



## **PERADENIYA ACADEMICS OF THE EARLY DAYS AND THEIR CONTRIBUTION TO SINHALA STUDIES**

**K.N.O. Dharmadasa\***

Department of Sinhala, University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka

### **ABSTRACT**

The contribution of the University of Peradeniya to the theatre and literary arts is well known. The 'Golden Era' of Peradeniya was characterized by a succession of truly phenomenal works in the fields of fiction, poetry, drama and other forms of literary creativity by towering figures such as Sarachchandra, Amarasekara, and Gunasinghe. However, it appears that the general belief is that Peradeniya's achievements during this 'golden era' were confined to these areas and did not extend beyond them. The scholarly achievements of the Department of Sinhala during the 50s and 60s have not received the recognition they deserve. This paper is an attempt to fill that void by bringing to light the critical contributions of Peradeniya academics particularly in the field of Linguistics during the hay days of the University.

**Key words:** University of Peradeniya, Golden Era, Scholarly Contributions, Language Studies

Sir Ivor Jennings, the founding Vice Chancellor and the guiding light of the University of Ceylon at Peradeniya for the first twelve years (1942-54), had this to say about the aim of university education:

To produce educated men and women in the fullest sense of the phrase; men and women capable of fulfilling any function in the world that may fall to their lot, citizens of high intelligence, complete

moral integrity and possessing energy, initiative, judgement, tact and qualities of leadership.

In retrospect, it is clear that our University was able to achieve this aim to a great extent during those initial stages and our graduates were able to prove that they were in fact capable of "fulfilling any function in the world that fell to their lot". Those who performed best at the final examinations, obtaining either first or

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\*Author e-mail:  
dharmadasa.kno@gmail.com

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upper second honours, were absorbed to the academic staff, depending on the availability of cadre positions in each department. It so happened that the very first teachers were by and large products of the Ceylon University College, affiliated to the University of London. These teachers had often been to British universities for post-graduate studies and had obtained post graduate qualifications, usually PhDs, from these institutions. Some of our initial academics were expatriates from Britain and some were from Indian universities. But once our university was inaugurated in 1942 and started producing its own graduates and recruiting the best of them to the academic staff, Sir Jennings' concept of university education was greatly fulfilled as far as manning the academia was concerned. Similarly, it was the products of our university who were recruited to the high ranking posts in the national bureaucracy, the most prestigious being positions in the Ceylon Civil Service. Other high posts in the administrative structure and the educational system were all manned by graduates of the national university. In retrospect we note that the smooth functioning of these systems was ensured by these "educated men and women of high intelligence, moral integrity, energy, initiative, judgement, tact and qualities of leadership". However, the aim of the present essay is to examine the contributions of those pioneering academics, particularly in Sinhala studies, during the 50s and 60s, which constitute the period popularly known as the 'golden age' of Peradeniya.

It is an accepted tradition in university academia that university teachers should, in addition to imparting knowledge to the students, be engaged in the creation of knowledge and contributing in a significant way to the corpus of knowledge available in their respective disciplines. As envisaged in the statement about university education by Sir Jennings quoted earlier, a university academic who is recruited from among those who performed

best at the final examination should have "energy, initiative and judgement". These qualities come into play when an academic engages in the creation of knowledge.

According to established norms in university academia, a new recruit to the university staff is placed on probation and is expected to obtain post graduate qualifications during this period of probation. It is only after fulfilling that requirement that s/he is confirmed in the post. The purpose of this requirement is to ensure the maintenance of academic standards in the university. When we mention academic standards, we need to remember that at the initial stages of our University, particularly during its first 15 years or so, there was a greater facility of obtaining scholarships and placements in British or American universities, as the medium of instruction was English. During the tenure of Sir Jennings as Vice Chancellor, the practice was to send all the final year examination answer scripts to British universities for second marking, after the initial marking done here by our own academics. Thus our graduates were equal to any from British universities at the time. Even in subjects like Sinhala, Tamil, Pali, and Sanskrit, which were taught in Swabasha, the services of eminent scholars from outside were enlisted for the second marking of papers. With such a mechanism in place, our university had the capacity to be ranked as one of the best in Asia, if not the world. Sir Jennings has stated in a radio broadcast he made over Radio Ceylon in December 1954 prior to his departure from the island that "I can assure you that the graduates of the University of Ceylon are equal in standard to graduates from any university in Europe".

