J. Ensink

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JAN GONDA († 1991) AND INDONESIAN STUDIES

*It is anyhow the fate of men little
to know and little to fathom . . .*

Professor Jan Gonda died in Utrecht on 28 July 1991 at the age of eighty-six. He was one of the world's foremost scholars in both Old Indian and Indonesian studies. His successor to the Utrecht chair of Sanskrit, Dr. Henk Bodewitz, in the *Indo-Iranian Journal* (34, 1991, pp. 281-286) as well as in the Yearbook of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (*Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen, Jaarboek 1991*, forthcoming), has especially commemorated him as a scholar in the Indian field. This In Memoriam will be devoted mainly, though not exclusively, to Gonda as a scholar in the field of Indonesian languages and literature.

Indonesian studies were not what the young student who entered the University of Utrecht in 1923 intended doing. He had made up his mind to study under Professor Willem Caland, who then held the chair of Sanskrit there. Caland that summer had been an external examiner in Gouda, the town where Gonda was born and went to school. The admiration which the scholarly figure of the professor had inspired in the school-leaver was reinforced during the subsequent years of study, and Gonda spoke about his guru with reverence and warmth all his life. A full study of the Greek and Latin classics was combined with that of Sanskrit. In those years, when the prestige of comparative Indo-European linguistics and of the comparative study of Indo-European religions was high, the study of these three languages and of the cultures of which they were the vehicles easily constituted a harmonious whole. Under the supervision of the Greek scholar Vollgraff, Gonda in 1929 defended a thesis entitled *ΔΕΙΚΝΥΜΙ*, which was a semantic study of the Indo-European root *deiḱ-*.

Meanwhile (in 1925) facilities had been created at Utrecht for the training of civil servants (styled *Indologen* in Dutch) and lawyers for the Dutch colonies. The curriculum for this included law and economics, as well as languages and history. The chairs of Malay and Javanese seem initially to have been occupied only temporarily, and the Faculty seems to have seen in Gonda a man who, after additional special training, would have both the right scholarly and personal qualities to be entrusted with the main responsibility for the teaching of Indonesian languages. After his doctorate, Gonda accordingly went to Leiden to study Malay, Javanese and Sundanese, if not with a promise, at least with a hint from the Utrecht

Jan Gonda († 1991)

(Portrait of Jan Gonda taken from India Maior, Leiden: Brill, 1972.)

Faculty of 'Indology' that, after completion of these studies, a post would be available for him. Perhaps he already had this prospect when in his final student years at Utrecht he attended the lectures of the Arabist Th.W. Juynboll. In Leiden (1929-1931) he studied under Van Ronkel (Malay), R.A. Kern (Sundanese), Krom (ancient history and archaeology of Indonesia) and Berg and Ismaïl (Javanese), but he did not wait for the completion of this course to produce publications at the tremendous rate which has since impressed the scholarly world. Not only did his first two papers on Indonesian subjects appear in *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde (BKI)* in 1930 and 1931, but by November 1931 two additional articles had been completed, and by February 1932 he had his edition of the Old-Javanese *Brahmāṇḍapurāṇa* ready for the press. To this publication I shall return later.

In 1929 Caland died and was succeeded by J. Rahder. But in 1931 Rahder exchanged the Utrecht chair of Sanskrit for the Japanese one at Leiden. To the vacant chair, Gonda was appointed the next spring as professor extraordinary (he became an ordinary professor in 1941) of Sanskrit, Avestan, Old Persian and elementary Indo-European linguistics; at the same time he occupied the chair of Malay and Javanese in the Faculty of Indology. His inaugural lecture, *Austrisch en Arisch* (1932), according to the subtitle dealt with 'the importance of a knowledge of the Austric languages, mainly for Indian philology'. It introduced both the Indo-Aryan and the Indonesian fields of study and reconsidered the then current notion that, in the fields of culture and language, there had only been unilatéral borrowing by Indonesia from India. Examples were given of possible Austro-Asiatic loans in Sanskrit; a few cases were discussed in which borrowing by India from Indonesia appeared much more probable than that the other way round; and an outline was given of the route travelled by Indonesian words, by way of India and/or Arabia, to Europe long before European merchants sailed to the Archipelago. This lecture foreshadowed some of the themes of his *Sanskrit in Indonesia*.

