



OUR LAND OF HYPOCRISY

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Sunil Perera shows the LT what he usually keeps under his famous hat.

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In the July issue, Sunil Perera, leader of *The Gypsies*, spoke candidly to us about the sad state of Sri Lankan politics that has influenced his new album and concerts. We left him seething at the hypocrisy of media censorship. However, it soon became apparent that that was not the only dinner conversation issue he felt strongly about. Sunil went on to talk about sex, religion and family.

SUNIL PERERA ON SEX
Sunil Perera has few reservations when it comes to talking about his personal life, but he says he finds it difficult to give answers to the Sinhala media because of the way it expresses itself. "It can be very damaging," he says. "Now, see: in English, if you say sex, it doesn't sound that bad, but say, in Sinhala, if

you say *sansargaya* or *lingika sambandatha*, people get the wrong impression. They might think that I'm a cad, or a sex maniac or something like that".

Sunil is neither of those two things, but he does seem to like sex rather a lot. I asked him whether he would rather give up music or sex, and he answered that sex was number

one priority. Later, he said only half-jokingly, "People come and ask me 'Do you read any books?'. I say, 'Yes, I have some books. You might be interested, but the thing is - I read mainly about sex". Sunil gives a wide cheeky grin. "If I grab a magazine, I try to see whether it has anything with regard to sex which is the most impor-

tant thing in my life. If I could lay my hands on a book or video or DVD or anything that I feel could enhance my relationship with my wife, I would definitely go for it. I wouldn't think twice about the price - I would just buy it. I think, in my life, my system is such that, that *that* is there all the time. The need is very high. Unless you have a

very understanding wife who realises that, you're going to hit a bad patch".

If I had doubted that Sunil's wife was understanding, I was convinced of it after Sunil showed us the new roof garden he was putting up on his house. I said that it would be an ideal place to have a barbecue or a party. "Yes", said Sunil, "We

could have a party, but..." Sunil paused, rubbed the back of his neck sheepishly, and leaned forward as if to tell us a secret. "You can do a lot more things than just have a party up here," he said.

At one point Sunil was being so honest about his personal life that I was unsure how much of it was off the record. He said, "Yes, that's okay, because everybody is like that. I haven't raped a girl or anything like that."

Sunil Perera is one of the few Sri Lankans who is this open about sex. He thinks Sri Lankans are hypocritical in the way they attempt to portray an artificially pious image despite it being entirely inconsistent with their behaviour. In his own life, he openly admits to having made mistakes in the past that he now regrets. "Sometimes you make mistakes in life because your biological needs override everything else", he says.

Sunil shares the opinion that many men in Sri Lanka - even respected family men - cheat on their wives and visit prostitutes. This fact is kept well hidden. "You can never say by looking at that person that this bugger could do things like this... but, there is something lacking in him. That's why he's hunting. So, to stop the hunt, you got to be fed. And, only your wife can do that for you".

Jehan Mendis: What is most important in a marriage?

Sunil Perera: Sex.

JM: Why is sex so important?

SP: Because, if you have a very good sexual relationship with your wife, then you are a complete man. And also, if you have a fantasy, you should try and make it a reality with your wife. Not with an outsider..."

JM: How do you feel about homosexuality in society?