At this point I should recall the fact that the Ceylon University College (1921-1942) which was an affiliate of the University of London did not have "a university atmosphere" as observed by Sir Jennings himself in his autobiography (Jennings 2005). In establishing

the University of Ceylon in 1942, two steps were taken to remedy this situation. Firstly, the University of Ceylon Ordinance drafted by Sir Jennings and enacted by the State Council, sought to establish the independence of the University from outside interference by vesting administrative authority in the Council and academic authority in the Senate. Earlier, the University College functioned under the Executive Committee for Education and was no more than a government department subject to interference by politicians and government officials. Secondly, by stipulating that the university should be a fully residential institution situated in a campus (in Peradeniya) specially designed for the purpose, it was ensured that apart from imparting knowledge via lectures, a well-rounded education was provided for moulding personalities “educated” in the fullest sense of the word.

The shifting of the university to the new campus in Peradeniya occurred over the 1951- 1952 period. Two years later in 1954 Sir Jennings completed his assignment in Sri Lanka and returned to England. Professor Ediriweera Sarachchandra who was among the first teachers in Peradeniya, who took part in the shift from Colombo and contributed immensely to creating the prestige the University enjoyed in the early days, had this to say about the campus:

One special feature of the Peradeniya campus was the facility it provided to the students to interact closely among themselves and with their teachers, engaging in intellectual discourse. There were discussions on books that were published. And then there were arguments and counter-arguments about critical theories. All this contributed towards the nurturing of the creative spirit (Sarathchandra 1985, p. 213).

The dramas *Rattaran* (1954), *Maname* (1956), *Kada Walalu* (1958), *Elawa Gihin Melawa Ava* (1959), *Wella Vehun* (1960), etc.

are instances which display the atmosphere of artistic activity that prevailed in Peradeniya during the 50s and early 60s. Along with that the literary creations of Gunadasa Amarasekara including *Ratu Rosa Mala* (1952), *Bhava Gita* (1955), *Karumakkarayo* (1955), *Uyanaka Hinda Liyu Kavi* (1957), and *Jeevana Suwanda* (1958), which appeared in the 1950s, and Siri Gunasinghe’s *Mas Le Nethi Eta* (1956), *Abinikmana* (1959), *Hevanella* (1967), and *Ratu Kekula* (1980), which appeared during the same period, also bear witness to the creative enthusiasm that prevailed at the time. In addition to these, critical evaluations by Ariya Rajakaruna, Wimal Dissanayake and others also contributed much towards nurturing the literary activity that centred around the Peradeniya University then. Thus the contribution of the university in the field of creative activity, theatre, novel, short story, and poetry, as well as in the field of literary criticism is public knowledge. But the university’s contribution to scholarship about which I intend to discuss in this essay, is not so well known.

When the idea of a university for Sri Lanka was first mooted in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century by the Ceylon University Association (1906), it was in the wake of a cultural revival which occurred in the latter half of the 19th century. As stated by Sir Ponanbalam Arunachalam, a leading figure in that movement, one of the primary aims of establishing a university in the island was to instil a sense of pride and value of their traditions, particularly the native languages and the national historical heritage, in the younger generation who were growing up in an alien cultural milieu. Although it took nearly two decades to realize the dreams of these nationalist thinkers, it is creditable that at least some initial steps were taken to give pride of place to the teaching of the national languages and national culture in a higher education institution. However, the Ceylon University College (1921), affiliated to the University of London, had little or no

