

# Uncle Gamini

## And the British

TAMBIMUTTU

**H**EARTY Uncle Gamini, Oxford double Blue (boxing and cricket), is the pride of our Ceylonese family. As a southpaw bantamweight youth he showered glory on Ceylon. The resident Englishmen and Scotsmen patronized him in a make-believe that he was near-English himself.

Uncle Gamini had been the first Sinhalese to shine in an Inter-Varsity Meet, and he had even shaken hands with King George VI during one of those cricket fixtures called Gentlemen vs. Players—the players being professionals and the others being, well, gentlemen, which was all to the good.

Under British Protection, which lasted until 1948, it was good to play cricket. "Well played, sir!" meant approval, and "That was not cricket," condemnation. It was the most democratic game invented. It all depended on teamwork. Which was the reason Uncle Gamini toiled manfully in the murderous hot sun, six hours a day, two days a week and sometimes three, as if to say he was good as any Englishman. Some thought the long-drawn-out and phlegmatic game injurious to the human system in the tropics. The shorter games like polo and field hockey, both Indian games, were being adopted by the British, along with jodhpurs and pajamas.

### Good Fellows All

Uncle Gamini flourished under the British. He swilled beer in the Colombo cricket pavilion and sang "Wrap Me Up in My Old Tarpaulin Jacket" and "Tipperary" in his fruity Ceylonese voice. When he produced his *pièce de resistance*, "Maquita, Maquita, I Love You, Maquita," it brought the house

down, and the Cockney cricketer from Cargills, Ltd., who was barred from the Princes and Garden Clubs because of his accent, soon became starry-eyed. Uncle Gamini's only regret was that he could not fox-hunt in England every year with the Much Hadham Pack, along with his friend Sir Marcellus Wijeyesinghe. However, he consoled himself by being measured for a rifle in Bond Street and popping it off on Ceylon's elephants, leopards, and wild boar. Though he does not own a fox brush like Sir Marcellus, he boasts of other trophies.

Immaculate in his Savile Row suits and bespoke footwear from Bond Street, Uncle Gamini was popular at the Lawn Club, the Orient Club, and the Havelock Golf Club, where he downed quantities of Johnnie Walker whisky in the best of company. He was real pukka. On weekdays he rode his strawberry roan round Victoria Park with the English gentry. We were all very proud. On Sundays he drove a four-in-hand down the red gravel of the Galle Face, in front of the world-famous hotel of the same name. The

glossy victoria, bound in shining brass, was English.

**I**N SPITE OF his British Rugger-type attitude, Uncle Gamini is a poet. He once showed me a poem he had written about the seaside resort of Chilaw:

*Prancing prawns and sea-shell's swoon,  
These at sunset Chilaw is.*

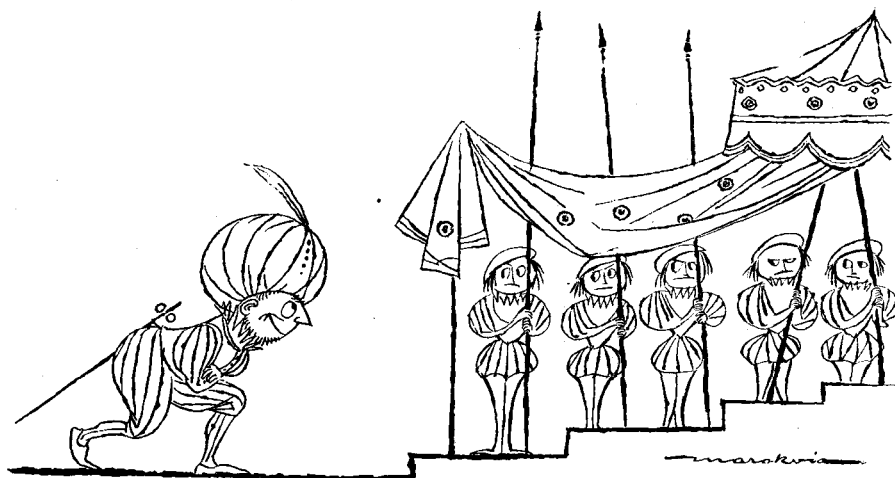
It was written in English, of course, —in the best romantic tradition, or so Uncle Gamini thought. The more fashionable Ceylonese poets had begun to write stanzas like this:

*And should an English landscape ever pall,  
With all its wide diversity of hills  
And trees and waters, lo! the fresh breeze fills  
Our welling canvas at the Poet's call!  
Where shall we wander? In the fields of France?  
Or classic Italy's wave-saluted shores?  
Or dearer Scotland's barren heaths and moors?*

—from the pen of the celebrated Govind Chunder Sutt. As always, Uncle Gamini was quick on the uptake, and always on the mark. That is why we respected and admired him.

