

# Shridath Ramphal

The Commonwealth and the World

ESSAYS IN HONOUR OF HIS 80th BIRTHDAY

Edited by Richard Bourne

HANSIB

Shridath “Sonny” Ramphal grew up in Guyana in the colonial era to become a leading spokesman of the free, independent, developing world in the last quarter of the 20th century.

For an unequalled stint of 15 years, from 1975 to 1990, he was Secretary-General of the Commonwealth of Nations. He served on a succession of international commissions, led by Willy Brandt, Gro-Harlem Brundtland, and Olof Palme and co-chaired one with Ingvar Carlsson.

Having been a key player in bringing an end to Ian Smith’s Unilateral Declaration of Independence and institutional racism in Southern Rhodesia, he spent much of his last five years as Secretary-General, until 1990, in the struggle to end apartheid in South Africa. He had the satisfaction of playing a part in Nelson Mandela’s release from prison in February 1990, and Namibia’s independence the following month.

Ramphal also gave intellectual leadership in trade and development, and the strengthening of multilateralism. He used the technique of the expert group, bringing together persons from different countries and backgrounds to make recommendations to governments. In the decade from 1977-87 alone he sponsored eleven expert groups, with a heavy emphasis on development and international economic issues. He was also ahead of his time in giving attention to environmental issues.

Sonny left the Commonwealth Secretariat as a still youthful 61. He was Chancellor of the Universities of Guyana and Warwick, and the University of the West Indies, and he went on to chair the West Indian Commission which charted a future for the Caribbean region in the 21st century, and he headed the regional negotiating machinery which sought a unified Caribbean trading response to the European Community, the United States and the World Trade Organisation. At the age of 79, he successfully led Guyana’s legal team before a United Nations Law of the Sea Tribunal that peacefully settled the maritime boundary with Suriname.

The essays in this Volume in honour of his 80th birthday in October 2008 provide glimpses of a remarkable career.

*Front cover:* Sonny Ramphal, Commonwealth Secretary-General, on a Marlborough House staircase, with paintings of the Duke of Marlborough’s victories in background

*Back cover:* A recent portrait



D Chi Non's

Deputy Chairman

Royal Comoros Society

Chairman

Mechnords.



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The Commonwealth and the World

To Dear Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad

With grateful thanks  
for your wonderful insights  
and perceptive analysis  
of the Malaysian experience  
which gives such hope to all  
our developing countries.

Dr Chin Norris



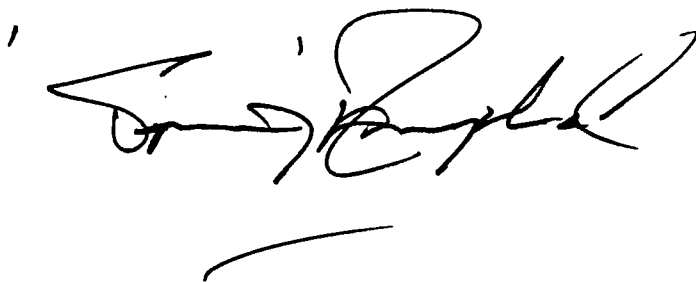
TUN DR. MAHATHIR MOHAMAD

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# For Sonny

*David Dabydeen*

The lumps of gold which Raleigh grasped  
For, digging up mountains, trawling  
Lakes, losing countless men, a beloved  
Son, his own sanity and head.  
His maps were confused, directionless.  
Gold slipped from his grasp  
Like breath. He brought back only  
News of the dead.

Three centuries and more since he sighted land.  
Another sea crossing, another stranger  
Came to El Dorado's shore,  
From India, shovel, cutlass in hand,  
Cleared space in the canefield, a manger  
For his wife. On the seventh day his work  
Was done. The child she bore:  
Shridath, pathway to a golden sun.

— ∞ —

*Professor David Dabydeen*, born in Guyana, won the Commonwealth Poetry Prize in 1984 and holds a chair in the Centre for Translation and Comparative Cultural Studies at Warwick University, of which Sonny Ramphal was Chancellor from 1989 to 2002.



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# Editorial Note and Acknowledgements

It has been a privilege to edit this collection. In the absence of any full-length biography of Shridath “Sonny” Ramphal, and with the inclusion of material and commentary which will be new to most readers, I believe that this is not just a tribute to a major international personality on his 80th birthday, but a lasting contribution to contemporary history.

As editor I have not sought to harmonise the different perspectives of our authors, to all of whom I owe deepest thanks. My concern has been with readability and the checking of facts. All the authors are extremely busy people. They have responded generously and speedily. Publication of this book is one of a number of celebrations for Sonny Ramphal, organised by a London committee chaired by Mrs Patsy Robertson, which has also promoted the Ramphal Centre, and a special lecture on his 80th birthday in October, 2008.