space for these national cultural aspirations. But most significantly, the independent University of Ceylon established in 1942 gave recognition to the national cultural tradition by establishing a Faculty of Oriental Studies which was accorded primacy of status in the hierarchy of faculties in the new university. The departments of study in the Faculty were Sanskrit, Pali, Sinhala, Tamil, and Arabic. As time went by academics such as Prof O.H.D.A. Wijesekara, Dr. Jayadeva Thilakasiri, Dr. M.H.F Jayasuriya, Dr. Siri Gunasinghe, and Dr. Ratna Handurukande in Sanakrit, and Prof. K. Kanapathipillai, Prof V. Chelvanayagam, and Dr. S. Vithianandan in Tamil, Prof. G.P.Malalasekara, Prof. N.A. Jayawickrama, Dr. Jothiya Dheerasesekara, Dr. Lily de Silva, and Dr. D.J. Kalupahana in Pali were able to publish widely, making their contribution to knowledge.

If we are to recall the University College days, the first lecturer to be appointed to the Department of Sanskrit, Pali, and Sinhala was Rev. Suriyagoda Sumangala who held an MA from the University of Calcutta. His career which started with much promise ended suddenly with his resignation during the mid-1920s. The next noteworthy lecturer who joined the department was Rev. Rambukwelle Siddhartha who also held an MA from Calcutta. Unfortunately, his later career too ended with his sudden demise before the University came into being. The first professor of this department was Dr. G.P. Malalasekera, the well-known Pali scholar who took office in 1927.

The Department of Sinhala which was established after the new University came into being in 1942 had as its first professor, M.D. Ratnasuriya, who had been teaching in the School of Oriental and African studies (SOAS) in the University of London. The steps taken by Prof. Ratnasuriya to expand the vistas of Sinhala Studies should be given special attention. The syllabi of Sinhala

Studies from the days of the University College were designed to study the classical works concentrating on meaning, grammar, and history of the language. It was Prof. Ratnasuriya who inaugurated a course of study titled *Sanskruitiya* (culture) in the Sinhala syllabus, with the aim of studying not only the arts of the ancient Sinhalese but also the folk arts such as folk poetry, folk beliefs and customs, etc. which had hitherto been neglected if not despised by scholars in general. We have to mention here that some academics such as Dr. Malalasekara and Rev. Rambukwelle Siddhartha who taught during the University College days, had evinced an interest in folk literature, but no concrete steps had been taken for the study of folk culture until Prof. Ratnasuriya's time. It needs mention that a fine collection of Sinhalese masks used in Sinhala healing rituals and in folk theatre, collected by him remain a much valued possession of the university library. M.P. Ariyapala who joined the academic staff of the Sinhala Department in 1944, proceeded to SOAS in London in 1947 and engaged himself in a research on medieval Sinhalese Culture as reflected in the literary, historical, and archaeological sources of the period. In this study he concentrated on the social life, institutions, customs, and beliefs of the people of 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> century Sri Lanka. He obtained his PhD for this study in 1950. It was published in English as *Society in Medieval Ceylon* and in Sinhala as *Madya Kalina Lanka Samajaya* in 1962. A monumental work by Dr. Ariyapala was the critical editing of the great Sinhala epic *Kavsilumina* of the 13th century, for which he had consulted a large number of manuscripts and printed works, resulting in an authoritative work. The second academic from the Department to study a facet of Sinhala culture was P.E.E. Fernando. Both Ariyapala and Fernando had been students of the University College. They as well as the other senior members of the Department such as D.E. Hettiarachchi, D.J. Wijeratna, and E.R.

(Ediriweera) Sarachchandra were graduates of the University College concentrating on Indo-Aryan Studies which was the name given to the subject at the time. P.E.E. Fernando too did his post graduate studies at the SOAS working on the topic 'Arts and Crafts of Ancient Ceylon', for which he used the material provided by classical Sinhala epigraphical sources as well as literary, historical, and archaeological sources. In 1954 he was awarded his PhD for this study.

