

OBITUARY

IN MEMORIAM

MOM LUANG BOONLUA DEBYASUVARN

M.L. Boonlua Debyasuvarn (née Kunjara), noted scholar, educationist and writer, passed away on 7 June, 1982, as a result of cerebral haemorrhage. She was 71. Born into a distinguished family of artists and administrators, she inherited much from the cultural riches of her family environment. Her father, *Chao Phrya* Deves, was known for his many constructive innovations in the dramatic arts. Close family ties with the renowned Prince Naris proved to be a further spiritual and cultural enrichment. In her autobiography, M.L. Boonlua depicted with great lucidity the warmth of this enviable milieu which left an indelible imprint upon herself. She owed to her family the open-mindedness and the susceptibility towards new experiences that characterized her life and work.

As was the case with most aristocratic families, her roots in Thai culture were enriched by a western-oriented education. M.L. Boonlua went to a convent school in Penang and then to another convent school in Bangkok before going to Chulalongkorn University where she took her B.A. in 1936. *Acharn* Boonlua was destined to be a part of a fair number of innovative educational projects, starting with the creation of Trium Udom Suksa School, where she did distinguished work and rose to the rank of Assistant Director. After further training at the University of Minnesota where she took her M.A in Education, she was entrusted by the Ministry of Education with the task of heading the newly-created Supervisory Unit in the Department of General Education. It could be said that she was among the very first educators in Thailand who saw the real importance of educational supervision. She was then transferred to the College of Education, Bangsaen, when she served as Principal during the difficult early years of its existence. But it was her last assignment as Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Silpakorn University at Sanam Chandra Palace, that she had a chance to initiate many innovations in the field of the humanities. Particularly in the teaching of Thai literature, M.L. Boonlua proposed new schemes and methods that were later to be adopted by other tertiary institutions. If contemporary Thai literature now constitutes an integral part of the university curriculum, we owe it to *Acharn* Boonlua, who fought so hard for its rightful place.

The decade following her retirement could be called M.L. Boonlua's "Indian Summer". She was free to think, to write and to live, without having to subject herself to the vicissitudes of government service, which she, being such an independent

mind, could not help abhorring. She served in a number of advisory committees, notably in various curricular committees of the Ministry of Education and the National Committee for the Co-ordination of English Instruction (in liaison with SEAMEO-RELC). She was always a "resource person" in the truest and noblest sense of the word, being an inexhaustable intellectual resource that younger scholars and educationists could rely upon. In recognition of her work, three Thai Universities conferred honorary doctorate degrees upon M.L. Boonlua during the last years of her life.

Those who have known her will always treasure the warmth of her heart and her readiness to give. Those who have not had the good fortune of knowing her will still be able to benefit from her experience and wisdom through the many books and publications that she managed to produce during a lifetime plagued by constant ill health. To understand her was not simply to know her personally; to know her also involves digging deep into her writing which is a treasure house of spiritual strength. *Acharn* Boonlua is a difficult writer, as may be witnessed from her novels which may not be widely read. But the most succinct of her books is probably the autobiography "Success and Failure", which can be regarded as the embodiment of the "critical culture" itself.

M.L. Boonlua was born to give. In her will she instructed that her body be donated to the Anatomy Department of the Siriraj Medical School for educational purposes, the wish that her husband, Dr. Chom Debyasuvarn, willingly carried out. Those who went to her cremation rites on 7 June 1984 probably did not realize that there was not much left of that fragile physique to be cremated: she had already given it all away. That was M.L. Boonlua.

Chetana Nagavajara

Silpakorn University at
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