

## A multiple talent with a Divine calling By Susitha R. Fernando

### **Givantha Arthasad - Father of animation film-making in Sri Lanka**

Multi-talented television and cinema artistes and pioneer in cartoon and animation filmmaking in Sri Lanka, Givantha Arthasad was recently awarded with the Lifetime Achievement Award by the Sri Lanka Press Association.

The citation for his award noted on his contribution to cinema and television art. He was instrumental in creating an animation film camera and Special Effects and Optical Printer. He was also honoured for creating first animated cartoon film in the Sri Lanka film industry with his 'Dutugemunu' in 1979.

Givantha is multiply talented and has mastered eight different fields including painting, printing, animation filmmaking, make up and cinematography.

"I have seven teachers and eighty fields in my life," says Givantha with contentment. As he was an expert in different field it is hard to find what is his forte is. But he has managed to be the top in all the fields he worked.

For example, Givantha a completely self taught printer today is a lecturer in printing at the University of Sri Jayawardenapura. There he shares his vast knowledge acquired through his own experiments and vast reading.

A man who loves his work and fully dedicated to what he does, Givantha's motto is "the world is my field", the very motto of Revd. John Wesley, an Anglican cleric and theologian who co-founded Methodism.

He believes that the religious upbringing and his life dedicated to faith has helped him overcome all odds in life and be success in everything he started.

"My father wanted to make me a pastor because my parents had made a promise to God. This was after my elder brother died immediately after birth. So when I was to be born my father had made a promise that I would be dedicated to God," says Givantha reminiscing about his life.

"But having realised that I would not pursue a religious life my father gave me the freedom to decide on my future," says Givantha who thinks that it was his father's guidance made him to be what he is today.

Having completed GEC ordinary level, Givantha realised that there was no education institute to pursue what he was yearning to learn.

Started education at Methodist College Katunayake, Givantha had a colourful and memorable childhood. His both parents were teachers and he was brought up among children who visited his house everyday after school.

Givantha receiving the award from President Maithripala Sirisena



“My father was a teacher and he was handling scouts. Children used to come to learn art from my mother. I can remember my mother used to turn old gramophone discs to beautiful decorations and I was memorised with this world,” says Givantha elated by his memories.

“At the age of 3, I was able to read the newspaper and at the age of four my father told me to read the newspaper upside down and I was able to do that too” says Givantha how his father moulded him to be different person.

“At the age of 5 we got a radio and my father told me to read what is in the newspaper in style of news reading in radio. So I was following the giants in the radio art like Cyril Rajapaksa and Karunaratne Abeysekera,” Givantha said.

Several decades later what Givantha was taught by his father has yielded and today he is being used to record the Bible for dramatized reading by the Ceylon Bible Society.

For 2nd standard class Givantha came to Wesley College and that was the turning point in his life. “My class teacher was great actor Cyril Wickremage who was 22 years elder to me,” said Givantha.

In the next standard there was a teacher called Miss Ivy Marasinghe. That was Prof. Walter Marasinghe’s aunt. She was a good artist. She was my class teacher and I was in the hostel. We were given the opportunity to watch 16 mm cartoon films during the weekend and there I first witnessed the cartoon characters like Donald Duck and Mickey Mouse. I inquired from the teacher as to how to make a cartoon film and teacher asked me whether I was really interested in learning it. And two weeks later she gave me a comprehensive lesson on cartoon film making. I later came to know that she had gone to the British Council

and had read about cartoon filmmaking and this was just to answer my curious question, says Givantha who was ever grateful to Ms. Ivy for introducing him to the world of cartoon.

This lead Givantha to make a cartoon film and he met film-maker Bermin Lylie Fernando. It was 1971 and I have the basic drawing and I did 'Andare'. Since there was no animation camera we used to shot the each drawing with film camera, cut frames and glue them to make 1440 frames for one minute of the film. It was shot in small parts, develop it and negatives are glued, Givantha explained the magic of animation film-making.

