

## HILDA WESTBROOK KULARATNE: 1895-1995

Jane Russell

**H**ilda Westbrook Kularatne, the English wife of P.de S. Kularatne, was born one hundred years ago. Mrs. Kularatne's name is co-terminous with that of her husband when speaking of the development of Buddhist education in Sri Lanka. She founded and served as Principal of four leading Buddhist girls' colleges - Ananda Balika M.V. in Colombo, Sri Sumangala Balika M.V. Panadura, Maliyadeva Girls College in Kurunegala and Pushpadana Balika M.V. Kandy - as well as serving as Principal of Visakha and founding-Principal of Mahamaya. Without her, it would be difficult to imagine what Buddhist girls' education in Sri Lanka might have looked like today. Suffice to say that Hilda Westbrook Kularatne was a pedagogic architect equal in stature to that master-builder of Buddhist education, P.de S. Kularatne. In attempting to conjecture on the magnitude of her achievement, one possible measure is this: in 1895, the year of her birth, less than one in twenty Buddhist girls or women were literate. Today more girls from Buddhist homes enter the medical faculties of Sri Lanka's universities than from any other group, male or female.

A hundred years is not long in the lifetime of a culture as ancient as Sri Lanka's but it is a very long time in the memory of a human being. Perhaps that is why we humans celebrate centenaries with such fervor. Although Hilda Westbrook Kularatne died unexpectedly, ten years before her allotted biblical span, her life was packed with incident, with excitement and momentous accomplishments. The ability to take risks, to go into physically and psychologically unknown territory, to face bodily danger and potential humiliation, to accept hostility and insult is the measure of that most political of virtues - courage. And courage was a virtue Hilda Westbrook Kularatne carried with her through life. To say she that she was an idealist is an understatement. She lived an ideal. If she had any major fault, possibly it was an inability to accept any falling short of the ideal. Disillusionment was a terrible punishment visited upon her by life. To err is human, to forgive is almost impossible. And there were occasions when Hilda could neither forgive others nor herself for failure of the human response to the ideal - for a loss of nerve.

But we are talking here of the headiest heights of endeavor. How does one chart the destinies of those exalted by fate? To start at the beginning, Hilda Muriel Westbrook was born on November 28th 1895 in Dulwich village, the historic, semi-rural and wholly genteel suburb of South-east London. Hilda's father, W. Francis Westbrook, a westcountryman, was a high-ranking civil servant in the Colonial Office. Her mother, Jessie Duncan-Westbrook, came from an artistic Scots family. Significantly, both parents were active Theosophists. Hilda and her brother were therefore brought up in an

atmosphere of intellectual and artistic excellence, made somewhat rarefied by their parents' passionate interest in oriental religions. Jessie Westbrook produced an English translation of Persian Sufi poetry in 1915 under the imprint of a London feminist press. During the first world war, Francis Westbrook read a passage from an English translation of the Baghavad Gita every day, marking each quatrain with the date as he read it. This book was found among Hilda's effects after her death.

The schooling of a celebrated educationist is always more formative than it is for most people. Almost all biographers of P.de S. Kularatne remark on the influence of Richmond College and in particular its young Principal, Dr. W.T. Small, in shaping his values and purpose in life. Less is known of Hilda Westbrook's schooling but one or two salient facts have recently come to light.

Hilda Westbrook had her primary and secondary education at James Allen's Girls' School in Dulwich. Founded in 1741, James Allen's is one of the oldest girls' schools in England. James Allen, the founder, was a Freethinker and educationist. He was almost a century ahead of his British contemporaries in believing girls' education to be important. When Hilda was enrolled as pupil number 1717 in 1903, aged eight, the school was already well over 150 years old.

Hilda was an outstanding, all-round student. In 1912, she was awarded an Exhibition in recognition of her excellent results in the junior school certificate. She played hockey for the school 1st eleven. When she left James Allen's in July 1913 after taking her 'Senior', she had already been designated 'Cambridge material'. She took her Cambridge entrance later that year and entered Newnham to read the Mediaeval and Modern Languages Tripos (French and German) in October 1914, a few weeks into what became known as the Great War. Hilda's male contemporaries at Cambridge - Rupert Brooke included - quickly became caught up in war fever. How the nineteen year old Hilda reacted to the spectacle of her fellow students rushing like lemmings to die at the front, we do not know.

