



FOR A SUSTAINABLE TRADITION OF RESEARCH IN THE PERADENIYA FACULTY OF ARTS*

G. H. Peiris**

Department of Geography, University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka

ABSTRACT

This paper traces the establishment and subsequent evolution of the University of Peradeniya, particularly in relation to its original mandate as the University of Ceylon. In this regard, it focuses on the most significant intellectual contributions of some of the university's most illustrious alumni in the field of Arts. The paper also explores in detail the impact of vernacularization of the medium of instruction on the quality of education imparted by the institution, its academic independence, as well as its research output. It extensively deals with the politics of the repeated restructuring of the University in terms of both its causes and consequences, and finally makes some prescriptions for a desirable and necessary future course of action.

Key words: University of Peradeniya, Vernacularization of Education, Quality of Education, Academic Independence, Research Output

Any visit to the University of Peradeniya is, to me, a sentimental journey down the memory lane stretching back almost 60 years to July 1956 when I came here as a first-year student. I should begin with a comment on the conference theme – ‘Unleashing Minds to Create a Sustainable Future’ – by stating that it would be prudent to make it more explicit with an addition of a few words: ‘Unleashing minds to create a sustainable future of peace and prosperity for the people of Sri Lanka’ to

clarify that what we expect is not, say, a future of dependence and subservience to the global powers, not a future as a component of the Indian federation, not a future that disregards our treasured cultural heritage, and not even a fancifully imagined future as “The Knowledge Hub” of Asia, or of South Asia or of the Indian Ocean periphery.

Assuming that what the phrase ‘unleashing minds’ in the conference theme is intended

* This paper is an adaptation of the keynote address delivered by Prof. G.H. Peiris at the International Conference on the Humanities and the Social Sciences, Faculty of Arts, University of Peradeniya, 26-27 July 2016

** Author e-mail
geraldpeiris@yahoo.com

©2017 Social Affairs Journal. This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License.

to mean is the reinvigoration of learning in the Arts and Humanities, I decided that my presentation should be contextualized in that objective by looking at the past record of research in the Faculty of Arts here, and make some suggestions on what could be done in order to remedy the inadequacies of that record.

On the alleged 'leashes' that are believed to restrain the intellectuals here, I also find it necessary to clarify that externally imposed restrictions on what we teach and learn, on our choice of research issues, on accessing and disseminating information and, indeed, on our participation in mainstream politics have generally been less formidable than those that have all along been self-imposed.

'ARTS' AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CEYLON

The most momentous attempt to enhance the quality of higher learning in our country, as generally acknowledged, was the establishment of a 'national university' – a unitary, autonomous and residential institution of higher learning located in the western periphery of the municipality of Kandy (and not in the village of Peradeniya which, as old documents indicate clearly enough, was restricted to the other side of the River Mahaweli). Most of us know that its statutory framework was formalised in 1942 and that the development of its infrastructure commenced in the aftermath of the Second World War, guided by a vision of making it the foremost symbol of national resurgence. No investment and no effort was spared to provide the best for the university – the enchanting setting, the ornate architectural embellishments reminiscent of ancient glories, the physical comfort for its students and staff comparable or superior in quality to that of post-war Oxbridge or of the minute 'upper middle-class' here.

In order to highlight the place envisioned

for 'Humanities' in that national university, I should refer to a little known fact about the campus layout which was depicted in a scale-model displayed at the 'Colombo Exhibition' of 1951, and placed thereafter in a backroom of the old Economics building for visitors to admire. It showed a set of structures elegantly styled in Kandyan design in the locality presently occupied by the teaching hospital as the precinct of an 'International Centre for Religious and Cultural Studies'. The related documents, traceable among copies of Sir Ivor's correspondence (now found dumped and decaying in a small store-room above the lobby at the entrance to the 'Arts Theatre'), indicate that the Centre, along with the Botanical Gardens on the other side of the highway, were intended, from landscape perspectives, to form a gateway to the city of Kandy; that 'Buddhist Studies' were to occupy the pride of place in its scholarly endeavours; and, more importantly, that the sponsors of that idea included Jennings himself, Shirley de Alwis, and several stalwarts of the State Council who could by no stretch of imagination be branded 'Sinhala- Buddhist chauvinists' in the manner now in vogue.

