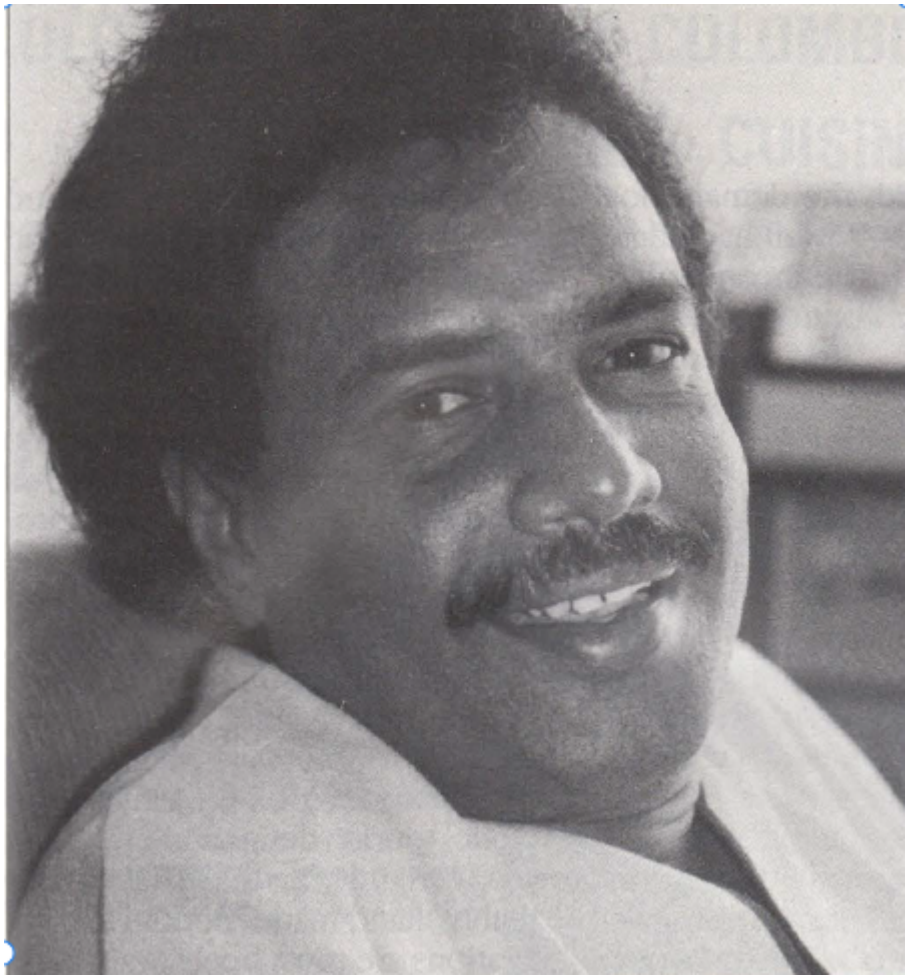
# Buddhi: Artist as Entrepreneur

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Throughout the ages the picture of the artist has not changed. He lives in misery, in agony – rarely attaining ecstasy – a picture more true today in the developing countries, where exploitation of talent and labour is more the norm than an. exception to the rule. Yet this story is about one artist who proved to be the exception. Buddhi Keerthisena, finding eloquent expression in batik, paints an ecstatic picture of success. The formula to his success: a blend of artistry based on

tradition and entrepreneurship. His secret: ‘Sheer hard work and perseverance!’ Buddhi’s Gallery at Marawila is one of the largest batik workshops in Sri Lanka. Despite the turbulence prevailing in the island, it still retains a permanent staff of more than 200 dedicated artists, designers, dye-masters and textile technologists of high professional calibre. Buddhi today is still one of the leading exporters of quality hand-made batiks. He has won international awards for his contribution to the batik industry; this, in addition to many national awards for his artistry and entrepreneurship. Tourism was booming in the early seventies. “I sat down and thought hard, fast and in clarity. Building tourist accommodation was not my line . . . it had to be aesthetic . . . it should give me satisfaction . . . so batik was the natural choice!” Buddhi launched his batik workshop in his backyard at Marawila. His lines and forms, the judicious blending of his colours, made his work stand out. He was encouraged by an ever-widening circle of fans to hold his first exhibition in Colombo. Soon his workshop and gallery at Marawila became a ‘must visit’ for tourists on the way to the wildlife sanctuary at Wilpattu or to the Ruined Cities through Puttalam. “And many a tourist showed keen interest in speaking to me about the process of batik making … and I, speaking with them, learnt the reasoning behind their taste and how they were attracted by traditiqnal lines, forms and motifs Buddhi was ready by now to have his work exhibited abroad. The tourist trade connections were certainly an incentive. Before long Buddhi’s hand-made batiks were on display at one-man exhibitions at Stockholm, Milan, Brussels, Vienna, Llnz, Frankfurt . . . then Tokyo, Bonn, New York and Amsterdam. Accelerated by these exhibitions and by participation in several international trade fairs, the demand for Buddhi’s hand-made batiks made him a leading exporter of the non-traditional variety.

In keeping with the demand for quality batiks – wall-hangings, scarves, dresses – he incorporated stringent quality control measures in production. He personally supervises the intricate process of handmaking batiks – selecting the finest quality materials, choosing designs and motifs, preparation and waxing, colour blending, dyeing and washing; and he has inculcated a sense of dedication to quality among his assistants. These steps make the batiks from his workshop special artistic creations of lasting aesthetic value. Today his garment factory in Colombo caters for large-scale commercial buyers while the workshop at Marawila continues making hand-coated batik creations for export and local marketing. From other artisans he has commissioned work on a piece-work basis. His success as an entrepreneur continues.

Recently, Buddhi realised another of his cherished childhood dreams when he began principal photography on a theatrical film: the re-make of the 1950’s box-office hit SUJA1HA. And now, on being appointed a Director of the Ceylon Tourist Board, he has undertaken a very arduous programme on a personal basis. His mission is to counter the adverse publicity resulting from the current turbulence around us. He is armed with a well-planned promotional package to motivate the foreign traveller to look on Sri I.anka as an exotic tourist detination . . . and also, certainly, as the place where quality hand-made Buddhi’s batik creations are most freely available!




Budhi’s showroom at Marawila.