



Knowledge Society or Knowledge *for* Society?

The Social Sciences and the Humanities in 21st Century Sri Lanka

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Imagination, Creative Thought and Development

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It is always a pleasure to visit the University of Peradeniya, and savour once again the beauty of this campus. Some of us, of an older generation in Sri Lanka, graduated from this university, then the single University of Ceylon exactly fifty years ago. We were students in what is often described today, somewhat wistfully, as the halcyon days of higher education in this country. This campus has also witnessed some of the terror and violence that has blighted our country for many decades. The University's survival and growth is a tribute to those who have lived and or worked in this University. Their contribution has prevented a university established with a vision and commitment to create a centre of knowledge, from withering away like many other institutions established with the same sense of purpose.

Today's event marks the inauguration of the 1st International Conference on the Humanities and Social Sciences of the University of Peradeniya. Its theme focuses on knowledge sharing and the future of these disciplines in the 21st century. I feel honoured to have been invited by Professor Anoma Abhayaratna, Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Professor Carmen Wickremagamage, Chair, Conference Organising Committee and the Faculty of Arts, to speak at this conference, especially because my profession, law, is sometimes critiqued today as one that does not belong to either of these disciplines. And yet, when this University was established, legal studies were located in a department in the Faculty of Arts. The Dean of this Faculty in my student years was the late Professor T. Nadaraja, who succeeded Justice Soertz, a Supreme Court judge, as the Professor of Law. Students of Biology and the Physical Sciences could also be admitted to the Law Department, so our discipline brought together what is sometimes known as "the two cultures." However the majority of students like me, had read Social Sciences and Humanities in our schools, and had indeed been admitted as students to the Faculty of Arts. We law students were mostly "might have been" students of Humanities and Social Sciences. I must confess that in my first week of law classes, I yearned to go back to the study of History and Languages as my first loves in courses I took in secondary school. A familiar law student myth is of the law professor who tells his first year class "look to your right and look to your left - one of you will not survive into the second year of this course." That could have been an apt prophesy for many of us, and yet we survived the law course. But some of us also retained our first love and so integrated our interest in

the Humanities and Social Sciences in postgraduate studies and in our professional work. It is indeed because of this that Law and Development became an attractive field of study, and an opportunity to engage in interdisciplinary research. And so, with an apology for not being a “true blue” academic from the Social Sciences and the Humanities, I decided to select as my theme for this lecture, “Imagination, Creative Thought and Development”.

It is said that “in learning lies knowledge, in knowledge lies wisdom”. Governments in developing countries in particular, confronting the global pressures for economic growth, tend to dismiss as “ivory tower” nonsense the idea that imagination and creative thought integrated into learning and knowledge is a necessary foundation for sustainable development. Why are the concepts of imagination and creative thought so closely linked to our own perceptions of the disciplines of Humanities and Social Sciences? Are the dimensions of humanism and value based learning and knowledge in these disciplines being undermined, and will they too wither away in an inhospitable environment that focuses only on the public benefit of economic growth in market economies, the revolution in information technology, and new priorities in governance to achieve this growth? I think we need to reflect on these issues in the context of the status of the study of Humanities and Social Sciences within our own country, Sri Lanka, and in other parts of the world.

The Early Years in Peradeniya

The University of Ceylon, Peradeniya Campus as it was known, originated as a classic Liberal Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences institution. The main faculty in the University as we knew it, was the Faculty of Arts, offering a range of subjects in the Humanities and Social Science. Many of the staff were eminent and established scholars in their respective fields, though not always the best of teachers. Some of the best teachers may not have had impressive publications but they were brilliant university teachers who inspired generations of students to think creatively, challenge dogmas and forge friendships based on respect for diverse viewpoints. It is often said that this environment created an elitist “Western” enclave in academia, that was alienated from its roots in a national culture.

Those of us who were students at the time and indeed were the products of diverse social and economic backgrounds, know that this is a false perception. There were many students who studied local and oriental languages, and or who came from strong locally rooted family backgrounds, and they were all exposed to ideas and thoughts from other parts of the world, including the West. The library and access to

distinguished and erudite librarians was an intrinsic and valued part of our lives as students and teachers. Some trotted with the Trotskyites, others with their boyfriends and girlfriends, but we all trotted at some time to that beautiful Peradeniya library, in the centre of our campus. We nicknamed our law library peon, after the Roman jurist Ulpian. No "google searching" was required, with his ultimate skills in tracing a book from a multitude of shelves. Access to books and stimulating friendships provided all of us with that opportunity to synthesize different influences in our lives.