EXPECTATIONS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

The transfer of the university from Colombo to the new site in Kandy commenced in October 1952. Thereafter, for nearly 10 years, Peradeniya remained almost exclusively the domain of the Faculty of Arts and Oriental Studies. Among its academic disciplines, those concerned with historical, linguistic, and aesthetic studies occupied centre stage, with the 'Social Sciences'—Economics, Sociology, Geography, Political Science, Education, and Law – despite their increasing popularity among the students, maintaining a relatively low profile. The more productive social scientists at Peradeniya were themselves drawn in their research towards the study of Sri Lanka's past, preferring to write on

topics such as: 'From a Dependent Currency to Central Banking in Ceylon' (Oliver 1963); 'Plantation Agriculture and Land Sales Policy in Ceylon, 1836-1886' (Driesen and Vanden 1956); 'Ethnic representation in Ceylon's Higher Administration Services, 1870-1946' (Tambiah 1986); or 'Local Government Institutions and Education in Ceylon 1870-1930' (Jayaweera 1966). The economist was usually an economic historian; the sociologist, a historian of social change; the political scientist, a political historian; and the educationalist, a historian of education. For many on the teaching staff at Peradeniya, with access to the archives in London almost routinely provided in early career, history of one sort or another was a convenient launching pad. In the Social Sciences segment of the 'Arts', barring a very few exceptions, it was usually an outsider – an Edmund Leach, Howard Wriggins, Bryce Ryan, Das Gupta, B H Farmer, Hans Singer, Nicholas Kaldor, Joan Robinson, Donald Snodgrass or a Nur Yalman – that ventured into contemporary affairs.

Yet, on the achievements of the faculty at that stage, specific mention should be made of the project to compile a Sinhala encyclopaedia; a similar collective effort on an encyclopaedia of Buddhism (on both of which one could reasonably ask 'what for'); the *University of Ceylon History of Ceylon* project; strengthening of the all-island survey of the economy of rural Ceylon pioneered by Professor Das Gupta; internationally acclaimed works on aspects of Buddhist Philosophy by K. N. Jayatilake; the far-reaching impact of Professor Hettiarachchi and his senior colleagues to the lexical development of Sinhala without which it would have been almost impossible to use it as a medium of communication in the sciences (in Tamil, I have been told, the required vocabulary was available in South India); and the regularly published research journal *University of Ceylon Review*, besides

other journals of wider participation such as *Piyawara* and *Sanskruthi* that depended largely on the Peradeniya 'Arts' community. In addition, there were the Sarachchandra-led breakthroughs in the Fine Arts, continued and enriched by a whole generation of its highly gifted alumni – Gunadasa Amarasekera, Siri Gunasinghe, Dayananda Gunawardena, Gunasena Galappathi, D. B. Nihalsinha, Vasantha Obeyesekera, Dharmasena Pathiraja, Somalatha Subhasinghe, Simon Navagaththegama, and Jayalath Manoratne, to name those who readily come to mind.

The objective which the Faculty of Arts and Oriental Studies at Peradeniya set for itself in its early stage of existence was clearly more than that of producing graduates for the job market. In research, one of its main preoccupations was the 'discovery' of Sri Lanka (emulating Jawaharlal Nehru?) for an English readership here and abroad. The liberal scholastic traditions of the older British universities which the university at Peradeniya was intended to adopt were also consistent with the objective of promoting a mildly nationalist brand of intellectual elitism rather than that of catering to economic needs. Economic needs were, of course, catered to in an incidental fashion; for, its products found ready employment in the main growth industry of the country at that time – government administration. Moreover, the standards maintained by the faculty were such that its graduates, regardless of speciality, were believed to be (and often, found to be) suitable for the executive cadres in civil administration, diplomatic services, the armed forces, banking and commerce, and in many other fields of employment where educated young men and women were in demand. Thus, in public sector employment it was not unusual to find a 'Philosophy' policeman, a 'Sanskrit' land administrator, a 'Classics' tax assessor or a 'Pali' revenue officer among the more numerous 'Social Scientists'. Conditions of full employment

