

Professor J. E. Jayasuriya - the educationist

It is an honour to write about this unparalleled educationist whose service to Sri Lankan education is unprecedented. His service to education starts with being the founder Principal of Dharmapala Vidyalaya Pannipitiya in 1940.

After a long career in various educational institutions, he ended up as the Dean of the Faculty of Education of the University of Ceylon Peradeniya and then as consultant to UNESCO in Bangkok on Third World Education.

I, being a Principal of Dharmapala Vidyalaya like first to dwell on his strategies to bring up Dharmapala starting with a wattle and daub cadjan hall. Later I shall deal with his rise to the level of the most resourceful educationist.

Knowledge

I also experienced his knowledge of education as a student under him during my diploma in education at the Faculty of Education of the University of Ceylon Peradeniya when he was the Dean of that Faculty

At the inauguration function of Dharmapala Vidyalaya, P.De.S. Kularatna introduced the pioneer principal thus: "A 22-year-old young energetic gentleman with the highest educational qualifications has been appointed as the Principal of Dharmapala Vidyalaya". That fact itself I see as a good sign to the future development of Dharmapala Vidyalaya." This prophecy has become true of Dharmapala Vidyalaya's development as the premier mixed school in the island.

His simplicity and humbleness in spite of the highest positions he achieved may lie in the simple remote village of Ahangama as the son of the postmaster there. The father's profession being transferable JEJ started his Primary education at Anuradha Vidyalaya in Nawalapitiya.

When his father was transferred to Ambalangoda he was admitted to Dharmasoka Vidyalaya Ambalangoda. Once he passed the 7th standard, he sat for the entrance exams

at Ananda Vidyalaya and Wesley College in Colombo. He passed both tests winning 1st place. Though P.De.S Kularatna offered him a scholarship at Ananda his father preferred Wesley College.

This bright student passed the Cambridge Senior Examination winning 3rd place among students of the British Empire. Subsequently having won a scholarship to the Colombo University College and following mathematics as the major subject he got a 1st class pass in the London University Examination.

This educational background must have laid the foundation for him to become a philosopher later.

Humble

He was humble enough to take up the post of Principal Dharmapala Vidyalaya, though P. De. S. Kularatna said he could not promise a reasonable salary but shall allocate a sum depending on the school fees that is collected.

In the end in January 1941, he was paid a paltry sum of Rs. 225 as a salary.

When he started as Principal of Dharmapala Vidyalaya in 1940 it had only a semi-permanent wattle and daub cadjan hall, and a semi completed hall.

Many of the staff were elder to him and some students among the 350 on the roll too were elder to him. However, he had the sharp intelligence and soft-spoken words and a capacity to explain lucidly even a subject as difficult as mathematics.

Three weeks after he assumed duties at Dharmapala he was called up to the Ceylon civil service interview. Though he had passed the civil service exam with the highest marks he failed the interview because the chairman of the interview board was the Director of Education L. Mac. de Robinson who was a Britisher.

He scoffed at JEJ's post of Principal of Dharmapala Vidyalaya (which he said he hasn't approved) and the fact JEJ couldn't

tell his exact salary which wasn't decided by then. So he was not selected to the civil service. Realising that they devalued the dedication to service irrespective of the salary JEJ decided to dedicate his future to education.

He considered it as a blessing in disguise the fact that he lost the chance to be a civil servant since he was the principal of Dharmapala Vidyalaya.

Dharmapala Vidyalaya

Since he became the principal of Dharmapala Vidyalaya all his efforts and energy were directed to bring up its education to the highest level and develop infrastructure facilities. With his able administration and dedication of the staff and the support of P.De.S. Kularatna and well-wishers, within a short period Dharmapala achieved a prestige not second to Ananda Vidyalaya.

With the increase in the student population and with the support of donors within one year he built a row of new classrooms. Further having realised the importance of sports and athletics for the balanced mental development of students he developed a playground. And to motivate students he started the year end prize-giving.

These accounts show his total capacity and understanding and dedication to education.

After having laid the foundation for Dharmapala Vidyalaya to develop to its present state, in 1942 he was appointed as deputy principal of the much-developed Sri Suman-gala Vidyalaya Hikkaduwa.

Later C. W. W. Kannangara appreciating JEJ's capacity and ability as a principal and an educationist appointed him as the Principal of his first Central College in Matugama.

In 1947 JEJ joined the University of London for his post graduate diploma in education and obtained the master's degree in education later.

In a statement to the Dharmapala Vidyalaya magazine 1940 -1980 he states thus: "Because the period I was at Dharmapala

was limited to about one year I believe my service to Dharmapala was minimal. But from the day I became Principal of Dharmapala Vidyalaya all my efforts were to organise the teaching and bring the education to the highest level possible. "The fact I was not selected to the civil service because of Dharmapala, I regard this as a blessing". This statement sums up his humbleness and dedication to education.

After coming back to Sri Lanka from London he worked as a lecturer in mathematics at the Maharagama Training College and in 1952 he joined the Education Faculty in the University of Ceylon Peradeniya and in 1957 became its Dean.

This account so far traces the history of JEJ and his rise to the top in the education arena.

Birthday

I shall now briefly narrate other lasting contributions he has done to education in Sri Lanka which most of us educationists know about, particularly retold by the orators and writers at the annual J.E. Jayasuriya Memorial Commemoration on his birthday day that falls on February 14. This is his 104th birth anniversary.

By facilitating the offering of post graduate diploma in education through the colleges of education, making research to maintain cordial relationships between teachers and parents and authoring several books on education and statistics are a few of his services to the national education system.

By inaugurating the Bachelor of Education Degree at the University of Ceylon Peradeniya in 1962 the effort he made to bring out experts in education administration is another successful national endeavor on his part.

In 1961 he was appointed as the Chairman of the National Education Commission. In this capacity he gave leadership to several education reforms to bring our education system in par with exemplary systems in de-

veloped countries.

Though most of the proposals were not implemented then, they still hold relevant to overcome some of the startling drawbacks in our present education system in schools and in the universities in the present socio-economic political context.

I note down some of the recommendations which JEJ gave leadership as follows:

The compulsory school going age to be between six to 14 years to be enacted by legislation.

The duration of school hours during the day, the school days during the week and the number of days the school should be held during the year, minimum being 210 days.

It also recommended the variation of the school calendar to accommodate harvesting in agricultural areas so as to prevent the falling children's attendance at school.

The importance of health and physical education is also highlighted for the development of a child.

The report also stressed the need for work experience in secondary school children.

The Education Sector Development Framework and Program, has incorporated unfinished elements in the proposals of the Jayasuriya Commission.

In recognition of his excellent service to Education JEJ was awarded the "Sahithya Chakrawarthi" Honorary Degree by the University of Colombo and the "Vidya Vishsara-da" Honorary Degree by the Open University in 1982.

An exemplary teacher, administrator, author, researcher and policy maker he has attained international fame.

He left our nation on January 23, 1990. We need the participation of professionals of the calibre of Prof. J.E. Jayasuriya to bring our education system to the level he prophesied.

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