One may wonder whether Indonesian studies did not rank second in the scholarly devotion of a man for whom originally Sanskrit had been the favourite subject. Though the study of Sanskrit, and especially the Veda, was nearest to his heart – he admitted more than once to a predilection for the Atharvaveda –, the supposition that the other field received less attention, time and energy is belied by the fact that, during the period he occupied the chair in the Faculty of Indology, Indonesian studies played at least an equal part in his scholarly production. A sense of duty here went hand in hand with that 'zest for exploration' which Sir Richard Winstedt observed in him. His interest did not stop at the boundaries of a single field, specialism or method.

As a teacher, Gonda's main tasks now comprised the instruction of colonial civil servants and lawyers as well as Sanskritists. Moreover, all the facilities for the study of Indonesian languages and literature as a full-

fledged special course had become available. Gonda was the kind of man to make the most of that opportunity, and soon a number of students, several of whom had already gained experience in the field as missionary workers, attended his lectures, did their examinations and in several cases took a degree under his supervision. When under the German occupation the University of Leiden was closed by the authorities, some trainee government linguists went from there to Utrecht to complete their studies under Gonda. Aside from these categories, students from various other departments also attended several of his lectures. Students of Greek and Latin in the thirties and forties frequently enrolled for his course in Indo-European comparative linguistics as auditors. Though this course was systematically related to the paragraphs of Sanskrit grammar, it also provided a fairly complete, though elementary, survey of the prehistory of Latin and Greek. From his lecture notes for this course – intended for first-year students and regularly revised as they were – he deliberately left out all that was not accepted by the consensus of linguistic scholarship. For many years they did not include the laryngeal theory because he felt that it was still too controversial. Gonda was a devoted and – though he little showed this emotionally – enthusiastic teacher. However impressive his output of books and papers might be, the time and energy for this work were never spent at the expense of his teaching task. In the training of Sanskrit students for many years he had to do practically all the work himself. He was not above teaching at the most elementary level, such as the tuition of first-year students doing the *Übungsbeispiele* from Richard Fick's *Praktische Grammatik* (and later on from his own well-known *Kurze Elementar-Grammatik*), in step with his comparative introduction to grammar. In order to lay a solid foundation, he continued this practice with respect to the *Lesestücke* even for the greater part of the holiday breaks. For the teaching of Indonesian languages, on the other hand, he had the assistance of experienced senior lecturers in Javanese, Malay and Sundanese respectively right from the start. Here his personal task was restricted to giving lectures for advanced students on such texts as the *Rāmāyaṇa kakawin*, the *Pararaton* and the *kidung*, on comparative Indonesian linguistics, and on Javanese and Malay literature (*literature* – as he almost always took it – in the sense of *Schrifttum*). He soon made it a fixed tenet that a language should be studied from its ancient down to its most modern forms. This applied especially to Javanese, where the wealth of texts from every period provided the material for a study of the language in all its phases. An exacting teacher, Gonda on the other hand also did all within his power to help his students. During the war, he took great pains to help those in hiding from the German authorities along with their studies. Thanks to the respect commanded by his achievements from the governors of the Faculty of Indology and the university and from the ministry of education after the war, he was able in several cases to arrange for students to be given the time and means to write their theses. The number of theses

completed under his supervision totals sixty-one. In the period he held the chair of Malay and Javanese (1932-1950), the theses on Indonesian subjects kept pace with those in the Indian field. In the first category sixteen were defended in all, the last two being those of the Indian scholars Sharada Rani and Sudarshana Devi (1957), to which C. Hooykaas devoted a detailed and critical review article in *BKI* in 1962.