It was realized in the meantime that the academic interests of the Sinhala Department needed to be expanded to keep up with new socio-cultural trends. Dr. P.E.E. Fernando, in a study in 1954 on the development of the Brahmi script, made a pioneering contribution to the study of the evolution of the Sinhala script whose origins can be traced to the Brahmi script which was introduced to the island in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C. along with Buddhism by the missionaries led by Arahant Mahinda, sent by Emperor Asoka. Fernando's study titled 'A Paleographical Development of the Brahmi Script in Ceylon from 3<sup>rd</sup> Century B.C to 7<sup>th</sup> Century A.D.' was published in two instalments in *The University of Ceylon Review* which was the official journal of the University of Ceylon. In this study, Dr. Fernando traced the gradual development of the script, using the evolution of the letters as found in lithic records that appeared during the period, finally ending up in the script of about the 7<sup>th</sup> century, which had by then assumed an independent form. It needs mention that this pioneering work remained the guiding light for many subsequent studies on the subject. A Sinhalese translation of Dr. Fernando's original paper was published by *Sri Lanka Grantha Sanvardana Mandalaya* in 2008.

An academic who has contributed immensely towards the expansion of vistas in Sinhala studies is Dr. E.R. Sarachchandra. He graduated in Indo-Aryan studies from the

University College in 1934, and was working in other institutions before joining the staff of the Sinhalese Dictionary as a sub-editor. It was during this period that he came to associate Martin Wickramasinghe, who was then the editor of the Sinhala daily *Dinamina*. Sarachchandra mentions in his memoirs that this association helped immensely in expanding his intellectual horizons. Wickramasinghe had read widely and Sarachchandra says that Wickramasinghe had the latest publications in Philosophy, Anthropology, and Literature with him. "I was amazed at his wide reading", he comments, adding; "It was from him that I came to know about many new writings. I would like to mention that my studies not only in Anthropology but also in literary criticism, the art of the novel, Russian and French fiction as well as many other areas of knowledge started with my association with Martin Wickramasinghe" (Wickramasinghe 2001, p. 39).

As Sarachchandra has mentioned in his memoirs, this kind of knowledge in Anthropology, literary criticism, and modern developments in literature were not available in the study programmes that existed in the Ceylon University College courses which he followed as an undergraduate. Wickramasinghe who had, by self-study, gained such new knowledge stood above the graduates of the University College in these areas of intellectual activity. According to Sarachchandra, the undergraduates were taught "only classical Sinhalese literature and Philology. The subject of Sinhalese could be studied only up to the Intermediate level. For the Honours Degree one could offer only Pali and Sanskrit. Sinhala was not included. Therefore, I had no interest in Modern Sinhala literature at that time" (Sarachchandra 1985, p. 127).

Sarachchandra who read with great interest the works of modern Western literature

and literary criticism, began to scrutinize contemporary Sinhala novels and short stories which were popular among the Sinhala readership. The result of that study came out in the form of a book titled *Modern Sinhala Fiction* in 1943. Later, this work was expanded and published as the *Sinhala Novel* (in English) and *Sinhala Nava Katha: Ithihasaya saha Vicharaya* (in Sinhala) in 1950. It was in 1949 that Sarachchandra first joined the academic staff of the University of Ceylon, as a lecturer in the Department of Pali. Thereafter proceeding to SOAS in London for his post-graduate studies in 1947, he obtained his PhD in 1949 writing a thesis titled 'The Buddhist Psychology of Perception'. On returning to the University of Ceylon in the same year, he immediately turned to his favourite area of interest, Sinhalese literature. He went on to publish the book *Sahithya Vidyava*, explaining how literature could be enjoyed using the tenets of Sanskrit literary theory amalgamation with theories of modern European literary criticism. There are two important facts that should engage our attention in this regard. First, it was a lecturer of the Pali Department (and not the Department of Sinhala) who published these pioneering works on modern Sinhala fiction and modern criticism. The second salient fact is that even as late as 1949 the study of modern Sinhala literature had not been included in the university syllabus.

The study of modern Sinhala literature was included in the syllabus of the Sinhala Department only after the shift to Peradeniya occurred in 1952. It was a momentous shift to a destined location in Peradeniya with its lecture rooms, halls of residence for students, staff quarters, sports facilities etc. especially built for the purpose in the new campus. When the shift to Peradeniya was in progress, Prof. Ratnasuriya died suddenly in 1951 and a new Professor of Sinhala was appointed. The appointment of Dr. D.E. Hettiarachchi as the professor of Sinhala coincided with

the shift to Peradeniya and the arrival of Dr. Sarachchandra in the Sinhala Department.