The Nobel prize-winner Amartya Sen philosopher and economist has emphasised the complexity of our plural identities as individuals and human beings. Peradeniya imparted that gift of plural identity to its students. We could belong to and be rooted in our diverse faculties and ethnicities but we could also experience the rich tapestry of Western Art, Music or Literature. This complexity and diversity was epitomised in the work of staff from different language departments who nevertheless interacted as respected colleagues. Holding passionately different views did not mean that they could not share some common values on scholarship, learning and the meaning of a university education. It is this environment, the essence of the liberal arts tradition of learning, that people look back to, with fond nostalgia when they refer to Peradeniya as a centre of excellence in university education in those early years. In the first decades some of the best students opted for courses in the Humanities and Social Sciences, with History and English Honours study programmes often being associated with the "golden brains" of the University.

That ethos did not really change when other faculties and disciplines expanded the scope of the University's staff and student profile. Faculties of Dentistry, Engineering, Science and Medicine came to Peradeniya. Professors of Medicine were sometimes great musicians and dramatists, Professors of Dentistry collectors of fine art, and Engineering professors, teachers and scholars who expanded the canvas of their profession with critical thought and ideas drawn from Philosophy and Political Science. And so, the humanist, Liberal Arts traditions of Peradeniya remained, and was sustained for some time, even after the change in the medium of instruction, and teaching and learning to the national languages. As a state university, following the political ideology of the times, university teaching had to be in the national languages, Sinhala or Tamil. However in those early years, staff who did not leave the university but stayed to face the challenge, challenged their own students to continue to access reading materials in English. Some who had not taught in these languages made every effort to do so, and the administration required everyone to teach some courses in the national languages. Since a large cohort of students admitted to the Faculty of Arts still had some knowledge of English, and

political interference was hardly noticeable, the disciplines of Humanities and Social Sciences could continue to stay the course on their commitment to impart a multilingual education in these disciplines, even when they taught local language courses. This helped the students in those early years to struggle with the challenges and yet overcome the constraints to obtaining a quality education in Humanities and Social Sciences.

Professor K. N. O. Dharmadasa a former Professor of Sinhala and Dean of the Faculty of Arts has pointed to the vibrant and strong intellectual tradition of reading, reflection and thought in this country that goes back to early centuries of our country's history, and the multilingual environment of scholarship teaching and learning. Rarely does a country ritualise the importance of teaching and learning. In Sri Lanka at the age of 2 years, a child, girl or boy, at an auspicious time, participates in what is described as a "letters reading" ceremony. The value of learning and knowledge is idealised in religious texts and folk poetry. *Ugatha mana* or sound knowledge and *ugathcama* or being an *ugatha* were associated with the acquisition of both knowledge and wisdom. And yet, a combination of factors caused universities in this country to undermine and ignore the value of multilingualism and access to the stimulus of diverse ideas and thoughts.

Monolingual Humanities and Social Sciences Education

Very soon therefore, the destroyers of quality higher education were at the gates of universities, including the University of Peradeniya. A populist political agenda on imparting a monolingual education in the interests of students from so called "non - elitist" social and economic backgrounds, encouraged intolerant student radicalism within the universities. Other disciplines including Medicine, Engineering and the biological and physical sciences faithfully and by various skilful strategies continued to impart a bilingual education. The more politicised faculties of Social Sciences, Humanities and Law in Peradeniya and elsewhere, could not resist these pressures. And so began the decline into exclusive notes based, rote learning, without access to books or reading materials. An exodus of bilingual staff accompanied these changes. They left for overseas employment, or for posts at a higher level at the new and mushrooming faculties and universities.