Another aspect of Gonda's activities that should be mentioned are the tasks in connection with the administration of a faculty which fell to a professor by law. He had a high regard for the law. Moreover, his oath of office was very important to him, and he felt that it laid essentially heavier obligations on the shoulders of a professor than on those of people who did their work solely on the basis of a labour contract. Thorough as he was, he had a perfect knowledge of the laws and regulations pertaining to his office, and in this respect was an oracle for many of his colleagues. He was punctilious in the observance of every stipulation of the law, and expected the same from others. This caused a great deal of friction with his older colleague Gerretson, the founder of the Faculty of Indology, who made himself immortal as a poet and was highly regarded as a teacher, but was notoriously remiss in the observance of the legal formalities. In his correspondence with his fellow-historian Geyl (quoted by Emile Henssen in his Groningen thesis, *Gerretson en Indië*, pp. 108f. and 207), Gerretson spoke of Gonda in abusive terms, and it obviously took him some time to reconsider his opinion. But in 1947 he wrote to Geyl:

'Gonda is a singular man. In the United Faculties [Faculty of Indology] there has been friction between him and myself for years, until I pinpointed the plane of friction. He is extremely conscientious, while I am not. And once we had agreed that with respect to examinations - for that was what it was all about - we would abide strictly by the law, then all friction was gone, and thenceforth I actually associated with him in a most amicable way and really came to appreciate him.'

In later years, when the academic organization became more complicated in proportion as universities grew, and teaching staffs were increasingly burdened with administrative work, Gonda never shirked the functions for which his seniority and prestige marked him out. He continued performing administrative tasks dutifully, though with diminishing enthusiasm.

Gonda was an active member of the Royal Institute of Linguistics and Anthropology. Besides publishing over forty contributions in the present journal, he was periodically between 1935 and 1957 a member of the Institute's board, where he often pleaded the cause of student-members. In many practical issues he did not hesitate to put his finger on the sore spot. Numerous are the manuscripts he evaluated, and in many cases he assisted the authors in the preparation of their texts for the press. On

several occasions he represented the Institute at international congresses and on national committees.

During the first years of his dual professorship, Gonda's publications were mostly focused on Indonesian languages. The Royal Batavian Society in 1930 had launched the series *Bibliotheca Javanica* with the object of speeding up the rate at which traditional Javanese literature (both Old and New) was to be made available in edition and translation. As Professor Berg, the first contributor to the series, told me later, it was agreed among the initiators that the presentation of 'rough drafts' would suffice. Editions of texts were based on a single manuscript, to be corrected only as the editor deemed fit, by reference to other manuscripts or by conjecture. But Gonda, in editing the Old-Javanese *Brahmāṇḍapurāṇa* as the fifth volume in the series (1933), deliberately broke with this tradition, which he criticized rather severely later (in 1948, in *Philology and literature*, p. 229). Applying the method evolved in Latin and Greek textual criticism, he traced the relations between the available manuscripts and, on the basis of the *stemma* thus established, weighed their different testimonies against each other. The question of the Sanskrit original (the Javanese work evidently is not a translation of the Sanskrit *Brahmāṇḍapurāṇa* now known to us) was also discussed. Gonda demonstrated that it belonged to the 'Vāyu version' of the Indian *purāṇa* tradition. The entire publication was generally acknowledged to be an excellent one, so much so that it is said to have discouraged other prospective contributors to the series. The edition and translation of the *Brahmāṇḍapurāṇa* was followed by that of the *Agastyaparwa* (text and translation published in *BKI* 90, 1933, and 94, 1936) and the Old-Javanese *Bhīṣmaparwa* (*Bibliotheca Javanica* 7 and 7a, 1936/'37). The issues of the (possible) Sanskrit originals of these three texts and their place in the history of Javanese literature were dealt with in several separate papers.

In other articles on Javanese, Malay and other Indonesian languages, Gonda was more concerned with linguistics than with literature. The majority of his publications on literature was written for a wider public and, as it seems, mostly by invitation.

Gonda displayed the initiative of the true researcher in his linguistic papers (most of them published in *BKI*, almost one in every volume, if not every issue), however. He covered practically all aspects of linguistics. So there are a few papers on the history of the study of Indonesian languages, several lexical studies, a discussion of the Javanese vocabulary of courtesy (which, in his customary way, he showed to be not as exclusively a Javanese phenomenon as is currently presumed), and a number of articles on different facets of phonology, morphology and syntax. In the years following the war, general linguistic issues, though not disregarded before, came to occupy a more central place in his work. Evidently the diffusion of the synchronic approach (in Indonesian linguistics in the Netherlands represented by Berg and E.M. Uhlenbeck) played a role in this develop-

