

Professor M. L. T. Kannangara (1925-2017)



Professor M.L.T. Kannangara, Emeritus Professor of Physics and a former head of the Department of Physics at the University of Colombo, passed away on September 26, 2017. After graduating from the University of Ceylon, Colombo Campus (now known as University of Colombo) with a BSc special degree in Physics, he continued his studies at the University of Manchester, UK. Upon completing his PhD at Manchester concentrating on Cosmic Ray Physics, Professor Kannangara returned to his alma mater in the mid-1950s as a Lecturer and spent his entire academic career there. He actively participated in the advancement of science in Sri Lanka and is a Founder Fellow of the National Academy of Sciences of Sri Lanka. In 1994, University of Colombo conferred Professor Kannangara an Honorary DSc.

Many claim that carrying out high quality scientific research in developing countries like Sri Lanka, especially in fundamental fields like physics, is difficult if not impossible. Professor Kannangara however led a healthy research program throughout his career. In the 1960's, together with his colleague Professor P.C.B. Fernando (later head of the Department of Physics at University of Sri Jayewardenapura), Professor Kannangara published a series of papers in the *Journal of Geophysical Research* on geomagnetic micro-pulsations based on observations taken close to the geomagnetic equator, which runs through Sri Lanka. *Journal of Geophysical Research* is the leading journal of the American Geophysical Union and Professor Kannangara amply demonstrated that quality research

carried out from Sri Lanka could be published in highly recognized international journals. Later, as Head of the Department of Physics, he was instrumental in initiating an extremely successful international research collaboration with Sweden. Many current members of the Department of Physics have benefitted from that collaboration.

Professor Kannangara was also one of the finest teachers of the Department of Physics. He took great care to prepare his own lecture notes from multiple sources and updated them as necessary when new scientific advances became available. Most importantly, he was eager to point out the underlying physics behind what he was teaching. He emphasized the importance of assessing the relative contributions from different physical parameters to a particular phenomenon and to evaluate what is relevant and what is not. He paid great attention to errors and error propagation, a critical aspect of experimental physics. Overall, he imparted both the methodology behind physics and the joy of doing physics to his students. Professor Kannangara always had the interests of his students in mind.

In 1990 Professor Kannangara officially retired from the university as a Professor of Physics and was conferred the title of Emeritus Professor by the university senate.

Penned by his former students Nalin H. Samarasingha (Physics -1981), A.G. Unil Perera (Physics -1981), Sarath D. Gunapala (Physics -1979), and D. Asoka Mendis (Mathematics -1960).