The impact of these changes, and the outcome became visible very soon. The quality of Humanities and Social Sciences education diminished, and a university education came to mean passing examinations on the basis of lecture notes either delivered by teachers or collected from previous students. Inevitably the ranks of unemployed Arts graduates in Humanities and Social Sciences increased. Since many of the beneficiaries of

higher education in these fields were women, the gender disparities in employment among graduates also became visible. Admission to universities too had become very competitive, and the prestigious courses were now considered Medicine, Engineering and Science. Starved of resources, without access to good books and teachers, many bright students in secondary school who could have been a rich resource for these faculties came to consider Humanities and Social Sciences courses subjects offered by weak rather than intelligent students. Curriculum reviews shed subjects like Sinhala and English Literature, History and Government They disappeared from the syllabus, to be replaced by general courses described as English Language and Social Sciences with teaching confined to textbooks that invariably gave gender biased and intolerant messages on ethnicity and religion in our plural society. Generations of students never learned of the humane wisdom of the *palkavi*, or experienced the vibrancy of *sandeshayas* in Sinhala poetry, and had little opportunity to understand ideas on the human condition and existential realities embedded in the work of great poets and writers in English, from all parts of the world.

By the eighties, we had created two "cultures" of a different sort in our universities - the supposedly "superior" disciplines based on the sciences and the "inferior" mostly monolingual education, perceived as imparted through courses in Social Sciences and Humanities. The system of standardisation of marks also ensured that a large cohort of students from secondary schools were only qualified for admission to "Arts" rather than science courses, due to lack of laboratory and other resources. University administrators faced enormous pressures from politicians and radical student movements to take more and more Arts students with minimal or no resources for a proper teaching and learning environment.

When our extremely regulated economies were replaced by a new era of economic transition with a focus on the market, Humanities and Social Sciences were once again marginalised by the priority given to Management and Information Technology. The proliferation of universities which yet could not meet the demand for students seeking to follow Arts courses, also led to recruitment policies that did not ensure that staff with the appropriate qualifications and experience occupied faculty positions. I recall the nervousness with which I faced my first class of final year students, here in the Law Department at Peradeniya, despite the good degree and postgraduate qualifications that I had with me. Another generation were often flung into the deep end of academia without the language skills, the mentoring, and the staff development programmes which could have helped them to create centres of excellence in faculties of Humanities and Social Sciences. Excellent, dedicated and committed professors and lecturers who struggled to create good departments in

faculties of Humanities and Social Sciences, did so with minimum or no support from the educational establishment.

I recall the struggle we had as Deans and Vice Chancellors to obtain cadre posts, and library and other resources for Humanities and Social Sciences. We were always met with the argument that a very meagre national budget on education had to be shared disproportionately between faculties because science disciplines required laboratories and chemicals, whereas Humanities and Social Sciences could do with less money. Our arguments on the need for library resources and language laboratories to strengthen capacity for improving students' access to a second language for higher education invariably were received, unsympathetically. Why give resources for books and journals when the majority of students could not read them in English, and the staff had failed to produce a significant body of literature in the local languages? As Vice Chancellor, I had the opportunity to sit on many selection boards for recruitment to academic staff positions or award of postgraduate degrees in different faculties. The gap in standards between science and arts disciplines was striking, except in a very few departments in the faculties that focused on disciplines of Humanities and Social Sciences.

These realities have not changed and we need to reflect on them, even as we consider the future of Social Sciences and the Humanities scholarship, teaching and learning in our country, in this century. Those professors, teachers and departments that have tried to face the challenges of the system, and created islands of excellence, must be given opportunities for leadership to share their experience, and impact on the system, if the study of Humanities and Social Sciences is to come into its own once again in our university system after decades of decline and marginalisation.

The Imperatives of Economic Growth as a Development Objective

This is a difficult task because new national imperatives and a global scenario on higher education are posing new challenges. Market economic policies followed in our country too are creating an environment in which education and knowledge is being assessed and valued only in terms of financial impact and outcome on economic growth. Thinking and reflection is being undervalued on the argument that the market wants a different kind of "knowledge and skills." The latter concept is being interpreted exclusively as IT and English language proficiency rather than in-depth learning. Despite all the evidence of the lack of social responsibility in the accumulation of corporate wealth, governments are being challenged not to "subside" what is perceived as the "welfarism" of expenditure on the social sector. Non "profitability" justifies cut backs on public expenditure including public education and health. State universities have for some

years, and now even more stridently been pushed to generate their own funds. This has resulted in a move towards creating a corporate sector culture in university administration, research and teaching. Universities are required to develop corporate plans with missions and visions that envisage the creation of a knowledge based society where knowledge will be distilled and used swiftly to impact on economic growth. Rarely is there a reference to the value of education in encouraging critical insights, tolerance and respect for viewpoint difference and generating a scholarship of vibrant thought and ideas. New courses must be "job" oriented, to produce graduates for "the market." If language is taught it is for the purpose of accessing computer based information rather than literary work, reading and reflection.