ment. Gonda's attitude towards synchronic linguistics was ambivalent. His appreciation of this approach in principle was expressed in the opening lines of a review (1950) of Uhlenbeck's Leiden thesis, *De structuur van het Javaanse morfheem* (1949). Here he said: 'The current in modern linguistics which, no matter by what name or what definition of its task, aims at a purely synchronic science of language, free from logicisms, psychologisms and historical points of view, has opened perspectives of great interest and produced important results, and for the future promises yet more good'. In this connection he welcomed Uhlenbeck's book as a useful contribution. This unequivocally positive beginning is followed by not a few 'buts', however. Gonda admitted that for him the many minor discoveries and conclusions with regard to special issues were more interesting than the conclusions explicitly presented by the author as the results of his inquiry, as these (and this statement says as much about Gonda's orientation in research as about Uhlenbeck's work) 'only modify accepted notions about the Javanese morpheme in details'. The fact that in Uhlenbeck's book previous work on the subject by such linguists as Brandstetter was passed over in silence made Gonda wonder whether Uhlenbeck had not intended, like other structuralists, to sever all connections with those linguists who had worked along different lines. This kind of tendency provided for Gonda a major objection to the practice of synchronic linguistics. He had criticized it sharply (in *BKI* 105, 1949, p. 390) when discussing Berg's *Bijdragen tot de kennis der Javaansche werkwoordsvormen* (1937), saying: 'It is anyhow the fate of men little to know and little to fathom. I therefore do not think it advisable to aggravate that state of affairs voluntarily by narrowing one's horizon to a single branch of, say, linguistics. Those who proclaim such a branch the entire discipline of linguistics are victims of self-deception.' The issue weighed heavily with him, as appears from the opening lines of his *Sanskrit in Indonesia* (1952). Here he said: 'Every student of linguistic science who does not deliberately, or from an innate tendency to onesidedness, limit his activities to the small domain of what is sometimes styled "pure linguistics" – which then has almost nothing to do with the history of human civilization –, will readily agree that the study of problems connected with the influence of one language on another is one of the most attractive divisions of his particular province of knowledge'. According to Gonda, the synchronic and diachronic methods should be mutually complementary. He himself preferred to see them applied in one and the same inquiry. At the end of the sixties, he was happy to observe that the two methods in many cases merged in a felicitous way.

Gonda was interested in doing linguistic research of a kind that yielded useful results for other fields. The papers he published in *BKI* 105 (1949, pp. 25-57) and 114 (1958, pp. 98-116) are clear examples of this. Here he demonstrated the role in Old-Javanese syntax of *cola* as delimited by traditional punctuation in prose or by the lines in poetry in small metres.

His aim of providing a reliable aid in the interpretation of Old-Javanese texts is evident.

As we have seen, the desire to connect the history of language with the wider history of civilization was explicit in his *magnum opus* – definitely in the Indonesian field, if not of all of his publications – *Sanskrit in Indonesia* (1952, ²1973). The body of the work consists of a linguistic examination of borrowing by Indonesian languages, mainly Malay and Javanese, from Sanskrit. A wide range of phonetic, morphological, syntactic and semantic questions is discussed exhaustively. As always, Gonda adduced striking parallels from many other languages. But in addition there are introductory sections on the relations between India and the Archipelago and the routes via which Sanskrit reached Indonesia (a special section being devoted to borrowing by way of the Dravidian languages). Moreover, the linguistic chapters are preceded by a long one on ‘Sanskrit loan-words from the point of view of the history of civilization’. The book was praised by such scholars as Winstedt, Kähler and Renou, and was criticized sharply by Dyen, and constructively by Teeuw.

