

# Languages for Harmony

By Dr. Percy Karunatilaka, New Zealand

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It was with great pride that I read the news item about the Tamil Language Day at Ananda College, Colombo. The little Tamil I know, I learnt at Ananda in the early 1950s.

We were taught Tamil as a subject by Mr. Sivapathasundaram, whom we endearingly called Churchill, for his resemblance to Sir Winston Churchill. We had a good number of Tamil teachers during that era, namely Mr. Thanabalasundaram for English Literature and Mr. Govindapillai for Chemistry (with a bit of Shakespeare also thrown in) in the then SSC class. Then there was Mr. Selvaratnam (Botany), Mr. Arulambalam (Chemistry) and Mr. Panikkar (Zoology) from whom I had the privilege of learning. They were all of the highest calibre. This was during Mr. L.H. Mettananda's era as Principal, when he was labelled a Sinhala chauvinist by some sections of the press of that time. He was only highlighting the plight of the then Sinhala Buddhist, giving the indigenous culture and languages their due places.

During the era of Principal P. De S. Kularatne, Mr. (later Prof. and Cabinet Minister) C. Suntharalingam and Mr. T.B. Jayah, a Malay (later Cabinet Minister) were in the tutorial staff. I remember Mr. Murugananthan, who was a well respected teacher, being invited as the guest of honour to the high table at the centenary celebration dinner of the College in 1986. It was good to note that Minister Bakeer Markar, an Old Anandian himself, was the chief guest at the Tamil Language Day.

Though Ananda College was established by Col. Olcott for the primary purpose of providing higher education to the badly neglected Sinhala Buddhist youth of our country, during that era, Ananda has always been at the forefront, serving the nation without prejudice. A knowledge of Tamil for the Sinhala student, and Sinhala for the Tamil student, is a crying need of the hour in this critical stage of our history when we are struggling for national reconciliation.

I would like to commend the present Principal, Mr. P. Abeyratna and the staff for taking the magnificent initiative of teaching Tamil at Ananda. I am happy that students from Ananda have come out with flying colours at inter-school Tamil language competitions.