The whole corporate world on Information Technology has now been harnessed to create more and more dependence on computer related technology. Teaching and learning focuses less and less on creating a love of books, and the need for thought and reflection. The culture of learning at the tertiary level, already enmeshed in notes and didactic lessons has transmitted itself into all branches, so that the pressure is to acquire as many paper qualifications, diplomas, degrees and certificates, in the shortest possible time. No one seems to notice that plagiarism and "cut and paste" research is being encouraged in the "knowledge" based society that we are seeking to create. Research grants and support are also increasingly based on assessing impact. Many universities in developing countries, which do not have the resources for engaging in aggressive fund raising, have depended on research grants from multilateral United Nations or bilateral agencies and financial institutions. Contract bidding for the really big research grants is now the norm. The call for proposals invariably clarify that "research components" should not be included. Where they incorporate a research component, the request is for a "quick report" - leaving no time for solid work or reflection and thought. Good researchers who can produce quality evidence based and thought provoking research, do not undertake this kind of research report writing. Others who do, sometimes produce work of very poor quality. The quest for "applied" knowledge then undermines the relevance of imagination, analysis, thought and reflection, skills that we know have been intrinsic to scholarship and research throughout history. The focus on support for "Research and Development" (popularly referred to as R and D) even in the current Budget of 2011 is in order to be competitive in the market.

These trends are impacting even in the West in undermining the value of education in Humanities and Social Sciences. Martha Nussbaum, scholar and philosopher, who working with Amartya Sen has advocated the capabilities approach to sustainable development, makes a strong case for

continuing support for liberal arts education in a country's efforts to achieve high economic growth. The arguments of scholars like her on the need for a balance between economic imperatives and knowledge creation and sharing are relevant for countries like Sri Lanka, emerging from thirty years of conflict, with pressure to fast forward the economic development that we could not achieve for decades. Scholars in the West including Martha Nussbaum, point to the manner in which the economic crisis is encouraging policy makers to differentiate between the need for swift economic growth, and the relevance and public benefit of imagination and critical thought. Disciplines such as the Humanities and a Liberal Arts education, the study of History, Poetry and Literature are dismissed as irrelevant in primary, secondary and tertiary education, because the focus is on creating a society that is competitive in the global market. When the corporate sector goes into education and exercises control of it, in this environment, it is argued that core values of scholarship and learning embedded in critical thought, independence and university autonomy are also placed at risk. Increasingly, accreditation evaluation and funding support for study programmes is based on economic impact and the economic value of public or privately funded research.

Development Policy Planning and the Public Value of the Humanities and Social Sciences

One of the major challenges in all our countries therefore is to explain and argue for the public value of the disciplines of Humanities and Social Sciences. We must focus on the importance of integrating an understanding of abiding human values and critical thought and analysis into the culture of learning and knowledge in our universities. It is often said that "education" cannot achieve development, and that Sri Lanka's high social indicators in education, and the public financing of free education failed to ensure adequate economic growth. Many factors have contributed to the failure to achieve economic growth. But we must also ask ourselves whether or not, our education system gave priority to fostering critical thinking and enquiry and intellectual freedom which are the foundation of educational excellence in the fields of Humanities and Social Sciences.

Have our failures in this regard impacted to perpetuate intolerance and violence that has been generated on campuses, from students who have studied mainly in our faculties? If the "public value" of universities including our disciplines is being challenged and we want to respond, we need also to answer the hard questions on our own responsibilities as teachers and researchers in our state universities. Should we transform the *guru-gola* relationships that we often see today in hierarchical terms of an

empowered teacher and a disempowered student, to the *Guthila Kavya* model of a talented student who challenges the teacher? And in doing so, should we go back to the Bhikkhu Nagasena - King Milinda dialogue on the importance of freedom of thought, freedom of expression and respect for viewpoint differences, perceiving criticism and comment as a friendly exchange, rather than a sign of insubordination and bad behaviour? Inspiring and creating a culture on the value of critical thought, reflection, and the intrinsic importance of comment and dissent, viewpoints and ideas can be a major contribution to individual wellbeing and interaction in our families, communities, and in public life.