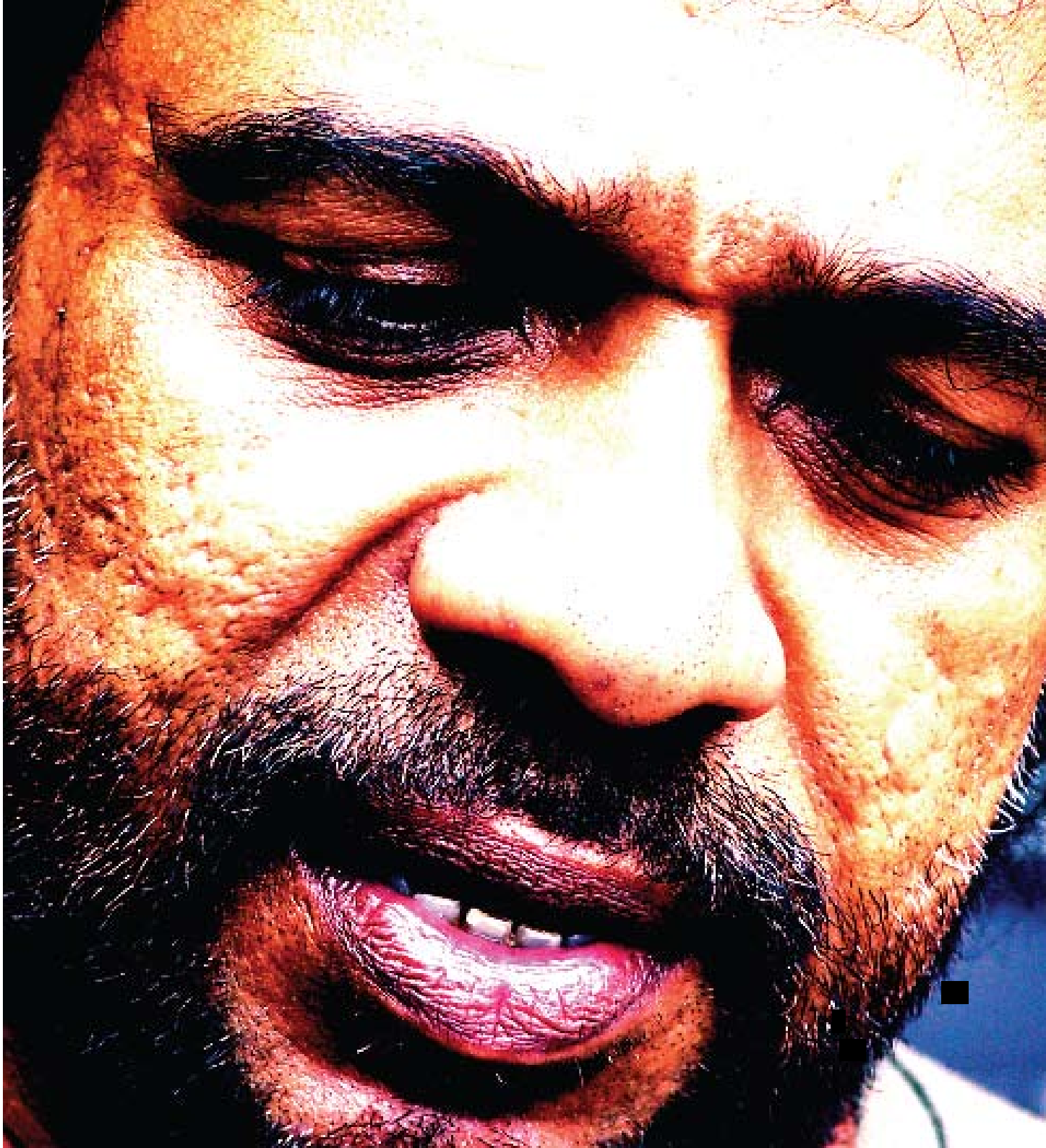
SP: Homosexuality is something that if you're born with it, don't go to attack it. What can they do? If I don't like a woman, I don't like it. If I like a man, I like a man.

JM: Do you like any type of sex that is not mainstream?

SP: All your fantasies should be made into reality, otherwise you are not a complete man... In sex there's nothing called "bad". You wouldn't say that there's anything dirty or perverted if the two parties agree.

Timothy Seneviratne: Right now, are you complete?

SP: I am. It is a beautiful thing. Couples walk in and people say "Oh, what a lovely couple". You go to their house and see: they live in separate bedrooms, outward appearance is fantastic. That is why I like the white man: if they don't like each other, if they feel that they are not enjoying themselves, they are not having fun, they split.