As stated above, the need to include the study of modern Sinhala literature in the study programme of the department was keenly felt at the time. Hettiarchchi as the new professor and Head of the Department, would have seen that the academic most suited to teach modern Sinhala literature was Sarachchandra with his pioneering work in the area. Thus, with the arrival of Sarachchandra in the Department, the study of the Sinhala novel, short story, poetry, and drama came to be identified as aspects worthy of academic attention in the university. Significant achievements in literary creativity by writers such as Amarasekara and Gunasighe that were mentioned earlier were also part and parcel of the artistic awakening in the University in the years that followed.

It was not only in fiction, poetry, drama and such literary creativity that Peradeniya excelled during this period. It appears that the general belief is that Peradeniya's achievements during this 'golden era' were confined to these areas and did not extend beyond them. The scholarly achievements of the Department of Sinhala during the 50s and 60s have not received the recognition they deserve.

The book *The Sinhalese Folk Play* published by Ediriweera Sarachchandra himself in 1952 was the outcome of a research on the rudiments of theatre available in folk rituals and village theatre practices as found in remote areas of the island. This study was indeed an extension of 'cultural studies' as envisaged by Dr. Ratnasuriya. Sarachchandra's scholarly study was again a pioneering work which tried to see our folk theatrical practices in the light of universal features in the art of theatre.

One of the significant conclusions he arrived at after this study was that the roots of what could be recognized as a national theatrical tradition go back to the classical dramatic

tradition of ancient India. Extending the study he made on the folk traditions in Sri Lanka, Sarachchandra was able to see the affiliations of the Sinhala folk theatre with the folk theatre forms of India. They all seemed to be rooted in the Sanskrit tradition. Finally, during a study tour he made to the Far-East in 1955, he saw the affiliations with the Indian tradition and the traditional theatres of China and Japan (Sarachchandra 1985, p. 180).

D.E. Hettiarachchi, the second Professor of Sinhala, himself a graduate of the University College, was recruited to teach Sanskrit by Professor Malalasekara, the then Head of the Department of Pali, Sanskrit, and Sinhala. Hettiarachchi then proceeded to the Calcutta University for further studies in Sanskrit and Prakrit and, having obtained his M.A., returned to Sri Lanka in 1937. When the University of Ceylon was established in 1942 he was appointed to teach Prakrit and Sanskrit in the newly established Faculty of Oriental Studies. He was assigned to the Sinhala Department subsequently and proceeded to the SOAS in London and obtained his PhD in 1948 for producing a critical edition of *Vesaturu Da Sanne* in 1957, an exegetical work of the Polonnaruwa period. Having been appointed Professor of Sinhala, he held this post till 1968, when he resigned to take up the Vice Chancellor post in Vidyodaya University (the present University of Sri Jayawardenepura).

During Hettiarachchi's period as Professor of Sinhala, the Department expanded rapidly and by the 60s, it was the department that attracted the largest number of students in the University. It was under his leadership that the study programmes came to be diversified as studies in literary theory, theatre, linguistic studies, and the study of modern Sinhala literature. Amidst his work in the Sinhala Department, Hettiarachchi also functioned as the Editor in Chief of the 'Sinhala Encyclopaedia', a project launched in 1955 by the government as part of the celebrations