It seems equally important to reflect on the past, and highlight the contribution made by ideas thought and imagination to the development policies of this country. I recall a statement made by the eminent economist Dr. Gamini Corea, at a public seminar. He commented that "Sri Lanka enjoyed the fruits of economic growth - before achieving economic growth." I recall responding at the time with the comment that if Sri Lanka had not done so, most women in this country, would like their sisters in other countries in Asia and Africa, be struggling to obtain the primary school education that the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have now set as a global baseline of development achievement. It is because this country adopted visionary policies, born of humanism creative thinking and reflection that despite three decades of conflict, we are set to achieve many of the Millennium Development Goals within the stipulated time frame, and we continue to rank well on the HDI or International Humanities Development Index.

Emeritus Professor Laksiri Jaysuriya, a distinguished scholar and one time Dean and Professor in the Faculty of Arts of the University of Ceylon, has given an insightful historical overview of the conceptual framework of development policies in Sri Lanka. Much has been written about this subject, and the Sri Lankan case highlighted as one of the best examples of accountable governance in achieving good social indicators for a people, despite less than impressive economic growth. However Professor Jayasuriya's book "Taking Social Development Seriously: the Experience of Sri Lanka" (2010) provides a historical analysis that demonstrates the critical importance of integrating humanism, values and analytical insights in policy planning for a country. He also provides arguments that can be used to both demonstrate and advocate for the public value of Humanities and Social Sciences, and their relevance to sustainable development.

Amartya Sen and Mahbub Ul Haq are two great development economists from our South Asian region, who by their thought reflection and ideas contributed to a growing recognition of the concept that economic growth is not synonymous with achievement of human development.

The UNDP's Human Development Index, has for many years assessed a country's development achievement in terms of social indicators such as life expectancy, education, health, and gender equality. Sri Lanka's ranking on HDI is 102, and still the best in South Asia on HDI as well as the GDI or the Gender Development Index. The conceptual thinking behind state allocation of resources for the social sector has remained, despite the years of conflict, and the violence and the changes in the political environment that we have witnessed. Access to health and education, has come to be perceived as the right of the people. This despite the fact that such policies have not been supported by either legislation or the Constitution. Our Constitution of 1978 recognises civil and political rights as fundamental rights, but does not incorporate a fundamental right to health or to education. Indeed there is not even a reference to the State's obligation to provide health care in the not justiciable (i.e. non enforceable) guidelines given in the Constitution for formulation of state policies. Sri Lanka has received international and regional accolades, including in Sen's work for conceptualising development as including human development. As Dr. Nimal Sanderatna, another distinguished Peradeniya academic has pointed out Sri Lanka is "a celebrated case of high social attainments for a poor country". (Nimal Sanderatna, *Economic Growth and Social Transformation*, (2000, p 99). Professor Jayasuriya's book traces the diverse influences, including from Western liberal welfarism, Marxist political ideology and Buddhist thought and ideas which contributed to what we now recognise as perspectives that are both visionary and contemporary in their relevance to current theories on sustainable development. Economics, Political Science and Philosophy have all combined to create the ideas and thought that fertilised development policies that have impacted on the quality of life of our people.

It is also important to recall that thoughts and ideas on human rights and development have fertilised and can continue to provide insights on development policies and planning in the public interest. International human rights is commonly associated, including in our own country, with a Western liberal political ideology that focuses exclusively on civil and political rights such as the right to free and fair elections, freedom of conscience, speech and expression, due process and freedom from torture. However since the time of the Vienna World Conference on Human Rights in 1993, international human rights law has developed to recognise the universality and indivisibility of human rights. This is a conceptual recognition that the civil and political rights incorporated in international human rights, though borne out of Western liberal thinking and ideas, represent abiding universal values on the need to control abuse of State power, and recognise the value and dignity of the individual, the human

person. Similarly socio-economic rights are derived from a communitarian, cultural tradition and or a socialist ideology of the rights of all people to enjoy and share the benefits of national resources. The human rights based approach to development emphasises that access to health, education, livelihood and shelter, are not welfare hand-outs by the State or private actors but basic needs and rights of the people.