JM: In one of your songs, you sing “Piti kotapang, nonay. Piti halapang, nonay. Heta ujeta kannata mata indi-appang onay” [Pound the flour, wife. Sift the flour, wife. I want string-hoppers for breakfast]. Do you ever actually say that to your wife?

SP: [Sunil smiles] My wife is not a person who will force things on my life. She is a person who is very much focused on the family and also would do anything for me. And we have a beautiful relationship. And one strong factor is I think the sexual aspect to life. It's complete.

There's one song - we haven't recorded it yet - that's also about my life, where I'm telling my wife “*Nona mata samwanna ona*” [Wife, you must forgive me]. You can guess what it's about. “*Nona mata samawanna ona. Mamath lay mas velin hadditcha minihak. Magay athing varadi wuna thamai. Giya deval giya. Eva gannang ganna epa. Nona mata sama vanna ona.*” [Wife you must forgive me. I am only a man made of flesh and blood. I have made mistakes. Let bygones be bygones. Wife, you must forgive me]. Because I love my wife. I love my wife, and she is everything to me.

When Sunil heard that I was engaged, he gave me some valuable advice. “...Your sex life has to be priority - priority. If



you want your marriage to be like what it is today in another 35 years or 25 years. Make sure you have that thing working all the time. All the time. If that is there, nothing will go wrong.” Obviously, I just could not wait to tell my fiancée about this.

SUNIL PERERA ON RELIGION

Sunil feels that the prevalence of sexual abuse in Sri Lanka is indicative of a sick society. He sees the popular notion that Sri Lankan values are somehow morally superior to that of the

West as inherently hypocritical. He showed us a scrapbook of relevant newspaper articles that he keeps to convince people - especially journalists - who might resist this idea. “You buy the Lankadeepa and see”, he says. “Everyday there is a sickening story. There is a case near our house where there's a father sleeping with his own daughter. This is what I say: why do you project a nice clean image of Sri Lanka? Tell the foreigners: in Sri Lanka, fathers sleep with their own daughters, so many uncles have raped their

own nieces, and there was a case in Moratuwa - a nine month old child. *Oya Minihata nathi wenna gahuwa* [They beat that man senseless]”. “But what do we show on the outside? ‘Oh, we're a Buddhist country. Unlike the West, we're a Buddhist country. These things do not happen here.’ Buddhist country?! Buddhist country *kiyala kiyanna epa* [Don't say we're a Buddhist country]. Buddhist country *kiyala kiyana kota* [If you say we are a Buddhist country] all these outsiders might think

that Buddhist country means all these dirty things happen. Ah? Don't ever say this is a Buddhist country. ‘This is a Christian country’ *kiyapang. Ethakota umbala tikak shape* [Say that this is a Christian country. Then you will somewhat okay]. Or, say this is a Muslim country. At least then, the Christians or the Muslims will get the blame.” Sunil is a Christian. He says, “I'm not trying to run down Buddhism. My wife is a Buddhist”. He did not need convince me because, by now, I had heard enough to realise

that Sunil is a true liberal and therefore, tolerant of all religions. However, the false piety and conservatism propagated through the likes of the priests in politics had clearly irritated him. When I asked Sunil about the Anti-Conversion Bill, he answered animatedly by acting out a hypothetical conversation. He is emphatic that if following a particular religion makes you a better person, the doctrine of the religion is largely irrelevant. “Now just suppose for example my son comes one day and tell me, ‘Thaatthi, I want to join a new religion...’

“What is the religion?”
 “We worship the coconut tree”.
 “The coconut tree?”
 “Yes”
 “Ah. So... you already have a sort of ‘clientele’ who have decided to worship the coconut tree?”

“Yes, and I think that there is a lot of truth in what the teachers of the religion say. We heard a talk the other day, and I was really taken up with it, and I thought to myself ‘I must join the coconut tree religion’”.

