

L.H. Mettananda - Educationist and National Patriot

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Daily News

Saturday, March 15, 2014 (All day)

'Education is an investment in a person's future. It is a transmission of civilization' - Ariel and Durrant

In the early 1960s when I was an undergraduate at the university, I worked as a reporter attached to the Associated Newspapers of Ceylon. The Dinamina and Daily News Editors assigned me to cover a public meeting at Kirullapone grounds.

With the evening sun faint behind the gauze of clouds, I reached the venue at about 5.00 p.m. The entire ground was filled to capacity. L. H. Mettananda, the leader of the Bauddha Jathika Balavegaya (BJB), chaired the meeting.

He was a charming personality and looked like a majestic Greek God. I slowly climbed the steps of the stage and introduced myself as a reporter assigned to cover the meeting and requested for a copy of his address.

"Now tell me Epasinghe, are you the 'Maths Man' (Referring to distinguished Anandian who later became Professor of Mathematics at University of Ceylon and Colombo and Sri Jayawardenepura University, presently an advisor to President Rajapaksa, or the cricketer."

I replied I am the cricketer who played for Nalanda. He was so kind to me, opened a file and gave me a copy of his speech.

Lokusatu Hewa Mettananda was born on March 19, 1894, 120 years ago at Kalawadumulla, Ambalangoda, as the eldest son of Kovies de Silva and Weerasuriya Karalinahamy. He had his early education at Dharmasoka, Ambalangoda, and later on at Richmond College, Galle.

He selected teaching as his profession and served in several schools and joined the staff of Ananda College in 1919. In 1923, he married Celia Wickramasooriya. As a trained teacher, he obtained his Degree in 1921. In 1924, Mettananda was appointed as the first Principal of Nalanda Vidyalaya till the school was registered in November 1925.

Mettananda returned to Ananda College in November 1925 as its Vice Principal. In 1932, with P. de S. Kularatna assuming duties as Principal, Dharmaraja College, Kandy, Mettananda was appointed Acting Principal, Ananda College, till he was confirmed as Principal on July 1, 1935. He was

later appointed, Principal, Dharmaraja College in April 1936 which he served till November 1945.

Mettananda assumed duties at Ananda College in November 1945 as Principal of the 'Crest-Jewel of Buddhist Education' and ushered in the golden era of this great educational institution. He retired in December 1954. As a teacher, a Principal he was a strict disciplinarian and a fine human being.

He possessed a golden heart. He was in the fore-front of the struggle for free education. He proposed and pioneered that every child should be given the opportunity to study Sinhala, Tamil and English. He was the pioneer of Science and Maths education in Sinhala. He played a lead role in translating Science books to Swabasha. He always stood for "One Country, One Nation."

Mettananda found that in all fields of employment, the Buddhists were not equally treated even after the country had gained Independence. A case in point was the recruitment to the Armed Forces and the Police. A radical change in the recruitment policy was made after he pointed out that the existing policy was not in keeping with the long term interests of this country.

He was not only an educationist. He noticed "a Top hat and Tail coat Government" after Independence was not prepared to provide government patronage to Buddhism. With the initiative of Professor G.P. Malalasekera, and others, proposed to D.S. Senanayake to look into the disadvantages faced by the Buddhists. The Prime Minister at first agreed to appoint a Commission, but, later backed out saying that it would violate the Soulbury Constitution. As a result of this attitude of the government, Buddhist leaders had no option, but to appoint a Commission of Inquiry under the aegis of the All Ceylon Buddhist Congress.

The Committee consisted of erudite monks such as Sri Siddhartha Dhammananda, Ananda Maithree, Kotahene Pannankitti and Madihe Pannaseeha Nayaka Theras. Amongst the laity were Dr. G. P. Malalasekera, P. de S. Kularatna and D. C. Wijewardena. Mettananda was one of the architects of this report, specially the section to do with education. The report was presented to the public on February 4, 1956. The contents of this report were to a great extent resulted in the defeat of the United National Party in the Parliamentary election that followed.

When analyzing the history before the Mettananda era, the name that comes to my mind is Anagarika Dharmapala. His forceful, combative approach to free the country from foreign occupation may have influenced educationist L. H. Mettananda.

The great national patriot Mettananda formed the Bauddha Jatika

Balavegaya. As President of this organisation, appearing before the Justice K. D. de Silva Press Commission, showed in detail the shortcomings and prejudices against the Buddhists. The BJB was of the view that the takeover of newspapers was not a remedy.

It is rather regretting to note that successive governments have not so far taken any steps to issue a stamp in honour of national patriot L H Mettananda.

Therefore if it was not done, it is high time to take action.

Mr. and Mrs. Mettananda had five children. Chandraguptha, an agriculturist by profession, the other two sons are Rajasinghe and Asoka. Indrani Gunasekera, a veterinary surgeon and the youngest Kamaladevi Ediriwira, a medical doctor, are the two daughters

- See more at: <http://www.dailynews.lk/features/educationist-and-national-patriot#sthash.vZJtAB2v.cunv95ne.dpuf>