

Vote of Condolence for Prof. J.A. Gunawardena



It is with deep sorrow that we wish to place on record this tribute to Emeritus Professor, J.A. Gunawardena who passed away on 2nd, September 2019. By the time of his demise on 2nd of September 2019, he was at the age of 82 years. He had been working in the department of Electrical and Electronic Engineering, Faculty of Engineering, University of Peradeniya for 43 years and spending his retirement at the time of demise.

Professor Jaya Abeysingha Gunawardena was born on 16th April, 1937 and studied in Mahinda College Galle. He enrolled in the BSc Engineering degree at the University of Ceylon and was graduated in July 1959 with First Class honours. There onwards he was recruited to the department as an instructor. He was promoted to a lecturer in Electrical Engineering in 1961 and had been working in that capacity for six years. He received Smith-Mundt, Fulbright scholarship to follow M.S.E.E. degree at the School of Electrical Engineering, Purdue University, Lafayette, Indiana, U.S.A. He completed M.S.E.E. degree from the Purdue University in September 1961. Professor Gunawardena pursued postgraduate research on “Analog Electrical Storage Devices in Self adjusting Control Systems” at the University of Cambridge, England during September 1963 to July 1967. He received George Colline Award from University of Cambridge in 1967 and he obtained his Doctorate in the same year. After the completion of his doctorate, Professor Gunawardena had served the department as a Senior Lecturer from September 1967 to October 1977. He had been promoted to the Professor of Electrical Engineering in 1977 October and he served in that capacity until his retirement in December 2002.

Professor Gunawardena is acknowledged as a special teacher who tested students on what they learnt in a very unique way. He never went after praises or pay checks but firmly believed in drilling the students with hard core of engineering basics to drive students to self-learning habits. He was one of the pioneers in introducing the use of computers to the undergraduates in the Faculty. His initial contribution to the development of control engineering laboratory and electronics engineering laboratory in the Department of Electrical and Electronic Engineering was significant. During his career in the faculty, he was the founder Head of the Department of Computer Sciences now named as Department of Computer Engineering in the Faculty of Engineering. He was the in-charge of the University Computing centre of the University of Peradeniya, from its inception in January in 1972. Also he had been working as the Director of

Electronic Workshop, Faculty of Engineering, from January 1982 to April 1990. He also served in many work groups at the national level including, Chairman of the working committee on science information, natural resources of energy, and science authority of Sri Lanka, and Chairman to the committee on applications of nuclear power reactor in Sri Lanka.

Professor Gunawardena is a brilliant researcher. While doing his postgraduate studies at Purdue University, the US government and NASA were investing heavily on the Apollo program, and wanted to recruit talented engineers. Professor Gunawardena was one of about 20 carefully selected persons, based on his skills in mathematics and control. During his career, he served reputed international Universities during his sabbatical leave periods. During 1974-1975 period, he had been working as a full time researcher at the department of computer science, University of Reading, England, by receiving the Royal Society/Nuffield Foundation Bursary. Also he spent his sabbatical leave at NTU Singapore in 1990-1991 period.

Professor Gunawardena was a competent practical electrical engineer. He was a chartered Electrical engineer, a Fellow of the Institution of Engineers Sri Lanka (IESL), a Fellow of the Institution of Electrical Engineers (IEE), London, and a Life Member of Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE). He was a consultant to many industries such as Bank of Ceylon, Ceylon Shipping Corporation, Department of Inland Revenue, State Pharmaceutical Corporation, the Ceylon Chamber of Commerce, Department of Telecommunication, National Development Bank, Export Development Board, and Ceylon Tobacco Company. He provided computing/data processing solutions to these establishments.

Professor Gunawardena was a symbol of simplicity and humility. He was a humble Professional who lived an exemplary life. He was a teacher who inspired many committed ethical professionals. Teachers like Prof. J. A. Gunawardena deserve praise and gratitude.

We, the Faculty of Engineering, are forever grateful to Professor Gunawardena for his great contribution to the University and the nation. On behalf of Department of Electrical and Electronic Engineering, and the Faculty of Engineering, we express our deepest condolence to his family members especially to his wife and his daughter.