to commemorate the 2500<sup>th</sup> *Buddha Jayanthi* which also coincided with the establishment of the Sinhala Kingdom in the 6th century B.C. As far as Hettiarachchi's contribution to Sinhala studies is concerned, he was able to bring out several noteworthy publications during this period. They are *Jataka Atuva Getapadaya* (1960) and the edition of *Thupavamsa* (1974) in collaboration with other scholars. *Dhampiya Atuva Getapadaya* (1974) which he did single-handed, bore testimony to his erudition. The long introduction to this work is one of the most significant contributions to the study of the history of Sinhala, placed as it is in the wider canvass of Indo Aryan languages. As Editor in Chief of the 'Sinhala Encyclopaedia', he and his competent group of sub-editors were able to bring out 6 volumes during the period 1963-1978. In 1972 he was also appointed the Chief Editor of the Sinhala Dictionary and his most notable achievement in this regard was the completion of the section on Sinhalese Vowels. Undoubtedly, he was the greatest scholar of the 20th century when it came to studies in the history of the Sinhala language. He was a polyglot, being competent in 13 different languages (details of his many publications are available in 'The Hettiarachchi Commemoration Volume' of the *Sri Lanka Journal of the Humanities*, vol. 16, nos. 1 & 2). Special note should be made of the fact that it was during Hettiarachchi's tenure as Professor and Head of Department, the Department became a true centre of Sinhala Studies casting off the shadow of Indo-Aryan Studies which was the legacy of the University College days. The credit for this transformation should go, to a large extent, to Sarachchandra whose path-breaking studies on literary theory, modern literature, and theatre have been discussed above.

Another teacher in the Sinhala Department in the 1950's and the 60s was Dr. M. Sri Rammandala who was a very popular figure among the undergraduates. He had joined the academic staff after serving as a teacher

in Pirivenas and schools and was an authority on classical Sinhala literature. The PhD thesis he submitted to the SOAS in London was titled 'A Critical Study of the Dharmapradipikava'. He obtained the Doctorate in 1954.

Among the scholars who made a special impact on Sinhala studies during the 1950s and 60s mention should be made of Doctors D.J. Wijeratne, Ananda Kulasuriya, M.H. Peter Silva, and M.W. Sugathapala De Silva. Wijeratne too was a graduate of the Ceylon University College. He graduated in 1941 and joined the editorial staff of the Sinhalese Dictionary in 1942 after a brief spell of being a school teacher. He was appointed an assistant lecturer in 1948 and went to SOAS in London, obtaining his PhD in 1951. His research was on the 'Morphological Development of the Sinhalese Language' during the period 3<sup>rd</sup> BC – 10<sup>th</sup> AD. The work was later converted to a book called *History of the Sinhalese Noun (A morphological study based on inscriptions)* which was published in 1956 by the University of Ceylon press. It is a monumental work on the history of the language. It displays superb analytical skill where he has utilized linguistic theories available at the time. Another highly significant work of Wijeratna was the analytical bibliography he compiled with a large collection of Sinhala manuscripts which were available at the India Office in London. These manuscripts were in a mess, until he embarked on his project and proceeded to examine them and catalogue them in an orderly manner. Wijeratna's work was not a mere list of names. It included a brief introduction to the content of each manuscript he had catalogued. This project was concluded in 1962 in collaboration with Dr. Ananda Kulasuriya and published in 1981. Wijeratna also published several papers on the history of the Sinhala language. He was appointed Professor of Sinhala in the Viyalankara University (present University of Kelaniya) in 1967, and held that post until his retirement in 1973. His special contribution

to the Department was the diversification of the field of Sinhala studies and placing the Department on a stable footing.

Ananda Salgado Kulasuriya is the first graduate of Sinhala from the University of Ceylon to be absorbed into the academic staff of the university. He graduated with first class honours in 1946, and having served in the editorial staff of the Sinhala Dictionary, proceeded to the University of Paris for post-graduate studies. His research was on the fourfold *Varna* (caste) system depicted in Sanskrit texts, which won him the Doctorate in 1951. When the University was shifted to Peradeniya he was recruited to the Department and proved to be an exemplary teacher and excelled as a scholar with a wide range of research interests. There is perhaps no other scholar in the Faculty of Arts who has published as many books and research articles of a very high standard covering a wide range of interests such as classical Sinhala prose and verse, Sinhala Grammar, literature and society in ancient and medieval times, and the methodology of editing classical writings. The four volume history of Sinhala literature titled *Sinhala Sahithyaya* written by him gives a comprehensive survey of the Sinhala literary works from early times up to the Kotte period. It remains to date an invaluable resource book for students interested in the history of Sinhala literature. Another highly significant contribution by Kulasuriya is the editing of the massive classical work *Sinhala Jataka Potha*, which he did with the assistance of a number of others. This project started in 1987 and was completed in 2002 and published by the National Library Services Board in 2004.

