

DAYANANDA EKANATHA HETTIARATCHI (1909 – 1989)

The University of Peradeniya celebrates her Golden Jubilee in July 1992. Founded in Colombo as the University of Ceylon, it remained the only university in the island till 1959, when two sister institutions, Vidyodaya University and Vidyalkara University were established. When university education began in 1923 with the Ceylon University College, the curriculum was designed to suit the requirements of the University of London, to which it was affiliated. Thus, until 1942 university education conducted in the island was far removed from the expectations of the pioneer agitators for a national university. Ponnambalam Arunachalam, the founder president of the Ceylon University Association (1906), had hoped that.

“It will be a chief aim of the Ceylon University..... to take care that our youth do not grow up strangers to their mother tongue and to their past history and traditions. Here they will learn to use their mother-tongue with accuracy and ease, to appreciate the beauties of their classical languages and literatures, to realize that they are inheritors of a great past stretching back to twenty-four centuries, and to make themselves worthy of their inheritance. The vernacular literature of the day will then be rescued from its pedantry and triviality and be made a worthy vehicle for the dissemination of what is best in Western and Eastern culture and of the thoughts, hopes and aspirations of our best men and women.”

In the Ceylon University College the national languages, Sinhalese and Tamil, as well as the traditional classical languages of the country, Pali and Sanskrit, were all confined in one department of study. There were no separate departments teaching the religious or philosophical traditions associated with the national religions – Buddhism and Hinduism. It was only in 1944 that a separate Department of Sinhalese was established along with a separate Department of Tamil. Religious studies connected with Buddhism and Hinduism were to gain recognition as university subjects only about thirty years later.

The first Professor of Sinhalese in Sri Lanka was Dr. M.D. Ratnasuriya. It was his eclectic vision that laid the foundations for a department of study which sought to concern itself with the linguistic, literary as well as cultural aspects of Sinhalese society. At the time the Sinhalese Department had in its teaching staff a young and energetic Assistant Lecturer, D.E. Hettiaratchi who had been recruited in 1942 by his teacher, Dr. G. P. Malalasekera, then the Professor of Sinhala, Pali and Sanskrit. Both Malalasekera and Ratnasuriya knew that their younger colleague's *forte* was language studies. He was a good Sanskrit and Pali scholar, but his main area of interest was Classical Sinhalese and his focus of attention was exegetical literature. Works such as the *Dhampia Atuva Getapadaya* (10th century), the *Vesaturu Da Sanne* (11th and 12th centuries) were for him mines of information about the history of Sinhala. The study of these and such other works remained a life-long interest with Hettiaratchi.

Ratnasuriya died unexpectedly in 1951, when plans were complete to shift the University from Colombo to its new site in Peradeniya. Thus when it was re-established in its new site, there was a new Professor of Sinhalese as well - D. E. Hettiaratchi, under whose inspired guidance the department was to grow steadily during the next 18 years.

As head of the department Hettiaratchi was inordinately concerned with recognizing young talent and encouraging it to grow. It was his policy to recruit only those who secured first or upper second classes at the final examination as Assistant Lecturers. Depending on the requirements of the department, the young recruits were guided to do postgraduate studies in linguistics or literature. Those who have been recruited by him to the department will remember the unflagging and persistent interest he took in their postgraduate studies. Indeed, at times it seemed as though Hettiaratchi was keener than the student himself in the subject of his research.

The 1950's and the '60's saw a tremendous expansion in university education, and the Department of Sinhalese in Peradeniya, under the able guidance of Hettiaratchi, expanded its interests to face the new developments. Young recruits to the department were encouraged to go into hitherto untouched fields of study - structural linguistics, historical linguistics, aesthetics, theatre and so on. Modern literature and theatre were included in the syllabus as courses of study. Recognizing the great contribution being made by Ediriweera Sarathchandra to Sinhala studies, Hettiaratchi worked hard and secured for him a second chair in Sinhala.

At that time the Sinhalese Dictionary project and the Sinhalese Encyclopedia project were both under the administration of the Professor of Sinhala. His rare combination of scholarship, with energy and dedication made Hettiaratchi the most suitable person to guide these two national projects.

Hettiaratchi loved learning languages. Apart from Pali and Sanskrit, he had a thorough knowledge of the old Prakrits and a working knowledge of several modern Indian languages, such as Tamil, Bengali and Hindi. Apart from English he studied several other European languages, Portuguese, Dutch and French. His interest in languages can be gauged from the fact that he successfully completed a diploma course in the Portuguese language when he was 60 years old. He was undoubtedly the country's greatest polyglot of his day, being competent in some thirteen languages.