The concepts of universality and indivisibility of rights therefore underpin a human rights based approach to development and governance, and hold governments accountable to work towards realising both the civil and political and the socio-economic rights of people. This approach was absorbed into the work of the United Nations and reflected especially in the Human Development Report of 2000. The idea that people are rights holders and governments are duty bearers, and the rights based approach to development represent a new perspective of the last few decades, and can be attributed to the work of jurists, philosophers, and scholars working on social and development issues. Similarly feminist theory including feminist jurisprudence has contributed to linking the gender equality agenda with development, so that today the Gender Development and Gender Empowerment indices have become an international benchmark for evaluating and rating the development status of a country. International human rights standards were originally envisaged as only imposing duties on the State. Once again, creative jurisprudence and philosophical thinking, including a human rights perspective on development, have contributed to the recognition in international human rights law that non-state actors including international financial institutions are accountable to respect, promote, and protect human rights and partner with the State in realising social and economic rights. The concept of the indivisibility of human rights, imposes on governments a responsibility for policy planning and implementation that is people centred, allocating national budgets and resources to reduce disparities and ensure inclusive equitable growth. Regulating the corporate sector to ensure that they do not exploit, and also conform to the norms on human rights, becomes the responsibility of the State, as a dimension of the human rights project. The concept of a "democratic" market thus replaces the ideology of a "free market." If we reflect on the recent "Arab Spring" and the "Occupy Wall Street" and similar occupy protests, it is evident that a human rights based approach to development, combining the need to realise civil and political rights and socio economic rights is an ideal of development that is in the public interest in all parts of the world, and a path to what is described in development theory as sustainable development.

This link between development and human rights reflected in the work of Sen and Mahbub Ul Haq, great development economists from

our region, has not been internalised in our countries, or in scholarly work like that of Professor Jayasuriya, that deals with development issues. Governments and economists also do not reflect adequately on the contribution of Courts, especially from our region, in using constitutional norms on human rights to promote governance and allocation of resources with equity and concern for sustainable development. Judges from our region have used the insights from disciplines of Philosophy, History and Social Sciences to create great jurisprudence through litigation in the courts. Justice Weeramantry's jurisprudence in the International Court of Justice, and in his scholarly writings, indicate a breath of vision that has helped to impact on accountable use of national resources for the public's benefit and wellbeing. Similarly the Justice Bhagavati Court in India, transformed the Anglo American legal concept of a right not to be denied life without due process of law, to a claim to civil and political rights such as freedom from torture, and the right to basic needs like health and education. It was this jurisprudence that led to an amendment to the Indian Constitution which incorporated a right to primary and secondary school education as a dimension of the right to life. There have been controversial judgements in the Sri Lanka Courts that have been critiqued for going overboard in challenging policy decisions of government through litigation, and impacting adversely on economic growth. However good jurisprudence, like Justice Amersinghe's judgement in the Eppawela Case demonstrate that a human rights based approach to development can help to balance the imperative for private investment for economic growth, with equity and fairness, respect for intergenerational rights in the environment, and the long term public interest in equitable inclusive human development. This judgement too reflects how knowledge of History and Philosophy and creative legal thought can contribute to shaping development policy that is in the long term interests of the people. An interdisciplinary approach that links different disciplines in Humanities and Social Sciences, teaching, learning, and scholarship, can help us all to appreciate the value of our disciplines, and advocate for their sustained importance at all levels of education and policy formulation in the national system.

Today, we see more than ever before, the importance of this advocacy. Sri Lanka is said to have reached 8% GDP growth and the Budget of 2011 seeks to "place the country on the path to rapid economic growth". Thirty nine percent of the Budget is said to have been allocated to Ministries of Economic Development, and Finance, Defence and Urban Development, Security and Infrastructure. Rs.230 billion is allocated for Defence and Urban Development. Of Rs.498 billion allocated for public expenditure, 9% appears to have been allocated for both health and education. While

encouraging private investment in both areas, infrastructure development is said to account for most of the expenditure on public services. Public attention has been focused on the increased militarization of the civil administration. Affirmative action policies permitted by Art 12 (4) of our Constitution have not yet been introduced to provide for a quota for women even at the lowest level in local government assemblies, despite the fact that only 5% women or less than that have been represented in all elected bodies since independence. Yet according to the most recently formulated "affirmative action" policies or special measures, the families of armed services are to receive a grant of Rs.100,000 for the third child. War widows who constitute a large number of the 24% female headed households continue to lose their deceased spouses pension under a colonial Widows and Orphans Pension Fund Statute, if they remarry. Why has thought and reflection not been given to policy formulation and resource allocation in the budget to address their plight?

