

The Colossus of the era who extended both his hands to help amateurs

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Before, during and after my school days I have been afflicted by an unusual disease. This disease did not cause any mental or physical suffering. Yet due to this disease which worsened day by day I was compelled to select journalism as a profession.

A voracious appetite for reading which made me lap up everything that came my way in black and white, was doubled and trebled by two outstanding scholars. They were Dr. E.W. Adikaram and Prof. Nandadasa Kodagoda. Although I was attracted to Dr. Adikaram through his philosophical writing, I did not have an opportunity to get close to him through association. Not so with Prof. Kodagoda. I was drawn to him through his writing and discourses and through association as well.

During the nineteen sixties and seventies, he was known to us as Dr. Nandadasa Kodagoda, as a member of the editorial staff of the popular magazine called 'Vidya' and as a popular writer. While being engaged in the medical profession, he displayed an innate skill in expressing complex scientific concepts in a simple and lucid language. Articles and magazine authored by him are carefully preserved by me. During my schooldays I read his writing with immense pleasure accessing a limit less expanse of knowledge. Just as his writing his speeches were also given in a lucid and refined language. The radio and television were adorned with his patiently explained Medical

complexities. Due to this reason all sections of the community, from the medical College in Colombo to the Veddha community in Bintenna were his friends.

Although I had no opportunity to be closely associated with him during my school days, I was fortunate enough to come into contact with him from time to time in the late nineteen eighties through the Sri Lanka Science Students' Foundation established at Ananda College by some science students. He was also an honorary patron of the Foundation. Other eminent scholars such as Dr. Upali M. Senanayake, Dr. Granville Dharmawardene, Professor Tuley de Silva, Prof. Sarath Kotagama and Mr. Edwin Ariyadasa were also patrons of this society.

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He was present on time at every seminar conducted by the Science Students' Foundation. He may sometimes come early but was never late for a seminar. Punctuality was never a problem for him. When he attends a seminar, it was his practice to deliver a lecture. His lectures were brief, yet rich in substance. When ever he met us his advice was that science should be taken to the village and that the effective medium for this is the Sinhala language. He strongly believed that the knowledge of English was extremely useful for the expansion of the knowledge of science. In fact his entire life was spent in his efforts to popularize science.

The science day in a school was his favorite day. His questions at a quiz programme did not leave a contestant stranded or shaken. He had his own style of presenting question to contestants. Every questions was preceded by the words "could you tell" or "tell us". He often give a clue through a phrase to a contestant who had a difficulty in giving an answer. He would often explain further, an answer that is given. Although the basic idea behind a quiz programme is to obtain answers, his attempt was to enrich the knowledge of the contestant as well as that of the listeners .

We met Prof. Kodagoda at a workshop on science writing conducted by him at the Natural Resources Energy and Science Authority in 1995. Among the scholars who addressed the workshop , the chief resource person was Prof Kodagoda. A large number of media personnel representing every media organization participated in this workshop. The workshop was reaching its final day. Mr. Nihal P Abeysinghe and myself met Professor Kodagoda and informed him that we were planning to establish a Science Writers' Association, of which the objective will be to popularise science, and sought his advice. He

welcomed the two of us and our intentions. On the day the certificates of the workshop were being awarded, he conveyed our intention to the Hon. Dharmasiri Senanayake who was the chief guest. Nearly two weeks after that we were able to establish the Sri Lanka Association of Science Communication under the guidance of Professor Kodagoda and in the presence of Prof. Priyani E. Soysa, Prof. P.L.D. Waidyasekera, Dr. Upali M. Senanayake, Dr. Jayantha Lal Ratnasekera, Mr. Anura Siriwardene, Mr. Thusitha Malalasekera, Mr. B.M.C.K. Basnayake, and Mr. Percy Jayamanne. The contents of the constitutions for the society were drawn up by the Professor himself. The application for membership was also prepared by him. It is with great respect that I mention after one year of its existence that it was under the patronage of Prof. Kodagoda that the foundation for an active society of science communication was laid. Some months after this as a result of an interview I was to assist on the editorial work of the Vidurava magazine of NARESA to which Prof. Kodagoda provided editorial advice.

He carried on a strong campaign against the drug menace. He travelled through out the island creating awareness in school children against the dangerous drugs. He used the radio and television as powerful media against part the drug menace. Although he was sophisticated in his knowledge and skills, he valued simple living. His love for the Sinhala language knew no bounds. His affection for other languages too was immense. Although our country is small there is no dearth of learned persons and persons skilled in diverse fields. Although the activities of Professor Kodagoda who was skilled in a myriad fields survives, he is no more among us . There is also no one to carry forward his philosophy.