After Indonesian independence, the Faculty of Indology was closed and its chair of Malay and Javanese abolished (1950). Later on, when asked by a pupil of his why he had published much less in the Indonesian field from the fifties onwards, Gonda explained that for him writing and lecturing went hand in hand. It was hard for him to write on subjects he could not treat in his lectures. Even so; after his *Sanskrit in Indonesia* he added over twenty-five publications to the nearly seventy-five in the Indonesian field that had seen the light before. Several articles from this period are devoted to the Indian religions in Indonesia. Special mention should be made here of ‘Śiva in Indonesien’ (1970). This paper gives a survey of the state of research on Indonesian Śivaism since the recent appearance of a number of publications – such as those by Sharada Rani, Sudarshana Devi Singhal, Hooykaas and Goudriaan. A similar survey of the wider field of ‘The Indian religions in pre-Islamic Indonesia’ was contributed by him to the *Handbuch der Orientalistik* in 1975. An often debated topic with regard to Indonesian Śivaism, or Indonesian religion in general, is the ‘coalition’ (‘blending’, ‘syncretism’ or ‘parallelism’) of Śivaism and Buddhism as this was found in the kingdom of Majapahit, and down to the present day in Bali. As early as 1888 Hendrik Kern drew attention to this phenomenon as encountered by him in the Sutasoma *kakawin*, by the Javanese poet Mpu Tantular. Kern cited examples of the identification of Śiva and Buddha also from India and other countries, to demonstrate that such blending was as widespread as the Indian religions themselves. In 1926 the ethnologist Rassers criticized Kern for not taking the special Indonesian context of the ‘Śiva-Buddhism’ under discussion into account. Rassers himself explained the fusion of the two cults in terms of a bipartition of the tribe dating back to a post-totemic phase in the prehistory of Javanese culture. The highly speculative character of Rassers’ theory could not but provoke Gonda’s

opposition. In the main, he held to Kern's view, which he supported by adducing more material. He often reiterated, each time in almost the same words: '... ethnological theories cannot replace historical facts that will escape us for ever'. Though acknowledging '... the necessity to investigate, as far as possible, the typically Indonesian features of this process', he seemed to doubt whether such an investigation might prove Indonesian Śīva-Buddhism to be essentially different from similar developments in other Buddhist countries. One may regret that he did not explicitly discuss the views of Pigeaud, who in his *Java in the 14th Century* explained the 'parallelism' of Śīvaism and Buddhism, in much more sober terms than Rassers, as being conditioned by ancient Indonesian concepts of a dualistic classification.

In the Indonesian section of the *Handbuch der Orientalistik*, Gonda also published the article 'Old-Javanese literature', which, although it appeared in print in 1976, had been ready for the press in 1970, so that it is up-to-date until that year. As usual, he stressed the connection between literature and religious ideas and Javanese views of life and the world. The ideas of Berg, Moens and Zoetmulder on the function or the work of the Javanese poet and on his notion of beauty were passed in review, though Zoetmulder's *Kalangwan* (1974) was not yet available.

Gonda's last publication on an Indonesian subject – which once more appeared in *BKI* (142, 1986) – was a review article on Teeuw's farewell lecture, *De tekst*, and W. van der Molen's thesis, *Javaanse tekstkritiek*. It took him back to the subject of one of his first publications, the introduction to the *Brahmāṇḍapurāṇa*, which he now elucidated in drawing upon his wide reading in the Indonesian, Indian and Greco-Roman fields and beyond.

During the last five years of his life he continued to write, but only on Indian subjects. He ceased his activities as a scholar only a few months before his regretted demise.

In mentioning Gonda's 'zest for exploration', Winstedt pointed to indeed an essential character trait. Gonda did not experience this as a merely subjective urge, but translated it into a collective need for modern society to rescue literary, historical and ethnological material from becoming lost through social changes, and was genuinely concerned that this rescue operation was not making sufficiently fast progress. The education of new research scholars to him was his most important task as a professor. He repeatedly mentioned in his lectures that in such and such a field there was 'sufficient subject-matter to fill several scholarly careers'.

From the above outline of Gonda's own scholarly career in the field of Indonesian studies it is clear that his explorations were mainly material-oriented. A disciplined thinker, he attached only secondary value to method. At a time when 'method' is not methodical enough, but must be 'methodology', such a viewpoint was likely to attract criticism from several directions. Most of Gonda's research papers provide a detailed and

virtually complete inventory of the relevant evidence, with the steps in his argument being formulated successively in each paragraph. It was his explicitly stated opinion that this was the way in which an argument should be built up. The opposite mode of proceeding, as evidenced in one of Berg's publications, was condemned by him (*BKI* 105, 1949, p. 391) in the following words: 'Copious and reliable factual evidence as a foundation can in my opinion under no circumstances be substituted by just a few examples, of the kind inserted by Berg between his "theoretical" speculations'.