The UNDP's most recent Human Development Report 2011 launched recently, focuses on "Sustainability and Equity in Development". It speaks of intergenerational rights to a sustainable environment, disparity reduction and community participation, in balancing economic growth and environment protection, and responding to climate change impact. Yet in our own country there has been a great deal of controversy recently on consumerism and exploitative use of natural resources such as forest reserves, in private sector investment. Concerns have been expressed in regard to urban development and construction projects that do not respect the right of urban low income communities to shelter or ensure the protection of what can be considered national heritage sites. What is therefore at risk today are ideas and concepts on development that have been accepted globally and indeed integrated into development policies of many decades in this country. New approaches that disregard the experience of the past are invariably justified in terms of a rapid response to eliminating the economic costs of our thirty years war. If these trends continue, with justifications based on re-inventing "home grown" cultural values, Singaporean economic models, et cetera, it may become impossible to prevent further cut back on resource allocation for social and economic rights including education in state schools and universities. "Poverty research" indicates that already patients are charged in the health sector for drugs and medical procedures, and urban poor families cannot afford to access even available health services. Children from low income families are forced to leave school because schools are closed for non-profitability, or they cannot afford "facilities fees". When a budget like the most recent one cuts back on state allocation and gives tax concessions and other incentives for private investment in education, we may not maintain an adequate

public / private sector balance in higher education, and only encourage the mushrooming of unregulated private institutions. The negative impact of exclusively corporate sector involvement in the management of hospitals has been referred to in a recent oration by Dr. Deepthi Attygalle, a former President of the College of Anaesthetists in Sri Lanka. Martha Nusbaum has referred to a similar dilution of the value of Human Rights and Social Sciences education in India, with exclusive private sector involvement in the financing and management of tertiary education institutions.

It will not be possible to reverse these trends unless academics in universities themselves, especially in the faculties of Humanities and Social Sciences advocate for the public benefit of sustaining and striving for development based on creative thought, reflection and humanism rather than only prioritising economic growth and consumerism. We can also collectively give a loud and clear message that “development” from our Sri Lankan experience links to the international development discourse on the indivisibility of human rights, and sustaining this approach can help us as a nation to work towards “equitable” rather than “uneven development.” Our government has decided to officially promulgate a gazette notification with the names of the long dead Uva Wellassa patriots who challenged British colonial rule. Are we justified in promoting economic growth that destroys the livelihoods of the peasants of this region, who have experienced the reality of uneven development for generations, without protest? Or should we treat them, as well as the displaced in the conflict areas, or the urban poor, as also the heroes who have lived the reality and survived the experience of uneven development? It is the core values of the disciplines of Humanities and Social Sciences that ask us to think, reflect and use our professional knowledge and capacity to advocate for humane equitable development, rather than economic growth which only addresses the need for competitiveness in the global market.

Today’s model of aggressive economic growth tends to perceive law, regulation and institutional arrangements for good accountable governance as a constraint on the freedom of the market. Even some academics and scholars argue that everything is a question of money and financial resources, and that we can ignore laws, accepted norms of autonomous university governance, including procedures under the Universities Act of this country, and chart a path to a vibrant economic growth centred, “knowledge based” society. And yet the 2011 budget gives a pittance for the social sector and even a smaller pittance from the national budget for university education. Those who argue that we need money and not autonomy or good governance in management and administration of universities, do not reflect on the fact that institutions of academic excellence across the world have created an environment that combines

adequate resource allocation and academic freedom. We on the other hand seem to be moving towards denying both these assets which are vital for the creation and dissemination of knowledge. What is even more dangerous for the whole nation is that the disregard of accepted institutional arrangements for decision making on higher education is encouraging a growing tendency to replace civil administration with the military. No one, including academics and professionals who support leadership training for new university students by the military reflect on the poverty of thought, the regimentation reflected in the very curriculum and teaching modules that form the basis of this training.