Born on 6 May, 1909 at Buthgamuva, then a small village in the northern outskirts of Colombo, Hettiaratchi's parents were Don Abraham Hettiaratchi and Podihamine Wijesinghe. Having received primary education at Buthgamuva Government Sinhalese School, he joined Ananda Vidyalaya, Colombo, later, and entered the Ceylon University College to graduate with a B.A. in Indo-Aryan languages. Sir D. B. Jayatilaka, scholar and politician, who was the founder Editor-in-Chief of the Sinhalese Dictionary project inaugurated in 1929, saw the linguistic talents of young Hettiaratchi

and offered him a post as one to its Assistant Editors in 1932. Later, Hettiaratchi decided to go to Calcutta for graduate studies in Indo-Aryan languages. Having obtained a Masters Degree he returned to the island in 1937 to rejoin the Dictionary project. When the University of Ceylon was established in 1942, Professor Malalasekera enrolled him the university teaching staff to teach Sinhala and Sanskrit. Hettiaratchi now started working on his doctoral dissertation, *The History of Sinhalese Vowels*, for which the Calcutta University awarded him the Ph. D. in 1944. Having obtained study leave thereafter he proceeded to England where, writing a dissertation upon *A Critical Study of the Vesaturu Da Samne*, he obtained a second Ph. D. from the University of London in 1948.

The major publications of Hettiaratchi are in the field of language and linguistics. Starting with an article to the Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society (Ceylon Branch) on the *Dhampia Atuva Getapadaya* in 1933, he has written a large number of authoritative papers in Sinhala and in English on different aspects of the history of the Sinhala language. His critical editions of classical text, sometimes in collaboration with others, remain outstanding examples of thorough scholarship. Some of his outstanding publications are, the first eleven chapters of *Pujavaliya* (1936) in collaboration with D.C. Dissanayake, *Sinhala Thupavamsaya* (1974), *Vesturu Da Samne* (1950), *Jataka Atuva Getapadaya* (1960) with M. Sri Rammanadala, and, finally, the *Dhampia Atuva Getapadaya* (1947). The last, with a long introduction containing copious information on the history of the Sinhala-language and its relationship to Indo European and Dravidian languages, is a lasting monument to Hettiaratchi's scholarship.

In the scholarly tradition in Sri Lanka Hettiaratchi can be recognized as one who effected a smooth transition from the older philological studies to modern linguistics. In his first contact with Indo-Aryan language studies in the University College he would have become aware of the vastness of that field as an academic discipline. His later acquaintance with Sir D.B. Jayatilaka and such scholar monks as the Ven. Telwatte Amarawansa Thero, who represented the pirivena tradition, Hettiaratchi would have obtained a thorough grounding of that tradition too. He subsequently became acquainted with modern linguistics, which was expanding rapidly in Europe and USA with the work of J.R. Firth, Edward Sapir and Leonard Bloomfield. The guidance Hettiaratchi gave to his brilliant pupil, M.W. Sugathapala De Silva, to study modern linguistics proved to be momentous. It was the beginning of modern linguistic studies in Sri Lanka, with several of Hettiaratchi's own students taking to various aspects of linguistic study, historical linguistics, structural linguistics and socio-linguistics.

In his own language studies Hettiaratchi adopted an approach which was broader, richer and more scientific when compared with the work done by his predecessors as well as his contemporaries. In preparing classical texts for printing, the older generation of scholars usually adopted the attitude of "cleansing" or "purifying" the text. This is reflected in the words *Suddhiya* or *Sanshodhanaya* by which such preparation were identified. Hettiaratchi, however, believed that the task of editing such works was to be guided solely by the available manuscripts. In

practical terms, what usually happens is that the editor uses one or a group of reliable manuscripts and provides the other variant readings in footnotes. Hettiaratchi believed in following Wilhelm Geiger (in his edition of the *Culuvamsa*) and G. P. Malalasekera in (the edition is the *Vamsatthappakasini*) that the task of the editor was to free the text from the mistakes made by manuscript writers, and that under no circumstances should it appear that the editor was trying to "correct" the author.

Another significant feature of the editions of classical works done by Hettiaratchi was the long introduction which contained a range of information which was wider than similar introductions hitherto written by those who edited classical literary works. Historical, linguistic, literary and cultural aspects of the text under consideration were discussed in Hettiaratchi's introduction and a wide range of readers benefited from the information thus provided.

