

The evolution of a Technocrat

Dr Sisira Ranatunga: A Trek of 47 years

Compiled by P.P. Perera

When I requested Sisira, to explain clearly in a few words, "who he is", his instantaneous response was "a person who has courage to face challenges". This prompted me to do an exploration, to in to his distant past and background to understand what made him what he is today.

A village boy, six years old, walking over the village roads and paddy fields to go to Wethalawa Primary School, in Uva- Paranagama, and a boy used to play cricket in the paddy fields, are scenarios, which are very close to my heart, reminding me of my own rural childhood, albeit a generation gap of about 23 years. He is the 10th in a family of 11 children, as per our own cultural and social traditions, which began to erode, in the early 70s with the forced introduction of the Western driven concept of the "small family". He is from a fairly affluent village family, his father being a higher up in the village administration and a farmer. He was brought up amidst traditional values of hospitality and community cooperation and harmony, which were the hallmarks of the rural society, a couple of decades ago

Sisira reverently honors his late eldest brother, whom he considers as the guiding beacon of his life, a by-product of Maspanna MV, in Welimada, who served as an Additional Secretary to three Prime Ministers of Sri Lanka.

The foundations for the gradual unfolding of his scholarly life was laid first at Wethalawa and later at Maspanna MV. He had a flair for mathematics from his early school days. He remembers with gratitude the devotion of some teachers such as Ms Rathnasiri, Lesley and Swarnalatha, who guided him in mathematics, English and Sinhala respectively. Having completed the O/Ls with very good results, he was admitted to St. Anthony's College Kandy. The boarding life at the college hostel, provided valuable experience to develop independency and interdependency. Although he was elected to the engineering faculty of the University of Peradeniya, after his A/Ls in 1989, he had to await three years to commence his studies, due to disturbances during the period 1988 -1991. He made use of this time to improve his knowledge of English. He excelled in his studies at the university and passed the BSc in Engineering in 1996,



His field of studies was manufacturing and industrial engineering and the elective subject was control, and automation. I keep wondering, whether the selection of this field was by default or by design, as this was an area of high demand in the merging industry needs. Nevertheless, this seem to have a significant bearing on his entire career path. He joined Loadstar of the Jinasena Group as a Trainee engineer in 1995. This appears as the move that glued him to the rubber and polymer industry for the ensuing period of 47 years.

Loadstar proved to be the platform for gaining valuable knowledge and experience as well as for the application of the academic knowledge he gained at the university. His career at Loadstar as Operations Engineer, involved integrated production and engineering systems. In 1998, he joined He joined Arpitation Compact Soles (Pvt.) Ltd, as Engineering Manager and continued as Factory Manager, till 2006 during which he made significant contributions to new product developments for creating new markets. If my memory serves me right, I think it was during his career at Arpitation, that I first met him, at Associated Motorways, where I was working. It was on doing some compounding using the latter company's mixing facility. I found him to be cheerful and dynamic person. He played a key role in arranging the annual cricket matches between the two companies, which were always enjoyable get-togethers.

He is strongly convinced that the turning point in his career was the successful completion of the MSc in Polymer Technology from the University of Moratuwa, which 2003. This paved way to widen his knowledge and perspectives on the diversity of polymer technology.

Subsequently he had a distinguished career of 15 years, at Elastomeric Engineering co: Ltd as General Manager from 2006. His devotion, hard work and commitment enabled him to serve as a Steering Group Member of three Hexpol Companies and as Global Head of Hexpol Engineered Production system (Lean Management).

The following can be listed as the remarkable milestones he achieved at Elastomerics:

- ✓ A 15-year journey towards business excellence - Transforming of a conventionally managed loss-making business to a profit making and a professionally managed sustainable organization and driving towards meeting the 4th industry revolution challenges.
- ✓ Regaining and expansion of solid tyre business by organization re-structuring, product reverse engineering and introducing new products range
- ✓ Implementation of lean concept at Hexpol 9 plants in USA, Sweden and China
- ✓ Team leader of Hexpol global production team
- ✓ Commercialization of economical composites caster wheels using greener materials.
- ✓ Initiation and implementation of Hexpol advanced technical and design centre in Sri Lanka.

While heavily engaged in his working life, he continued his education and further knowledge acquisition.

By completing his PhD in Polymer Technology, in 2015 at the University of Sri Jayawardenapura His field of speciality was polymer composites and simulation. He is very grateful to Prof: Lalin Karunanayaka for encouraging him to do the doctorate .

During 2021 he joined Global Rubber Industries (Pvt) Ltd as Director Manufacturing and he cites the rationale as serving the local company with the wide knowledge he gained over his career, which he feels is a national obligation of any professional groomed through the free education system in Sri Lanka. It is timely decision as this is the opportune time for the local rubber and tyre industry, to forge ahead as world leader in industrial tyre manufacture.

The contributions, he has made to the companies he has worked are innumerable and list is very exhaustive to be published in a short review. During his career he also got valuable opportunity to participate in overseas training programmes, in Ahmedabad, Cochin. Singapore, Japan, Malaysia, Thailand and UK, which further enabled him to widen his knowledge and perspectives.

He is also a Fellow of the Plastics and Rubber Institute of Sri Lanka, and has served diligently in the capacity as Assistant Secretary and Secretary to the Education Advisory Committee. He also served as the Secretary of the Sri Lanka Association of Manufacturers and Exporters of Rubber Products and during his tenure accomplished organizing two very successful workshops for the tyre industry with the financial assistance from the EDB.

Sisira has many scholarly and technical publications to his credit, and continues to synergize scholarly knowledge with industry practice for the benefit of the industry.

Finite element analysis and simulation happens to be his forte and presenting the proposal to establish the FEAS Centre to the Ministry of Plantation Industries through the PRI to the Govt of SL to establish the above centre as the collaboration of Ministry of Plantation Industries,



PRI and SLAMERP at the RRI Ratmalana 2018, can be considered as one of his key innovative endeavors.

Sisira is married to Priyadarshini, who is teacher, and they are blessed with three wonderful boys, Dumindu, Sevindu and Yevindu, who seem to have inherited the attitude for mechanical innovations and the love for musical instruments from their father.

Sisira's Personal Statement is ***To be a catalyst in the field of Polymer Technology by continuous learning and innovation, providing synergy and leadership to the organization to transform to next paradigm by adapting Triple Helix Business Model and worlds best Practices.***

His leadership philosophy is to be an example and personnel involvement in fostering my personnel values of trust, respect, openness, teamwork and intelligence. Decisions are based on analytical thinking, facts, figures and substantive argument.

Long-term strategic planning to align my vision with organization by inspiring a shared vision and challenging any process in such a way that enhances working as a good team player.

From my long experience of the rubber and polymer industry for 53 years, I would consider Sisira in the fast expanding category of Technocrats, which has a vital role to play in developing the national economy.

The journey from a remote village in Uva Paranagama, to come to the position he enjoys is remarkably is great achievement accomplished through his own determination and perseverance

In his work Twelfth Night, infamous playwright, wordsmith, William **Shakespeare** tells us not to fear greatness: "Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them. I consider Sisira in the second category. The first is for the royalty, while the third is for the politicians.



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