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## About Ourselves . . . .

The historic principality of Ruhuna (Rōhana in Skt. and Pali) occupied nearly half of the land-area of Sri Lanka to the south of the rivers Kalu and Mahavili. It straddled the island from the $S$. W. coast to the Eastern, spreading over several natural regions so that a headland on the western shore_ line, a lofty peak in the central mountain massif and a lagoon on the east coast sand-bars could claim a location in common. But in the crucible of Time the word, while managing to retain its form, could not help losing part of its meaning, and the effective Ruhuna today does not connote the whole of the sprawling territory as of old: it is but an undefined locality bordering the ocean on the South with its landward boundaries, if ever, vague and indeterminant. And when a University for the Ruhuna area was contemplated and the idea acted upon, hardly was any attention focussed to a location outside this region, however underfined its extent and limits were. The Ruhuna University, it was thought, should be sited somewhere in the South, and not far inland either.

The choice fell on Mātara, located somewhat in the center of the island's soutbern sea-board, not too close to the capital city in and around which many of the institutions of higher education are, and not unduely to the east where communication facilities are less and the climate not as congenial. Further, Mätara is blessed with a fitting heritage too: an intellectual tradition that burgeoned over two centuries ago to continue up to and merge with the literary and other learned activities of the present day.

So the main Campus which is soon to accommodate two of the Faculties and the administrative center is located just outside the town limits of Mütara within sight of Sri Lanka's southernmost point Tenavare, Dondure, Dondra or Dondra Head to sailors and map-makers of the past, but to us Devundara or Devinuvara, the 'City of God', hallowed by the fane of Uppalavanna or Upulvan of the 'colour of the blue lotus'. And from its southern-most mounds of brown earth hard by the waves and the highest balconies rising against the backdrop of the Deniyāya Hills one may espy but a few miles of an ocean surface (itself of the colour of the blue lotus) that stretches for well nigh a quarter of the earth's circumference right up to the very icy cliffs of Antarctica.

Although the general idea of setting up a University of Ruhuna 'somewhere in the South' had, for quite some time, been discussed at various levels and the necessity of setting up such an institution was widely accepted in
the country, it received official status only in October 1977, consequent to the keen interest and painstaking attempts made by the Hon. Ronnie de Mel, Minister of Finance and Planning and M. P. for Devinuvara. Prof. M. B. Ariyapala, a very senior academic who had served at the University of Ceylon, Colombo and Peradeniya, and was then attached to the University of Colombo, was appointed by the Hon. Nissanka Wijeratna, Minister of Education, to head a Committee empowered to recommend a suitable site for the location of the new institution and the Faculties of which it may be composed. Within a few inonths, on the 4th January 1978, the Committee submitted its report reconmending Mittara as the most suitable center of a dispersed institution. The Committee was also of the opinion that it should possess four Faculties to begin with, viz., Arts and Science at Mātara itself, Agriculture at the Government Farm site at Māpalāna six miles to the north, and Medicine at Galle where the South's largest hospital is located. A Faculty of Engineering may be added at a later date. Subsequently, the ViceChancellor of the University of Sri Lanka, Prof. P. P. G. L. Siriwardana, appointed Prof. Sirimal Ranawella, Head of the Department of History of the Vidyālankāra Campus of the University of Sri Lanka, as the Officer Coordinating activities connected with the setting up of the new institution;and an initial administrative center was set up at Eliyakanda in May of the same year.

Not much time was lost, and on the 27th August 1978, the Hon. J. R. Jayewardene, Prime Minister of Sri Lanka, declared open at Mātara, by a simple though impressive ceremony, the 'Mātara Campus of the University of Sri Lanka' with Prof. Mervyn W. Thenabadu as its head.

A new University Bill aimed at bringing reform to the whole of the island's University set-up was, in the meantime, being drafted. It was passed in Parliament as the University Act No. 16 of 1978. An important reform brought about by this piece of legislation was the elevation of all Campuses of the former University of Sri Lanka to the status of independent and autonomous Universities.

The fiedgling institution at Mātara was yet too young to be granted that status immediately. Nevertheless, it was elevated and renamed the 'Ruhuna University College' as from the 1st January 1979 with Prof. G. C. N. Jayasuriya as its Director. Its. Faculties were affiliated as follows: Arts and Medicine to the University of Colombo; Science to the University of Kälaniya, and Agriculture to the. University of Përädeniya. Each University was granted the right to frame syllabuses and issue certificates to graduates of the Faculty assigned. Internal administration was vested in a Board of Management.

However, Prof. Jayasuriya left his post in about a month, and Dr. D. A. Kotalawala of the Kalaniya University was appointed to fill the vacancy.

Dr. Kotalawala served the infant institution with a deep sense of devotion and dedication for five years. During his tenure of office several key posts on the academic staff were filled, the building programmes inaugurated and the crest of the institution designed and adopted along with the motto and the official colours. The first set of graduates in Arts and Science passed out in 1981. Dr. Kotalawala left on the 10th August 1982 preparatory to his sabbatical leave.