I would therefore like to acknowledge with thanks: each of our authors, in alphabetical order – Guy Arnold, Vincent Cable, Derek Ingram, Moni Malhoutra, James Manor, Rex Nettleford, Anthony Payne, Bishnodat Persaud, S K Rao, Patsy Robertson, Sir Ronald Sanders, Kaye Whiteman; those who have supplied and given permission for the reproduction of pictures – Lady Susan Sanders and the Ramphal family, the Commonwealth Secretariat (with thanks to Kevin Nellies), the Press Association and Oxford Mail; and particularly our publisher – Arif Ali of Hansib, and his colleagues; and other members of the Ramphal Centre Committee for their advice and encouragement. Finally I should like to thank my wife Juliet, who has provided invaluable IT assistance.

*Richard Bourne*

# List of illustrations

*Front:* Shridath Ramphal on a Marlborough House staircase

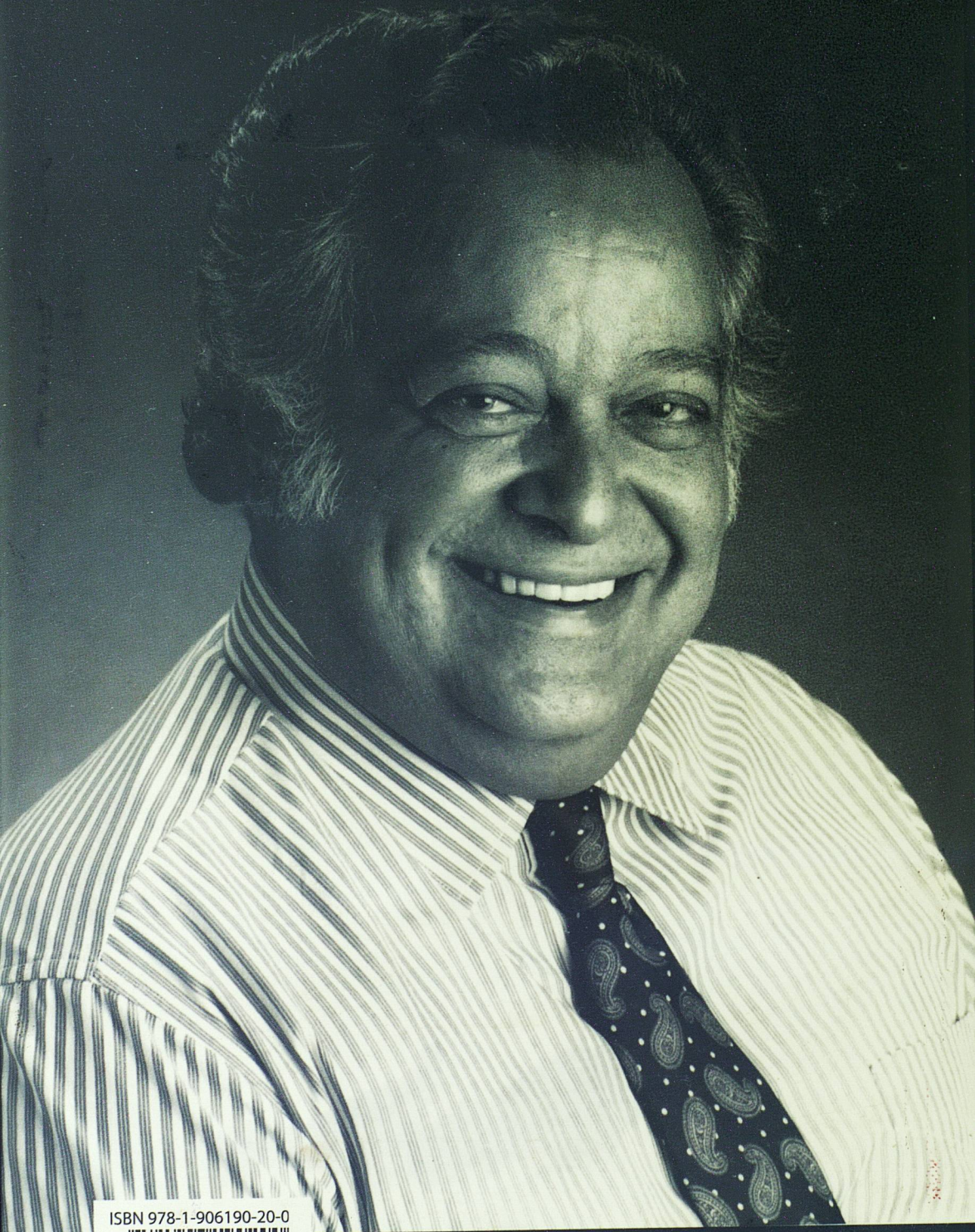
*Back:* A recent portrait

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- With his father, “J I” in British Guiana.
- British Guiana’s youngest “Silk”
- Chancellor of Warwick University, with his mother, Grace
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- At the annual Blenheim Palace cricket match
- With the Duke of Edinburgh
- At the UN Security Council in 1975
- With Willy Brandt
- With Lord Scarman

# Introduction

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