

Obituary



Jayantha S Wimalasiri
1936–2005

An exemplary academician

Associate Professor Jayantha Wimalasiri (69) was called to rest on Thursday, 16 June 2005 at 2.00 pm. Neighbours Professor Subramaniam Sotheeswaran and Mrs Sotheeswaran had transported him to hospital the previous night because he was too sick to manage for himself. His blood pressure was low. The following morning, when he was asked to allow airlifting to Sydney, he replied with his usual enthusiasm, 'I will be back in three days. Don't worry!' And promptly back he did come, but in a cortège for his final journey to his work place and then the pyre.

His son, Jaminda Wimalasiri, from Sydney, agreed to a Hindu ceremonial ritual, which was attended by the Sri Lankan Honorary Representative and his community. Amongst the mourners were the Vice Chancellor, Professor Anthony Tarr, and other senior management staff of the University of the South Pacific, as well as SSED colleagues. The Head of the School of Social and Economic Development, who worked with him for a little over three

years, spoke highly of his work. The Honorary Consul for Sri Lanka, Jaimi Semarawera, spoke highly of Jay and his work as a distinguished academic who completed his BA and MA at home in Sri Lanka, MBA at Michigan University, USA and PhD at Lancaster University, UK. He was on course for a full Professorship.

The whole University of the South Pacific was shocked. Colleagues and students talked about meeting him, talking to him and interacting 'just a few days ago' or even 'just yesterday'. The loss to the School of Social and Economic Development and the Department of Management and Public Administration was immediate. He was the Assistant to the Head of School (Staffing) and an Associate Professor in his department, teaching, urging, training in research methods and accompanying and mentoring students and younger colleagues to study, publish with him and further their horizons. One of his closest friends and colleagues, Ben Waqailiti, summed him up thus: 'He was a real teacher of distinction. All his work was done ready for the Board of Assessment next week.' (This was despite his having just been on brief sick leave to undergo an eye operation, which had gone well.)

Jay, as he was affectionately known by his friends and colleagues, handled University administrative responsibilities with enthusiasm, a rare urgency and finesse. Those who worked with him vouch for his enthusiasm and pursuit of excellence. Such colleagues were many, for he served in the School Research Committee, the University Research Committee, the Editorial Board of the *Journal of Pacific Studies*, the First Year Student Task Force, the HIV/AIDS Task Force and as organiser of the Faculty Seminar Series, besides being on the School Board of Studies and an Assistant to the Head of School. He was a tireless and committed worker who was respected by his colleagues.

Some of his recent work included the publication, with a younger colleague, of the report, *A Survey on HIV/AIDS/STIs in Fiji: Challenges and Opportunities for Action* (School of Social and Economic Development, University of the South Pacific, Suva, 2003, 40 pp.). In 2004 he published 'Contrasts in moral reasoning: the Fijians and Singaporeans', in *Journal of Business Ethics*, 49, 259–72. In the same year he published 'A cross-national study on children's purchasing behaviour and parental response' in the *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, 21(4). These publications in his mature academic years exhibit his

social consciousness, conscience and concerns—a scholar and at heart a Buddhist, Jay was a privately religious man who was proud of his homeland of Sri Lanka. On leave in Australia in January 2005, he was active in fundraising efforts to support Sri Lanka after the disastrous tsunami in December 2004.

The quality and quantity of tangible and intangible outputs of his seven years at USP is vouched for by his colleagues, the School and especially his students. Before coming here, he had worked in the University of New South Wales, prior to which he had spent 25 years at the University of Singapore. He is survived by his wife and son.

Jay we salute you, your work and human values. We thank the Almighty for the gifts you had in abundance that were shared with us freely, and the opportunity to work with such a generous colleague and friend. May you rest in peace, Professor Jayantha Wimalasiri. May we follow the same route with as much grace when our time comes.

A eulogy was delivered by Dr Ropate Qalo, Head of the School of Social and Economic Development, at the funeral rites for Dr Wimalasiri, 20 June 2005.

The Editor and Editorial Board of this journal also record their sorrow at the passing of a friend. He was a lively and industrious colleague and his informed opinions, especially on promotion and marketing, will be missed.

*Ropate Qalo
HOS, SSED*
