

PROF. NANDADASA KODAGODA

HIS CONTRIBUTION IN POPULARISATION OF SCIENCE

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I met Prof. Nandadasa Kodagoda one day in June in 1967. It was a Science Day in a school close to Colombo. Dr. Kodagoda was one of the speakers who spoke that day. I have listened to many science lectures, delivered by reputed speakers. However, there was a distinct difference, I would say a trade mark in Dr. Kodagoda's lecture. It was deep, full of fact, yet easy to understand. Eventhough I had listened to him over the radio, read his articles, that day was the first time I saw him in person. He was wearing the national dress. This scene reminded me of Dr. Adikaram. As I am also a popular science article writer and a participant in radio discussions our meeting turned out to be the beginning of a lasting friendship.

At that time Dr. Kodagoda was the Chairman of the Committee on Popularisation of Science (CPS) of Sri Lanka Association for the Advancement of Science (SLAAS). According to a proposal made by him, I was co-opted to the CPS. From that day, until his death, both of us were active members of CPS.

Prof. Nandadasa Kodagoda contributed in a number of ways for the popularisation of science. Writing science articles to popular news papers and magazines, radio discussions, western medical discussions, delivering science lectures at seminars, conferences and at

schools on invitation, conducting science quiz programs over radio and TV, were some of them. Since another article covers his contributions to electronic media, I will concentrate on his contributions to papers, magazines and science day programs.

In addition to writing popular science articles, Prof. Kodagoda acted as the editor or in the advisory board of various magazines. For example the Vidya Vyapthi magazine, the science magazine of the CPS, Vidurava Science magazine of former NARESA (now the NSF) received his guidance until his death. For the existence of these magazines, popular science articles written in simple language are very essential. These magazines are read by not only the science students, but also the general public. As such the content should be understood by them. Most of these articles were edited by Prof. Kodagoda before they were published.

There were two main reasons for this. Prof. Kodagoda had a wide knowledge in both medical and other science subjects. He was a master of the Sinhala language. He could not only correct or modify the factual content in an article, but also could correct the grammatical mistakes.

It was a pleasure to listen to Prof. Kodagoda's speeches. It was unique both in the art of lecture and lecturing. He laid emphasis where necessary, soft or a high tone accordingly. The content was never beyond the grasp of the audience. I have noticed many speakers trying to copy Prof. Kodagoda's art of speech.

The CPS Committee has conducted a large number of science day programs in school through-out the island. Although many of these lectures were aimed at the school children, some of them were open for the public. A science day attended by Prof. Kodagoda was a memorable day for many schools. To see him in person was an experience by itself. Many science days where Prof. Kodagoda participated were given publicity weeks before the due day. All occasions he was received with a sheaf of betel leaves and garlands. The lecture hall was full and many stood outside the hall. This was a common sight.

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In 1980's and early 1990's Prof. Kodagoda, as a member of CPS, participated in a large number of science day programs in many parts of the island. Many of these areas were remote areas of the island with little or no facilities for science teaching. It was he who initiated a discussion session with the students. They were free to ask any question within or outside science lectures. I think many students learnt more in their discussions.

I should mention here about another contribution made by Prof. Kodagoda. This is the launching of what is called 'Public Awareness Seminars'. Committee on Science Education of NARESA (now the NSF) recently launched a number of seminars under this category. On the request of general public these seminars were held either during the lunch hour or during the weekends. The topics covered were Food & Nutrition, First Aid and Social Problems, Nutritional Status of Expecting mothers, Smoking and Alcoholism, Drug Abuse and Addiction.



I cannot think of any other person other than Prof. Kodagoda, who educated the school children and the general public on the danger of drug addiction. He conducted special teaching classes for the police, and the officers of the armed forces. He clearly showed the dangers of tobacco and narcotics. He often spent his weekend at far away places lecturing the general public. He was an active member of anti-narcotic committees and associations.

One active area of the CPS was the use and misuse of pesticides. He conducted special classes for school children at inservice training institute of Agriculture at Gannoruwa. As a

medical doctor Prof. Kodagoda was visibly moved at seeing the number of deaths that occurred due to misuse of pesticides in the rural areas.

Prof. Kodagoda was very keen to educate the school children in the safe use of agrochemicals. He selected key students from rural areas and trained them on various aspects of safe use of agrochemicals. In turn, these students were asked to educate their elders at the village level. At early stages, when TV commercials were shown with people spraying agrochemicals with naked bodies, it was Prof. Kodagoda who corrected these advertisements. The importance of fully covering the body while spraying, refraining from eating, drinking, smoking or even chewing the betel nuts were demonstrated at village workshops. As a result of these activities, there was a definite drop in number of deaths due to agrochemical poisoning.



Lakshmi N. Menon International Award

Prof. Kodagoda loved school children. He called them 'son' and 'daughter' always when addressing them. No student was afraid of him

asking questions. He conducted the quiz programs in his own style. When he asked a question in such quiz contests, it was clear and easy to understand. He conducted quiz programs both in TV and Radio, as well as in nonbroadcast school level.

"Vidusara" is a popular weekly science tabloid paper, published in Sinhala. Prof. Kodagoda was one of the key consultants in the educational advisory board. Actually it was he who mooted the idea of publishing such a paper in Sinhala.

I should specifically mention of an association created out of his effort. NARESA (now the NSF) over the years conducted a number of workshops on science writing for both print and electronic media. Participants were young men and women employed by local papers, radio and TV companies. During the last workshop held in 1996, he suggested the importance of forming a science writers association. Accordingly an association was formed called 'Sri Lanka Association of Science Communication'. Prof. Kodagoda was one of the advisors to the association. So far this association held twelve workshops in the various scientific fields.

Prof. Nandadasa Kodagoda was a key person in the field of science education and communication. The flame he kindled is still alight. It is the duty of our present generation to keep it alight.

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