Dr. M.H. Peter Silva, having served as a trained teacher in the secondary school system, joined the Department of Sinhala after graduating. His field of interest was the relationship between Tamil and Sinhalese literature. In a background where only a handful of scholars like Ven. Hisselle Dharmaratana of Sarasvati

Pirivena in Balagolla ventured in to Tamil studies, Dr. Peter Silva chose to specialize in this field and based his PhD thesis to the Oxford University. The title of that thesis was 'The influence of Dravida on Sinhalese'. He has published Sinhala translations of the Tamil epics *Silappadikaram* and *Manimekalai*.

The first academic to take up Modern Linguistic studies in Sri Lanka was M.W. Sugathapala De Silva. He obtained a first class honours degree in Sinhala from the University of Ceylon in 1954 and proceeded to the University of London to study Modern Linguistics. In London he studied under eminent linguists such as R. Firth and R.H. Robbins, working on a thesis titled 'The Noun Phrase in Colloquial Sinhala: A Phonological Study'. He was awarded a research MA degree for this study in 1958. This study proved to be a path-breaking analysis of colloquial Sinhalese, a subject hitherto never subjected to study by any Sinhala scholar. The inclusion of Modern Linguistics in the syllabus of the University happened after De Silva returned in 1958. Later, writing the thesis 'A Structural Analysis of the *Vedda* Language spoken in the Badulla and Polonnaruwa Districts of Ceylon', De Silva obtained his PhD from the University of London in 1965. As the pioneer academic in the field of linguistics in the university system of Sri Lanka, he inspired many young academics to take up linguistic studies as their chosen field of academic interest.

His two books, *Bhasha Vimarshanaya* (1963), which was an introduction to Linguistics, and *Vigrahatmaka Vaag Vidyava*, an introduction to Structural Linguistics (1963) are again pioneering books on the subject and remain valuable reference works to date. In order to promote Linguistic studies, he set up The university of Ceylon Linguistic Society and included members from the Tamil and English Language departments also as office bearers. The first president was Prof S. Paranavitana, the renowned Archaeologist

who was also a reputed Indo-Aryan scholar. 'The Transactions of the Linguistic Society', a publication brought out in 1964 included papers by members of all those departments. De Silva had only a brief spell as an academic in Sri Lanka but it was a very eventful one. When the newly founded University of York in England (1963) instituted a Department of Linguistics with special interest in the study of language societies in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, Dr. Sugathapala De Silva applied for an advertised post in it and was recruited as a senior academic in 1964. He left the University of Ceylon and his motherland in that year to take up that post. During his career in York which ended with his sudden demise at the age of 49 in 1980, De Silva was able to inaugurate many studies on South Asian linguistics, which were all pioneering ventures in European universities as far as South Asian studies were concerned.

In this essay special mention has to be made of a very important national contribution by the Department of Sinhala of the University of Peradeniya, which was the compilation of glossaries for technical terms for university teaching programmes, not only for subjects taught in the Arts Faculty but also for Science-based faculties. The urgent need to create these terms arose in the mid-1950s owing to a government policy decision to switch over to *Swabasha* (national languages) - Sinhala and Tamil, in university education. This step was a culmination of a policy adopted in 1944 to gradually transform the medium of instruction in the school system from English to *Swabasha*. Starting with the Kindergarten in 1945, by the 1950s teaching in the highest grades (Higher School Certificate and University Entrance) had become Sinhala and Tamil. The next step was in the area of tertiary education i.e. in the universities. Although a debate took place about the feasibility of undertaking university teaching in *Swabasha*, it was finally decided that the universities had to fall in line with national policy. Thus urgent

steps had to be taken to facilitate the use of Swabasha as the medium of instruction in universities.