Prof. R. H. Wijenayaka, Head of the Department of Chemistry, took over the reins of the institution but relinquished them after two months, and Prof. G. P. Samarawickrama, Head of the Department of Community Medicinc, succeeded him. Soon the first batch of graduates from the Faculties of Medicine and Agriculture passed out.

Preparations were made, in the meanwhile, to elevate the institution to the status of an autonomous and independent University. All Faculties had demonstrated their academic efficiency, the library was expanding, the new buildings were being constructed at a satisfactory speed and there was no particular reason for delay. And so, on the 1st February 1984. the University of Ruhuna was formally inaugurated with Prof. G. P. Samarawickramia ats its first Vice-Chancellor. Mr. B. Abeysundara and Mr. W. A.S Weerasinghe were appointed to the posts of Registrar and Bursar, respectively.

On the 10th and the 11th of the same month ceremonial activities to mark the occasion were held. An academic procession (in which the students too took part) started off from the Eliyakanda junction and reached the compound of the administrative building at Mäddavatta where the University community along with the members of the Mahā Sangha and a large number of distinguished invitees gathered for the inaugural meeting. Mr. B. Abeysundara, Registrar, read out the proclamation inaugurating the University of Ruhuna. Dr. Stanley Kalpage, Secretary to the Ministry of Higher Education and Chairman of the University Grants Commission, the Hon. Ronnie de Mel, Minister of Finance and Planning and the Vice-Chancellor addressed the gathering. A full night's chanting of Pirit was held in a picterresque mandapa, and on the following day alms were served to 100 members of the Mahà Sangha. The members of the administrative staff were responsible to a large extent for the successful working of the religious programme.

The Ven. Pandit Paravāhära Paññānanda, B.A. (London), Hony. D. Litt. (Sri J'pura) was appointed Chancellor of the new University in March 1984.

Even up to the time of writing the University had not settled itself fully in permanent quarters. Right from 1978 the Faculty of Science and the administrative section are housed in the buildings of the former Junior Technical School at Mäddavatta, and the Faculty of Arts is accommodated within the Teachers' Training College at Eliyakanda, half a mile away by
the sea. Medical students selected for the Matara Campus in 1978 and 1979 were accommodated in the Faculties at Përädeniya and Colombo, and they moved in only after the Faculty of Medicine was set up at the General Hospital at Mahamodara, Galle in 1980. The first set of students selected for the course in Agriculture (1978) were accommodated temporarily at Müddavatta and were shifted to Māpalāna an year lator.

The building programme now nearing completion was inaugurated in the middle of 1980 by the Hon. Ronnie de Mel and Dr. Kotalawala. An extensive site of 71 acres was acquired at Vällamadama for the construction of the buildings of the Arts and Science Faculties, the Libraty and the Administrative Center together with the Vice-Chancellor's Residence and limited residential facilities for the staff. Land for a play-ground and a lake has also been set apart here. A 12 acre extent adjacent to the new hospital at Karapitiya on the northern skirts of the city of Galle was acquired for the construction of the buildings of the Medical Faculty. At Māpaläna a further extent of 10 acres bordering the original farm of 108 acres was acquired.

The initial building programme at Māpalana was completed by the end of 1983, and at Karāpitiya by January 1984. The Science Faculty buildings, the Vice-Chancellor's Residence and staff quarters at Vällamaḍama were completed by September 1984, and the work on the rest is proceeding satisfactorily.

The crest of the institution, as initially designed, consisted of an outline of Sri Lanka in which was marked the boundary of the Rōhana principality; below was a simple traditional earthenware lamp (pahana) the flame of which was shaped to occupy the total area of the principality. These were circumscribed by two concentric ovals with their vertical sides straight, exterior to which, on the upper half, ran the motto pañ $\tilde{n} \tilde{a}$ naränam ratanam ('Wisdom to mankind is a treasure'), and on the lower half, the inscription ruhuna viśva vidyālayìya vidyāyatanaya ('Ruhuna University College'), both in Sinhala characters. Another similar oval, but in bolder line, ran round the lettering enclosing the whole design.

It has now been modified: the boundary of the principality is not shown in the outline of Sri Lanka, the flame of the pahana rises from near the center of the southern coastline (where the main campus is located) and its effulgence, represented by short, straight, radiating lines, appears to light up thi wtole island. The lower inscription has been appropriately changed to ruhuna viśva vidyälaya ('University of Ruhuna').

The official colours of the Ruhuna University are gold and chocolate brown. Of these, gold (with other similar pigments) has been evident in native Sinhala art for centuries. It also represents learning and wisdom in the Orient - with the monks (known for their intellectual and spiritual attainments) donning the robe of a kindred hue. Besides, it symbolises light - the rays of the sun being poetically imagined as ranvan, 'golden'.

Brown is the colour of the fecund earth and is, at times, regarded as symbolic of strength and resolution.

The flag of the institution is composed of two equal and horizontally disposed stripes in gold and chocolate brown, with the former on top. On the mastward top quarter (i.e., on the background of gold) is the crest, also in chocolate brown.