Hettiaratchi's *forte* was historical linguistics. It can be said without any fear of contradiction that his knowledge of the history of the Sinhalese language was unsurpassed in his day. Another significant fact is that, unlike the usual Oriental scholar, he did not overemphasize the Indo-Aryan origins of Sinhala. He gave sufficient emphasis to the unique features of the Sinhala language and always gave due recognition to the *nispanna* (locally born) and *tatbhava* (adapted) features of the language. Furthermore, due to his familiarity with the work of modern linguists, he was able to recognize the importance of the spoken form, and focusing attention on its rich diversity he launched a dialect survey of Sinhalese, which unfortunately he was not able to complete. With Hettiaratchi the rather drab study of the facts of language was made more interesting and exciting. He delved into the social and cultural information reflected in linguistic forms and thereby broadened the vistas of language studies. Symptomatic again of his breadth of linguistic understanding was the recognition he gave to the influence of Tamil, Portuguese, Dutch on modern Sinhala. He recognized that Portuguese more than any other European language had exerted an influence on modern Sinhala. In order to understand this influence, which began about four centuries ago, he knew that a knowledge of old Portuguese was necessary and that there was no escaping but to equip himself with that knowledge. This happened quite late in his life, which goes to show his commitment and thoroughness as a scholar.

Hettiaratchi was the lexicographer *par excellence* in twentieth century Sri Lanka. Being appointed as Editor-in-Chief of the Dictionary project in 1972, he held that post with distinction for ten years. When he took over, not even the first letter of the alphabet had been fully treated in publication. That was thirty five years since the project had been launched! But with his coming, and the energy and dedication he brought to the task, he was soon able to complete the publication of the entire section on the vowels.

Work on a Sinhalese Encyclopedia was launched in 1955, and Hettiaratchi was the obvious choice as its inaugural editor. Amidst an extremely busy life as teacher and administrator in the University, he was able to lay the foundations of that project as well : enrolling staff, identifying head words and topics for articles, essays and building up a library for the project. During his Editorship he brought out five volumes, the last appearing in 1978. The later volumes of the Dictionary and the Encyclopedia have benefitted immensely from the groundwork prepared by Hettiaratchi.

One of Hettiaratchi's greatest contributions to the national languages was the service he performed in guiding the compilation of a set of Sinhalese and Tamil technical terms for university use. With the decision to switch over university teaching to *swābhasa* in 1960, a challenge was thrown to Sinhalese and Tamil scholars to provide workable sets of technical terms for all academic disciplines taught in the University. This was a formidable task; but Hettiaratchi took it up, and with the Swabhasa Office functioning under him, pooled the resources of university scholars to produce a large set of glossaries for use in teaching in the various Faculties and disciplines of the University. The task was formidable; the success remains inestimable.

Among Hettiaratchi's publications are several studies on literature. One of his earliest publications was *Parani Dambadiva Sahityaya* ("The Literature of Ancient India", 1946). His articles "Mahānuvara Yugaye Sinhala Sahityaya" ("The Literature of the Kandyan period" in *Pushpadana Swarna Jayanthi Sangrahaya*, Kandy 1958-9), and "Sinhala Prasasthi Kavya" ("Sinhalese Panegyric Poems" in *Sanskriti*, 1953) remain to this day standard studies on those subjects.

Putting his deep knowledge of Sanskrit and Sinhalese to good use, he brought out with one of his students a Sinhalese translation of Kalidasa's immortal verse-drama, *Abhijana Sakuntala*. In its success at conveying in Sinhalese the subtleties of thought and the nuances of feeling of the original, it remains one of the most outstanding Sinhala translations available today.

The same quality of authenticity is discernable in the English translations of selections from *Saddharmaratnavaliya*, where Hettiaratchi collaborated with C.B. Cooke. This effort forms a part of C.H.B. Reynold's *An Anthology of Sinhala Literature* and is admired for its lucidity and accuracy, not to mention the easy rendition of the Sinhala idiom in the English.

Hettiaratchi was fully involved in all aspects of University life. He was Dean of the Faculty of Oriental Studies for several years, the President of the University Buddhist Teachers Association for a long time, and a patron of several student associations including the Buddhist Brotherhood and the Sinhalese Society. It needs to be mentioned that the stupa in the University Campus was completed in 1966 largely due to the untiring efforts of Hettiaratchi. He was for many years the Warden of Arunachalam Hall. His daily routine invariably included a visit to the Faculty Club in the evening,

to play tennis or table tennis, when he often took on players younger than he in sheer bravado. His home in Getambe was most times of the evening a very busy place, with visitors from many parts of the island coming to meet him. He knew nearly all his students personally and took a great interest in their future. The aim of close teacher-student relationship as envisaged by the founders of the first national and residential university in the island, was achieved in full measure by Hettiaratchi. If there was an ideal university teacher, who was scholar, mentor as well as promoter of the social and cultural life of the University community, Hettiaratchi came very near to the fulfillment of that ideal.

K. N. O. Dharmadasa

* * *