Was it perhaps disillusionment with European civilisation that caused her to apply in 1919 for a teaching post at Ananda College, Colombo, advertised in a British journal of **Theosophy**? In any event, Hilda Westbrook was interviewed for the post by D.B. Jayatilake who was in England in connection with a constitutional memorial. Jayatilake realised at once her potential and offered her the position of Principal of Visakha Vidyalaya which had just fallen vacant. Hilda accepted and six weeks later, she arrived in Ceylon.

It was January 1920. Within a week she had met P.de S. Kularatne, the dynamic young Principal of Ananda College. Within a year, after waiting the eight-months stipulated by her-parents as a condition to their agreement (C. Suntheralingam, the mathematician and Kularatne's best friend was instrumental in getting the Westbrooks' permission), Hilda wed P. de S. Kularatne. And thus was born 'a marriage of true minds' which was to have profound effects on the educational system of Sri Lanka.

In chronicling Hilda Westbrook Kularatne's contribution to Buddhist education, apart from the six schools with which she was associated as Founder and/or Principal, mention should be made of her periods teaching Post-Senior classes to those who were waiting to take University entrance exams at Ananda College, Colombo and Dharmaraja College, Kandy as well as her working long hours into the night to ensure success for the educational exhibitions and fund-raising carnivals organised by her husband. She was, besides, visiting Lecturer in French and German at the University College in the early 1920's, before the birth of her first child Ananda. She also helped P.de S. Kularatne write and edit the "Buddhist Chronicle", a fortnightly review dedicated to furthering Buddhist education and culture.

When Dr. W.Y. Evans-Wentz passed through Ceylon on his way from Sikkim to the United States, after completing his English edition of the Bardo Thodol, the Tibetan Book of the Dead, Hilda acted as interpreter and amanuensis in his philosophical discussions with leading Theravada monks. In a free translation she made of world-renowned German Buddhist Paul Dhakke's last lecture in Berlin for the Buddhist Annual of 1928, Hilda had this to say:

Buddhism does not deny the idea of God but makes it mean what it really ought to mean. It becomes a higher humanity and thus the individual becomes personally responsible for every moment of his life..... For the Buddhist, there is only the idea of action and the result of action - the religion of dispassionate, unmitigated personal responsibility and therefore the religion for men who have developed out of the common run and who know that in the realm of reality nothing is given for nothing.

In 1952 Hilda Westbrook Kularatne was awarded the M.B.E. for her services to education in Sri Lanka. Her last position as Warden of the Ceylon Students Hostel in London brought her into contact with many of the young men and women who were to determine the future of her adopted land. When she died on 5th January 1956, she left behind her husband, P. de S. Kularatne, a son Parakrama and a daughter Maya. The Kularatne's eldest son Ananda, a flyer with the RAF, had gone missing, presumed dead, during the second World War. Hilda's creed of 'unmitigated personal responsibility' had made Ananda's disappearance the hardest blow for her to bear and may have led to her premature death.

Looking back from the vista of what would have been her hundredth birthday, it is difficult to decide whether Hilda Westbrook Kularatne was motivated purely by a desire to flesh out the driving ambition of her Sinhalese husband or whether she had what modern feminists call her own 'agenda'. But it can be said without blandishment that Hilda Westbrook Kularatne embodied the noblest impulses of her sex. If education is the bedrock of a nation's culture, Hilda Westbrook Kularatne's true memorial lies buried deep in that bedrock. ■

## THE STATE, DEPORTATION AND PUBLIC POWER

Jean Richardson

**D**r. Jane Russell was allegedly removed for overstaying her visa. What we should not forget is that deportation is an extreme measure: "the extirpation from a country of persons settled within its borders is the most direct infringement of personal freedom of movement: it requires the clearest justification and unobstructed rights of appeal" (Geoffrey Robertson: 1988: 322). The casual use of a harsh measure such as deportation is serious and requires analysis of the use or misuse of public power. Although Dr. Russell's deportation may have been "legal", we must remember that it was not Dr. Russell who committed a crime but the institutions and organs of the state which treated her as "a common criminal".

### Deportation-a tool for the removal of whores, agitators and eccentrics

**D**eportation was used during colonial times as a means of expelling "undesirable Europeans". The undesirables were people who did not conform to the narrow vision of what a decent, civilized colonist should be, the irony of being both civilized and an oppressor being lost within the blinkered vision of the colonial state. In the 1920s for example, the British authorities deported a Russian woman who was a "disgrace to the European community in Ceylon....constantly seen in the company of sailors.....wandering about the public streets drunk and indecently dressed" (Bracegirdle Commission 1938: 421). The British were keen to get rid of anyone who might betray a breach in the ranks and expelled white male and