

Sucharitha Gamlath: Enlightened Prof. brings out giant English-Sinhala dictionary

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The Sinhala-English dictionary was launched at the BMICH last Sunday. It was the brainchild of Professor Sucharitha Gamlath. At the inaugural ceremony, I too had the opportunity to join in the procession as a special guest, along with the Minister of Education and other political leaders to light the oil lamp. This finally ended up in the presidium. There was a huge crowd, mainly from Sinhala literature and art circles. Of course there were the Leftists who respected the committed "Trotskyite" professor, sprinkled among the crowd. It was a just tribute to a man who consistently and continuously expressed his displeasure about the reactionary capitalist system and took the side of the down trodden. The members of the bourgeoisie, both in the government and in the opposition were apologetic and compromising in the presence of this giant of a man, whose contribution to Sinhala literature is unique. After the goodwill speeches of academics, political leaders had to make their contribution. I was thinking as to what I should say of this great personality Sucharitha. Strangely, speeches stopped after Bimal Rathnayake of the JVP, made his speech. The so-called post modernist organizers of the event had concluded that my speech would be intolerable. Though I cannot complain, I must come out with what I was planning to say.

Contemporary

Comrade Sucharitha, the most respected professor of Sinhala, though two years senior to me, is a contemporary of mine at Peradeniya campus. Both of us were research students in England about the same time. However, except at political events we never met as we belonged to two different fields of study. His subjects were philosophy, literature and ethics while I indulged in electro magnetic theory. I have attempted in recent times to dabble in art criticism which attracted harsh words from Sucharitha the master! Today he has become a giant of the Sinhala society by devoting his energy to regeneration and development of the Sinhala language. This is a time where all goblins are talking about the development of the Sinhala nation. In nation building, one of the most important aspects is the language. In fact one could say that, without the Sinhala language there won't be a Sinhala nationality. In the struggle for national democracy it was important to develop and regenerate the Sinhala language so that it could compete with the dominant language, English. Democratic liberation does not mean throwing English into the dust bin; but it means that local languages should emerge from repression to enlighten the common masses. Sinhala should develop with its sister Tamil, the language of the Tamil neighbour. Professor Gamlath is unique in this respect as he always saw both the importance of English as an international language and the close association of Sinhala with Tamil. So he gave the best part of his life to prepare a comprehensive Sinhala-English dictionary with over half a million words and thereafter, a Sinhala-Tamil dictionary of similar strength. He gave every encouragement for the development of Lankan Tamil identity. He could do this because of his understanding of the permanent revolution and Trotskyism.

Different social entities

In the 3rd century BC, Gemunu, Nandimithra and others became giants of the day, not by defeating Tamils. Then Sinhala and Tamil meant different social entities, where there were no nations or nationalities. It may have been a struggle between leaders of the Asiatic regime and Arya Brahmins

who believed in Varna divisions. Those who defeated Varna divisions and established an egalitarian Asiatic regime were made heroes in the related story. But it is difficult to select the real hero between the two Arya shasthriya: Gemunu and Elara! Today it is very different; the growth of capital has given impetus to the nascent development of nationalities. Both Sinhala and Tamil are local nationalities struggling to get a foothold in this miserable world dominated by global powers. The democratic ideal is for oppressed nations of the region's Sinhalese and Tamils to get together with other communities such as Muslims, Christians etc and to fight against the hegemony of "Anglo-Saxon" ruling elites, the agents of global capital. The repression of the minority nation by the majority is the sure path to further enslavement by global capital. In fact, Lanka today is a classic example. Professor Gamlath is a giant today, because he understood this phenomenon in all its aspects. We are waiting to see the Tamil - Sinhala giant dictionary of Gamlath and Sivathambi. Sure I may not have said all this, but certainly my speech would have added colour to the occasion.

P.S.

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