

## CORRESPONDENCE

# Professor Chandra Gunawardena: an appreciation

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It is with profound sorrow that this tribute is presented in memory of Professor Chandra Gunawardena who passed away in August 2021.

Prof. Gunawardena, Emeritus Professor of Education at the Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL) has left a huge vacuum in the fields of education and social sciences. She was an inspiring role model in academia and a sincere friend who always greeted us with a cheerful smile. During her academic career that spanned over five decades, Professor Gunawardena taught and mentored thousands of undergraduate and postgraduate students in several universities to achieve their academic and professional goals.

Prof. Gunawardena obtained her BA, Postgraduate Diploma in Education and MA in Education from the University of Peradeniya (then the University of Ceylon), and PhD in Education from La Trobe University in Australia. Later, she was awarded a Commonwealth Academic Staff Fellowship at the University of Birmingham, UK, and her research study was published by the Institute of Educational Planning. In recognition of her outstanding academic contributions, Prof. Gunawardena was awarded Doctor of Letters (Honoris Causa) by the OUSL in 2006.

She was a brilliant scholar and researcher renowned nationally and internationally. She specialized in the fields of comparative education and sociology of education focusing on higher education and women's studies. Prof. Gunawardena functioned as the Commonwealth of Learning (COL)-UNESCO Chair in Distance Education

at the OUSL, and COL, Canada and UNESCO, Paris. She was recognized as an Asian Leader in Distance Education by the COL in 2017.

Prof. Gunawardena was the Founder Dean of the Faculty of Education of the OUSL. She was the Chair Professor of the Department of Secondary Education, and also Senior Professor of Education. The establishment of the Departments of Early Childhood and Primary Education, and Special Needs Education in the Faculty is testimony to the path-breaking initiatives of Prof. Gunawardena. She functioned as the Acting Vice-Chancellor of the OUSL on several occasions. She generously extended her services to other institutions including the Faculty of Graduate Studies of the University of Colombo.

Previously, she was attached to the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of the OUSL and functioned as its Dean for six years. Before joining the OUSL in 1993, she was a member of the academic staff of the Faculty of Education, University of Colombo and Department of Education at the University of Peradeniya.

She was engaged in research throughout her career. Her research contributions covered wide-ranging fields including early childhood, primary, secondary, tertiary and teacher education. She conducted research in collaboration with several international organizations such as COL, UNESCO, UNDP and ADB. Recognizing the crucial role of research in global university rankings, she always encouraged academics to join the research projects conducted by her in collaboration with the World

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Bank, the Ministry of Education and other organizations. She also provided ample opportunities to young academics to participate in international conferences organized by the COL and the Asian Association of Open Universities (AAOU). She was an active member of the Centre for Women's Research (CENWOR) along with her mentor, the late Professor Swarna Jayaweera.

Prof. Gunawardena provided immense contributions to the activities of the National Science Foundation (NSF) for a long period. She had been a key member of the Editorial Board of the Sri Lanka Journal of Social Sciences since 1997 until her demise. She made a major contribution as the Editor-in-Chief of the Journal during the period 2005-2011. Her tireless efforts in inspiring and guiding academics to engage in research and disseminate their research findings in peer-reviewed journals were immeasurable.

She was also a member of the Working Committee on Social Sciences (WCSS) of the NSF during the period 1997-2019. She extensively contributed to the international conferences, research and academic workshops, public lectures, panel discussions and policy forums organized by the NSF. In her mission to nurture research culture among social scientists, she spearheaded several training courses and workshops at

the NSF providing guidance in social science research methodology, academic writing, and research ethics.

Reflecting her passion for multi-disciplinary research, Prof. Gunawardena provided invaluable contributions to the NSF to conduct several international conferences that dealt with socioeconomic equity, labour migration, and the socio-cultural nexus of science and technology (S&T).

She also gave her input to many policy-level discussions conducted by the NSF on diverse fields including Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), public health implications of solid waste management, socioeconomic effects of the demographic shifts, labour market issues, and investment in research and development (R&D).

Prof. Gunawardena was a model to be followed in respect of professional integrity and self-discipline. She never missed meetings and other activities of the NSF even though she was not in good health during the last stages. She was always prompt in attending the meetings before the scheduled time, and the last one to leave.

Although Prof. Gunawardena is sadly no more with us, her motto "This is your country, this is your university and this is your faculty" will remain forever inspiring many generations of academics in decades to come.