Am I going to argue with him? No, not if my son is a better person tomorrow by joining the coconut tree religion. That is what I want. Religion is there to guide the man to be a better man. Man is not there to safeguard the religion... Here, the people are fighting over it. It is



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absurd. If you become a better person by becoming a Buddhist or by becoming a coconut tree man or worshipping a Mercedes Benz... If my son is a better person tomorrow, I'll tell my other son also "Aiya, is a better person, you also better join the Mercedes Benz religion".

"All these leaders Jesus Christ and Lord Buddha and all these people wanted man to be better, help each other. So, if you're a better person tomorrow by joining the Jehovah's Witnesses or Sai Baba, I would say "very good".

SUNIL PERERA ON FAMILY

We left the Torana Studio and went to Sunil's office and the Gypsies own recording studio in the premises of the Glucorasa factory, which is owned by Sunil's extended family. Later, Sunil took us to his home in Ratmalana where we met his beautiful wife and daughters. I asked about his family.

JM: Are you fostering your childrens' talent like your father did yours?

SP: Very much. Only thing is I have told them: doing all

this Dire Straits and Queen and Elton John and all this is okay to get your grounding, but, you *have* to write your own songs. If you want to make a name for yourself, I've always told them - do your own thing, and also: *don't ever follow me...* One of my sons is all the time trying to sing my songs. I don't mind anybody else singing them, but my sons, no. ...Don't try to make it with your father's influence.

JM: How is your sons' band Jada doing?

S: My son is writing some crazy [songs]... Totally different, blackguarding a girl - he had

had some relationship and he's off with that girl. My brother also listened to it and he said, "Don't try to change it, because that is what is coming out." It's his thing. We shouldn't try to change it. Let him write what he feels.

JM: How are you different from your father?

SP: My father was also very much like me. [Sunil gives a broad cheeky grin]. My mother must have had the same problems as my wife.

"I don't think what I have done for my children is even one percent of what my father

has done for me", Sunil went on to say. He remembered his father's supportive reaction when expressed his desire to become a musician after he had crashed his O'Levels: "...you're not going to be just another musician. I want you to be somebody... Your presence should be felt. Somebody out of the ordinary."

And certainly, Sunil has proved his father right. For all his fame and success, however, Sunil is a very easygoing, fun-loving man. He is perceived as always being game for a party. I asked him what his drink of choice was and he replied, "Anything. Kasiputh gahanawa [even moonshine]. Especially, when we go outstation and all that...". He proceeded to tell us a hilarious account of a fan that was in the habit of popping up at his fence with a small flask of home brew to share.

"First thing he does is, he takes a drink. Now, I don't feel like drinking - but if I don't drink, he feels hurt. But, if he is a suicide bomber type of drinker, then he should die first, but he'll kill me also. When I drink, he loves that. 'Sunil aiya, kohomada badu'? [Brother Sunil, how is the stuff?] 'Maru!' [Great!] You have to do it". Sunil does not like to disappoint his fans.

Despite his negative view of the status quo in Sri Lanka, Sunil Perera (or 'Sunil Aiya' [big brother Sunil] as he is known to his fans) is a man who loves

his country. This is obvious when you watch the music video of "Our Land" which is used on television to promote peace. It is because of his deep love of country that Sunil feels so disgusted at those who are responsible for the decay of his ideal. However, for his fans, he has a sense of responsibility that is reflected in his efforts not to disappoint them. "There was one incident where [the band] went to Chilaw, and this girl invited us for lunch", he says. "I said lunch was tricky, so, they called us for tea and we agreed. So, we went for tea, and we were delayed... and got there at about seven. We were given some food which was a bit stale. The term we used was 'guarantee period'. The sandwich was close to the date of expiry. I said [to the others] "Eat! *Hetana bada yannay. Mama kivva "Kapang!"*. [You will suffer only tomorrow. I told them "Eat"] 'They wanted you all to come with so much of love, so if you don't have a bloody engagement tomorrow, poddak palayang kakussiyata! oka makkakda? [Go to the toilet. What's the big deal?] ...because you have to please the people. We have to do certain things sometimes like that."

Sunil Perera is a beautiful Sri Lankan. ☺