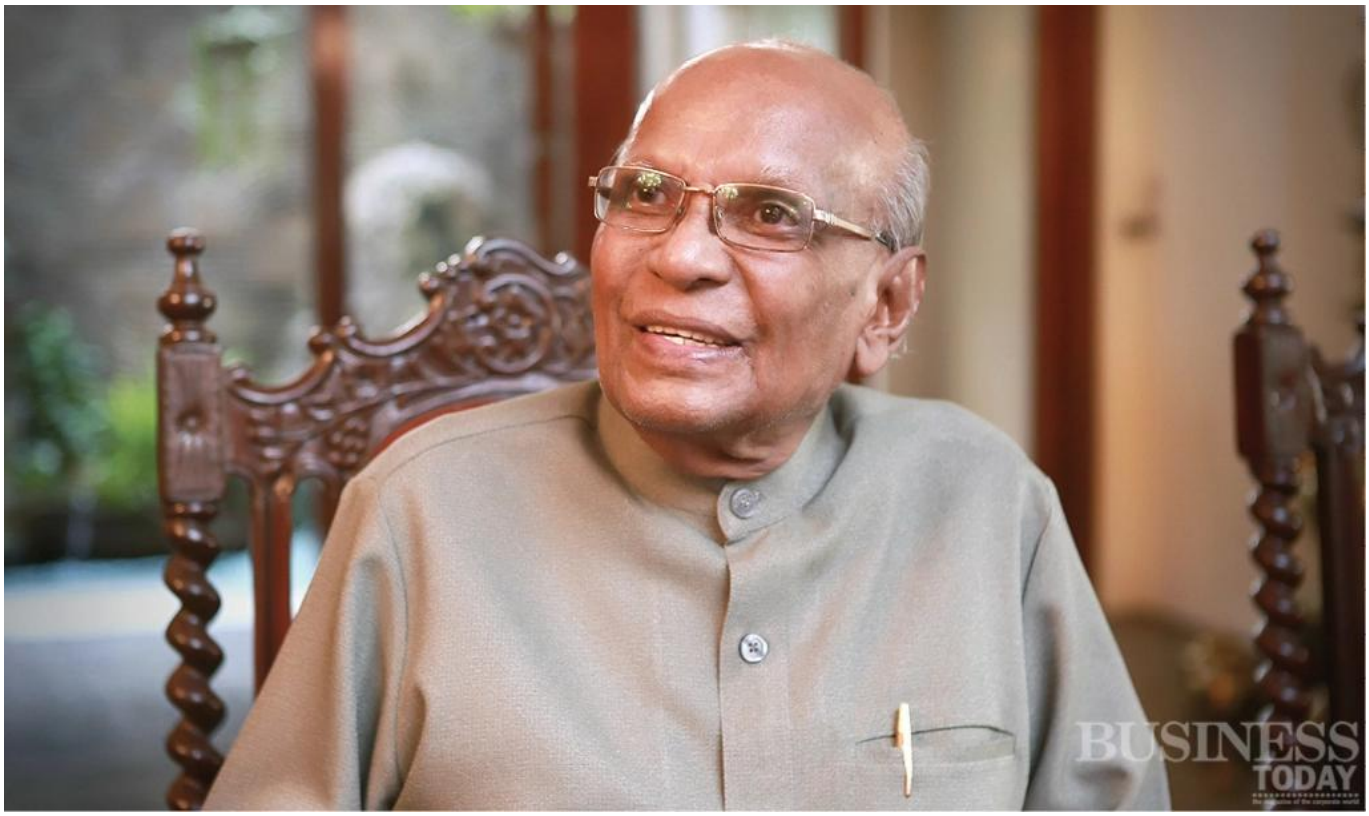
A Self Made Man



Professor Wilfred Perera is one of Sri Lanka's pioneering obstetricians and gynaecologists who has worked tirelessly towards upholding the rights of women in Sri Lanka.

By Keshini de Silva
Photography Vishwathan Tharmakulasingham

"We were a different generation of doctors," said Professor Wilfred Samuel Emmanuel Perera as he reminisced about his career at the milestone of his 90th birthday. As a self-made man, Prof Perera has left a lasting mark on the country's medical profession. Married for 60 years, he has three children, seven grandchildren

and a great grandchild. Born to Marcelline Perera and Josephine Perera; he attended St Aloysius College in Galle, later becoming the school's first student to enter the medical faculty of the University of Ceylon. Following a brilliant academic career, he attained a MBBS with honours in 1952, topping his batch. He completed clinical training at the De Soysa Hospital for Women and qualified as a Consultant in Obstetrics and Gynaecology in Liverpool, London. This being an achievement under the guidance of Prof Charles Wells – his trainer in Surgery, and Prof T N A Jeffcoate – his trainer in Obstetrics and Gynaecology. In 1973, Prof Perera became a Fellow of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists UK.

At Walton Hospital in Liverpool, Prof Perera authored a research paper on the management of abortions which was published in the British Medical Journal in 1961. Today, the legalisation of abortion is still an issue close to his heart. "I continue to write and lobby towards the legalisation of abortion in Sri Lanka. Currently, 1,000 illegal abortions take place in the country everyday. This is equal to the 1,000 births occuring daily. Many mothers die due to infections and complications. Therefore as a gynaecologist who took an oath to take care of women, especially during child birth, I cannot be silent on this matter. This is a significant issue that the country must address."

Prof Perera performed the first Wertheim's Hysterectomy for cervix cancer at the De Soysa Hospital and Maharagama Cancer Hospital, with Anaesthetist Dr Thistle Jayawardena. Whilst working as the Consultant of Obstetrics and Gynaecology at the state level, he provided services through a private practice at home too.

> **"We Must Protect And Empower The Women Of Sri Lanka. Or Else What Is The Point In What We As Medical Practitioners Do?"**

In the 1980s Prof Perera played an important role in the field of private medical education, being part of the establishment of the North Colombo Medical College. As well as being the founding Professor of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, he was also the Head of that Department. During a course of 15 years, NCMC trained 850 medical students; many are at present Consultants and Professors in various fields. Prof Perera stated, "Medical education is a must as WHO deems we should improve Sri Lanka's doctor-patient ratio. Sri Lankan medical education is also not on par with

technology available globally. Therefore, we do need private medical colleges. We established NCMC, which was nationalised and became the medical faculty of University of Kelaniya. I taught there for 15 years and our students do very well, some of them have become the country’s leading surgeons and consultants. In fact, I am the oldest obstetrician in the country at present.”

He has since been involved in training obstetricians and gynaecologists in both Sri Lanka and overseas. Looking back on his illustrious career and the medical profession, Prof Wilfred Perera adds, “We must protect and empower the women of Sri Lanka. Or else what is the point of what we as medical practitioners do?”