Wealth – Exercise & Relax. You are Your Greatest Asset – Protect it; Love it; Develop Wining Attitude: *'I can do it'* mind-set; walk that 'extra mile'!

[2] Harness BOTH sides of your Brain; **'Alpha'** level-thinking will boost your potential! Make Visualizing Success – a habit! Seize those half-open windows!

[3] Be Curious, Knowledge Hungry – even when beyond 70 years! Never 'retire your mind'! Participate in quiz programs; do crosswords; new pursuits!

[4] Reading Makes a Man; so true then – TRUE today as well! Read aloud whenever possible; reading enhances knowledge and keeps old age at bay!

[5] Think 'Out of the Box', yet slot the time to THINK undisturbed daily; think BEFORE action. Seek understanding first before wanting to be understood; feel & empathize; prepare, Prepare & PREPARE! Plan ahead whatever you do!

[6] Be alive to changes – global, national, corporate scenario; non adaptation is a killer – yet don't change for sake of change; ability to see the larger picture always. Invest time & effort to be a better communicator – not only being a better speaker but an equally good listener! Value & respect others around you.

[7] Dynamism to switch ON & OFF from Project to Project; be courageously decisive; cultivate an awesome memory; make each day extraordinary!

[8] Energized Enthusiasm is inspiration – keep the fires burning; develop charisma – it's magnetic. Lead by walking around, observing & listening. Build positive relationships with people all around you – relationships DO matter!

[9] First things First; make goal setting a habit; stay focused; bust stress – Time is a precious commodity – respect it and be Punctual ALWAYS. Practice is good – but PERFECT PRACTICE is BETTER!

[10] TRUST Yourself – You Are Unique – You Can Do It!

"You can go as far as your mind lets you – What you believe, remember, you CAN achieve!"

Once again let me salute the Ceylon Planters' Society on its Diamond Jubilee. May the professional planters within the CPS always abide by its motto inscribed 75 years ago and still so relevant today: ***"To secure and promote the personal and professional interests of Planters while endeavouring to co-operate with and ensure the prosperity of proprietors."***

May God Bless You!

DYAN SENEVIRATNE

The writer could be contacted as follows:

DYAN A SENEVIRATNE

12, St. Joseph's Road

NUGEGODA

Mobile: 0777-790147

e-mail: dyans@sltnet.lk

Website: www.speakupunlimited.com