The Department of Sinhala came forward to fulfil this need and instituted the 'Swabasha Office' under a Senior Academic, Dr. P.E.E. Fernando, who started creating technical terms glossaries, firstly in the Social Sciences, such as History, Economics, and Geography, and then in Science and Medical studies. Technical terms in Sinhala as well as Tamil were created by the Swabasha Office in which experts on Sinhalese and Tamil sat with academics in the disciplines which needed these technical terms. The Swabasha Office functioned till the mid-1970s when it was disbanded because similar work was being done by the Department of Official Languages in Colombo.

The pioneers of Peradeniya whose contribution to Sinhala studies was described above handed over their task of expanding and nurturing the field to the next generation of academics. It is significant that these young academics had been trained under the new study programme which came into effect in the early 1950's. Two prominent figures who thus became lecturers in the Department were Ariya Rajakaruna and G. Hemapala Wijayawardhana, both of whom secured first class honours at the final examination held in 1958. Rajakaruna, who had evinced an interest in theatre, was encouraged to proceed to Japan and enrolled as a graduate student at Waseda University in Tokyo where he studied as fields of academic interest the art of the theatre as it related to the art of the cinema. Rajakaruna thus became the first Sinhala scholar to study these subjects. Wijayawardhana who had a strong grounding in Sanskrit and Pali was interested in ancient Indian aesthetics which had exerted a strong influence on classical Sinhala poetry, and was encouraged to proceed to India to study Sanskrit aesthetics as available in the Sanskrit

treatises. Sinhala scholars starting with those in the *Pirivenas* and later others such as Martin Wickramasinghe and Sarachchandra had done some work on various aspects of the subject, but there was no Sri Lankan scholar who could be called an authority on the subject. Wijayawardhana went to Poona, a well-known centre of Oriental learning, and found an authority on Sanskrit aesthetics, Professor A. Shankaran, who had by then retired from university service, and became his pupil. After studying under Shankaran he returned to Peradeniya and submitted a thesis titled 'The Influence of Sanskrit Poetics on Early Sinhalese Poetry' for which he was awarded the PhD in 1963. His book, *An Outline of Sanskrit Poetics*, was published in New Delhi by the reputed publisher Motilal Baranasidas. He also brought out several books in Sinhala such as *Sanskruta Vicaraye Muladharmam and Kavya Vicara Gaveshana*, which remain the most authoritative works on the subject of Sanskrit aesthetics available to Sinhala readers.

Ariya Rajakaruna, after completing his studies in Japan returned to Peradeniya and became the most well-known young academic of the time working on modern Sinhala literature. In addition to theatre he evinced a keen interest in modern Sinhala poetry, a field he had been studying since his undergraduate days in the mid-1950s, writing a series of articles which appeared in the journal *Samskruti*. His two volume book *Nutana Sinhala Kavyaya* was published in 1962. Then his study of modern Sinhala theatre came out as *Nutana Sinhala Natyaya* in 1967. Since then his studies on various aspects of the contemporary scene in the field of the modern Sinhala novel and short story have earned him the reputation of being a prolific writer on modern Sinhala literature. The lead given by these two Peradeniya products to enrich and further the field of Sinhala studies have been taken up by later academics from Peradeniya who joined the staff.

In conclusion, a special note should be made of the invaluable contribution made by the Department of Sinhala in Peradeniya to further Sinhala studies in the country's university system. The Departments of Sinhala in all the three first universities to be founded after Peradeniya were manned mainly, if not solely, by Peradeniya products. The first Professor of Sinhala in the University of Colombo was Dr. M.B. Ariyapala, who had graduated from the University College and was serving in the University of Ceylon, first in Colombo and then in Peradeniya since the shift to Peradeniya took place in 1952. But all those who came after him like Hemapala Wijeyawardhana and J.B. Disanayake had also been Peradeniya products. The two so called 'Pirivena Universities' *Vidyodaya* and *Vidyalandara* had Buddhist monks (coming from the Pirivena tradition) as their first Sinhala Professors, but after them it was again alumni from Peradeniya who took over and this University continued to be the supplier of academic human resources, until these younger universities began producing their own graduates of high quality.

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