For a reader desiring to make a quick acquaintance with the subject, Gonda's research papers are no easy tools. For a student taking up the thread and wishing to pursue it, however, they constitute veritable mines of information. It is for the latter kind of researcher that they were written, in fact.

There have in the past been various misunderstandings about Gonda. An amusing one is the mistaken belief of some of his readers who knew him only from his writings that he was of Javanese extraction, so that they pronounced his name *Gondâ*. A more serious one was occasioned by the term 'primitive', which he often used to characterize certain phenomena in Indonesian languages. Some critics understood this as a disparagement of those languages and their speakers, so much so that the moralist's finger was raised at him. It would have been very much out of character for Gonda to have desisted from using a term which he felt to be adequate merely on account of such criticism. Like the Dutch historian of religion, Van der Leeuw (*L'homme primitif et la religion*, 1940), he used the word 'primitive' to denote those primary expressions of the human mind that are unchecked by rational discipline. Like Van der Leeuw, he encountered these, to a greater or lesser degree, in every period, culture and individual, and also, for all his disciplined erudition, felt an affinity for the primitive mind.

This latter point brings us to the subjective element in Gonda's work and personality. Though it was seldom made explicit in his lectures and writings, he was well aware of his subjective bent and of its role in the selection of some of his subjects. Once, when he had dealt with a subject from Vedic religion in a circle of historians of religion, one of his listeners remarked that he found a particular train of Vedic thought difficult to imagine. Gonda thereupon more or less exclaimed: 'But I can imagine it so well!' In a paper on the traditional Indian sciences ('*De Indische wetenschap*', 1952) he pointed out that several of these sciences had reached a much higher stage of development than is currently assumed by Westerners, but had not occasioned the disintegration of civilization that the sciences had often brought about in the West. In a peroration to this paper (a rare element in his works), he refers to leading thinkers in India who are looking for ways of making traditional Indian values serve the needs of the modern world, and concludes with the question, 'Could it be that they have some-

thing to say to us, too?' A certain nostalgia for the kind of cultural harmony that he found in the Indian (and Indonesian) tradition is obvious here; a similar nostalgia can be detected in Van der Leeuw. Furthermore, Gonda's frequent treatment of the notions of nature (*φύσις*), growth, and prospering in ancient Indo-European and Indian thinking (e.g., in *The meaning of Vedic BHŪṢATI*, 1939, and *Notes on Brahman*, 1950) was certainly no mere detached intellectual exercise.

It is a popular assumption that in a great scholar a certain atrophy of some aspects of his personality goes hand in hand with the extraordinary development of his intellectual powers. In Gonda it is hard to find evidence of any such atrophy. In fact, he was a man who was sound in body and mind. He had a clear notion of and an appreciation for the work of colleagues in other faculties, as in fact he appreciated any serious pursuit. Time and again he showed his well-advised, sober judgement in matters far beyond his official sphere of action; it certainly helped him find a ready ear among officials also outside the academic world when necessary.

In discussions about administrative issues he often displayed a tenacity verging on obstinacy. The emotional side of his character might then manifest itself, and there might be an exchange of angry words. Though he seldom went back on any of the essence of his standpoint, he could make amends for such words, for fundamentally he had a genuine affection for most of the people around him.

Where I have described Gonda above as being sound in body and mind, it should be mentioned also that he was a teetotaler. He could do justice to a good meal, however.

Having commemorated this thorough and incredibly productive scholar, devoted guru and stubborn fighter, we should remember the man who was all this and more.

NOTE

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J. Gonda's *Selected Studies* are collected in six volumes (I-V, Leiden, 1975; VI, in 2 parts, forthcoming). Articles originally written in Dutch have been reproduced in English translation here. Vol. IV contains the papers on the *History of Ancient Indian Religion*, vol. V those on *Indonesian Linguistics*.

A bibliography by Professor G. Chemparathy of publications by J. Gonda over the period 1929-1972 is included in J. Ensink and P. Gaeffke (eds), *India Maior*, Leiden 1972. A supplementary bibliography for the years 1970-1991 will be included in volume VI of the *Selected Studies*.