He was irrepressible in his admiration of the British. One Sunday, long ago, I must tell you, he accompanied the District Magistrate and the Superintendent of Police to the scene of a crime. He was a fledgling lawyer then, about to defend a murderer.

On the way, the Magistrate's wife was dropped off at the Sunday fair.



When the journey was resumed, Uncle Gamini lit a cigarette without permission. "Mr. Gamini, dear sir," protested the Magistrate, "you must not smoke. You must understand the Court is still sitting. It's a legal fiction, so to say, of course, but wherever the Magistrate goes, the Court goes." Uncle Gamini apologized suitably, and threw the cigarette out the window.

On the return journey, the carriage stopped at the fair to pick up the Magistrate's wife, whereupon Uncle Gamini gallantly volunteered to look for the lady. He jumped out of the carriage, wandered about the crowd for a while, and returning announced in his best Court manner: "Sir, the Court's wife wishes me to inform the Court that the Honourable Court's wife is busy buying vegetables."

### Gentlemen, The Queen!

After years of monkeying at the bar, Uncle Gamini has become rich and is now Member of Parliament for Colombo South. He was, of course, one of the United National Party M.P.s who voted to keep Ceylon in the British Commonwealth. He is in the public eye, and contrives to remain there by sponsoring beauty competitions among village girls all over the island. Though this foreign institution is anathema to the people, it gets him into the English-language papers that are read in Colombo. Perhaps it is for this same reason that he has acquired, as have other public men such as Sir Bougainvillaea Weerasekera, Sir Tudor Tissera, and Sir Samarasekera Lunuwilla, a string of race horses. The Colombo Race Meet rivals Ascot, and surpasses it in the colorful saris, blouses, and sunshades that protect the ladies.

Uncle Gamini, in common with most of his friends, believes in English education. Most of them have been to England or the English-style University of Ceylon. The Varsity Rag in Ceylon far outdoes Cambridge or Oxford, both in virulence and brilliance. And Uncle Gamini never misses the Royal-Thomian or the Law-Medical cricket matches. Based on the Eton-Harrow matches, these events gain in accoutrements every year, whereas the Eton boys no longer wear their top hats.

SINCE THE DAWN of independence, Uncle Gamini's ties with the British have grown stronger than ever. His three sons are being educated in England, while his daughter copes with English thought at Cheltenham Ladies' College. He hopes she will be presented at Court next year.

He himself hopes to be knighted by Queen Elizabeth, towards which end he is engaged in many charitable and other works. In some of the commercial firms that he owns,

the principals are Englishmen recently imported from England, and many of his friends are knights—Sir John Kotelawala, Sir Edward Nugewala, Sir Chittampalam Gardiner, Sir Claude Corea, Sir Donatus Victoria, and Sir Oliver Goonetilleke.

His name was not among those honored at New Year's, but we all hope that Uncle Gamini's fondest dream will be realized when the Queen's next birthday honors are published.

# The Unpopular Passenger

## A Short Story

ROBERT K. BINGHAM

SNOW was falling out of the dark into the tiny cones of light under street lamps down below as the plane circled to land at Cleveland. When the hostess saw that I was awake and that my safety belt was already fastened, she smiled efficiently and moved on down the aisle, waking the other passengers and asking them to fasten their safety belts. I did not make the effort to return her smile but turned again to look down on the miniature suburbs below.

The young soldier sitting next to me stretched awake and looked out the window too. "Must be a late party at that house," he said through a yawn. He pointed to where the lights were on in one half of a brick two-family house on a street of unlighted but otherwise identical brick two-family houses. Or somebody dying, was my first thought.

Being awake at three or four in the morning, sober and bored, waiting only for a certain time to elapse or a certain distance to be traveled, reminded me inevitably of my own days and nights as a soldier, of an emptiness in which at last even the too familiar prospect of death loses its power to provoke emotion.

After hovering uncertainly in the

air, the plane settled clumsily on the ground, stumbled to a stop, and then waddled into the brightly lighted area around the terminal building, wheezing and gasping. "One hour and forty-five minutes late," declared a resonant bass voice several seats behind me. "I told them we'd be there at a decent hour, but at this rate we won't be there before dawn." Several other passengers glanced at their wrist watches.

Those of us who were getting off

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