Givantha busy with his work



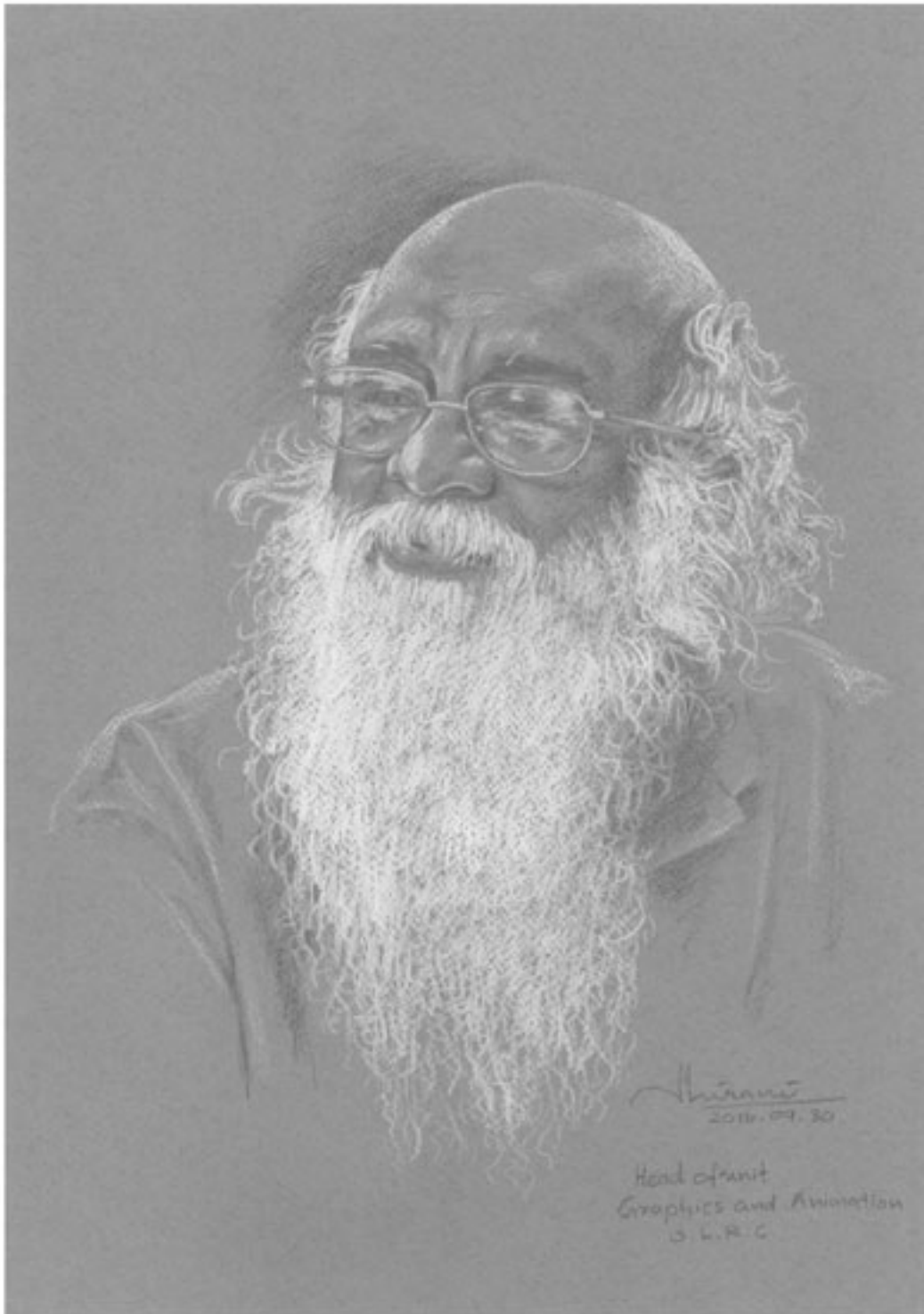
It was the time when short films like Dharmasena Pathiraja's 'Sathuro', D. B. Nihalsinghe's 'Bakthi' and Sunil Ariyaratne's 'Saragee', Parakrama Silva's 'Bhagna Asha', P. V. Perera's 'Manasgee' were screened. The screenings were organised by the Film Critics and Journalists Association and there were writers like Sunil Perera, Leslie Botheju and Gamini Haththottuwegama who were writing on them. Givantha got an opportunity to screen my film among above mentioned film.

Before making Dutugemun, Givantha made about ten short films and he believes that it was this experience seasoned him to make the cartoon film.

Givantha is grateful to Dr. Lester Peries and Mrs. Peries who gave him the idea of making an 'Optical printer'. After making the animation film, I went to meet Dr. Peries and it was he who gave me the idea to make the optical printer.

When the television medium was started in 1982, Givantha had to do a leading role in the television industry. He was all rounder working in almost all the departments. He was instrumental in introducing two Christian programmes 'Sudasuna' or Bonavista for Christian and 'Supuwatha' made by Fr. Benedict Joseph for Catholics. "Even the thematic music of the Catholic programme made by me is played," Givantha said.

However several years ago Givantha had to prematurely retire from SLRC as he was facing a problem with vision. This was against the decision of many of his seniors has his knowledge, The experience and dedication was irreplaceable. Years later Givantha still continue to work and share his knowledge and he believes that it was God's calling and he was serving in His field.



A portrait of Givantha done by Shirani, Head of Graphics and Animation Department of SLRC, the post earlier held by Givantha himself.



**A SCREEN PRINTED POSTER FOR 'DUTUGEMUNU', THE FIRST ANIMATED CARTOON FILM IN SRI LANKA.**  
Started the production of 'DUTUGEMUNU', on 29th June, 1976 & finished on 24th December, 1978 and Released on 19th October, 1979.  
'DUTUGEMUNU', CREATED BY GIVANTHA ARTHASAD, IN HIS AGE OF 25 YEARS.