The justification for the rejection of rules and regulations in the Universities Act, and the militarization initiatives on campus is that the universities, especially Faculties of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences have contributed to making State institutions of higher education "dens of iniquity" and indiscipline. In this environment, it is a great challenge to forge a sense of university community in place of the current battle lines based on the idea that the UGC and Vice Chancellors must push through top down government policies, formulated without consultation, and the participation of university teachers, students and faculty. The time has come for faculties in our disciplines too, to reflect on their own successes and failures and regain public confidence in the capacity of our institutions to perform and create the knowledge base of academic and professional excellence that is our responsibility. This means a commitment to self-regulation, within accepted norms of academic freedom, a commitment to excellence in both teaching and research, and active engagement of interest in responding to the problem of aggression and violence including the vicious practice of ragging in our universities. Alienation of academic staff from the process of university administration has not helped to address internal problems, and only contributed to the isolation of Deans, Vice Chancellors and Student Counsellors, who have to battle with outside interference and internal problems. We need to use the established university bodies like Faculties, Senates and Councils to prevent "top down" initiatives that affect universities, stimulating dialogue and participatory decision making. If we do not express our views, respond, and convey them through these accepted institutions to the policy makers at the highest levels, we will only foster the culture of top down instruction and obedience, which is the very antithesis of university autonomy and academic freedom that lies at the heart of both knowledge creation and dissemination.

We must also ensure that the proposed Postgraduate Institute of Humanities and Social Sciences that will be established in this University becomes a centre of excellence like other institutes, and demonstrates

the public value of our disciplines. Above all, it must contribute to reversing the negative trends by creating a dynamic research and teaching environment, with an emphasis on tolerance for viewpoint difference, debate and discussion.

In the late nineteen nineties I served as a Dean of a Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, on the Standing Committee of the UGC, on those disciplines. Later, as a member of the UGC I chaired this Standing Committee. We developed collectively, a proposal for the establishment of a Postgraduate Institute in these disciplines. The institute model had provided in other disciplines, the resources, the financial and administrative independence and autonomy to create centres of excellence that had impacted on teaching, learning and research in universities throughout the country. Due to various dynamics this proposal, approved by the UGC, was never implemented. In its place, the University of Colombo was given permission to start, in my time as Vice Chancellor, a Centre for Development Studies that was not sustained by later administrations. A Centre for the Study of Humanities and Social Science was also established later by the UGC, and has not emerged as a centre of excellence. On the other hand, the model of an institute or a school, like the School of Computer Studies in the Colombo University, that was created during my tenure as Vice Chancellor, after much debate and controversy, has provided opportunities to create centres of excellence, which have been able to withstand the pressures of resource allocation and administrative interference that Vice Chancellors and university administrations have to confront.

It is also important to know and understand, and internalise in our work the values of our Constitution guaranteeing freedom of thought, speech and expression. Our apex court has interpreted these rights to include a right to information, which includes information on all decisions that impact on university teaching and research. We have a role to play and contribution to make in supporting the enactment of the Right to Information legislation and advocating for a human rights based approach to development. We must ensure, through our work that our past development experience is not forgotten, demonstrating through our scholarship and teaching that initiatives on Research for Development or R and D initiatives cannot be just to increase profit, but to help a country achieve the broader objective of human development and good accountable governance. The story of Midas in Greek mythology, the tale of the Russian peasant who dies on the last lap of a run, as he strives to include an extra field before the sun sets, give us deeply human insights on the destructive power of greed. Intellectual thought and the philosophy of ideas drawn from the Humanities and Social Sciences have been a rich resource

used for the benefit of people, through many centuries of history. The need to balance economic prosperity with other abiding human values is reflected in the thoughts embedded in a beautiful Buddhist text, which even our so called "demonic" Gaullist Constitution of 1978, with its 18th Amendment, has incorporated. Chapter XXIV, the final Chapter of Sri Lanka's Constitution concludes with this well-known stanza taken from the Buddhist text: *Devo vassatukālena Sassasampattihotu ca Phito bhavatu loco ca Raja bhavatu dhammiko*

In translation :

"May the rains fall in season
May there be a good harvest,
May there be wellbeing in the world
May the Ruler be righteous".