for 'Arts' graduates were also assured by the rapidly expanding school system. The best graduates from Peradeniya found a higher level of acceptance than their counterparts from most other commonwealth countries by the leading universities in Britain in their admission to doctoral programmes. Even in sports, with national champions and record holders in many competitive games in its student body, the university was right in the forefront.

It would, of course, be incorrect to assert that all was well with the university at Peradeniya of the 1950's. One of its aggrieved graduates referred to it as a *paraputuvangē pārādeesaya* (paradise of parasites) – a view not peremptorily dismissed by our iconic guru Sarachchandra in his 'Convocation Address' years later. Joseph Needham who in the late 1950s was invited by the government to probe into the development of higher education during the 16-year period since the establishment of the University of Ceylon referred to "... widespread criticism levelled at the university in Parliament, by the national press, graduates, parents, educationalists, religious leaders, and even university teachers themselves." It is of interest, however, that the 'ivory tower' ethos of *ars gratia artis* was not among the criticisms carefully recorded and commented upon by him.

That apart, the forceful case the Needham Commission made on intellectual and educational grounds for an increased intake of students to the arts and humanities streams of the university, and for a *carefully planned* change in the medium of instruction from English to Sinhala and Tamil, conformed to what the government of the day in expedience (i.e. the need to somehow find room in the universities to accommodate the ever increasing numbers completing school education in the *swabhāshā* media), demanded from a hesitant faculty. The university succumbed to the pressure and

permitted the avalanche of students instructed only in Sinhala or Tamil medium with the requisite qualifications for further education in the arts and the humanities at tertiary level.

From about the early 1960's when this pressure began, university authorities had little or no control over the numbers admitted for higher studies in the humanities and the social sciences. But what they could and did control and curtail with cynical disregard for quality were the resources made available to the Faculty. Perhaps the earliest exemplification of the notion that higher education in the Arts requires only the most rudimentary resources – "only a blackboard and some chalk" as one of its adherents declared was in 1961 – when some 2,000 students (more than double the number admitted the previous year) were taken to pursue the 'Arts' at the University of Ceylon (in addition to those sent to Vidyōdaya and Vidyālankāra), making it necessary to conduct at Peradeniya its first-year lecture courses in more popular subjects to several batches ('internal residential' and 'internal non-residential', in the three media of instruction), of which the Sinhala medium invariably consisted of several hundreds of students. In 1965, with a part of the faculty shifted back from Peradeniya to Colombo, even the blackboard and the chalk were not available to those of the staff required to teach massive gatherings of students accommodated in the spectators' gallery of a former race-course, using the starter's stand as the lecture podium and a megaphone for disseminating knowledge to the crowd, accompanied by the somnolent drone of crows and the traffic. Amazingly a few brilliant scholars emerged from that chaos – attributable, no doubt, to their personal commitment and talents (inculcated at home and school?).

More generally, the phenomenal increase of undergraduate numbers and the switch over to *swabhāshā* in the Faculty obviously had an adverse impact on the quality of what was

being taught and learnt in the Arts disciplines. For instance, the tutorial classes conducted to groups of thirty or forty students lost their purpose. The expansion of the student body necessitated corresponding increases of the staff purely to keep the system ticking. At least in certain instances, this meant lax procedures of staff recruitment. The change in the medium of instruction also meant that some among those available a few years later for recruitment as university teachers themselves had language skills (such as they were) only in their mother-tongue and were thus handicapped in their attempts to improve their competence and talents after recruitment. The staff quality was also affected by other influences such as the substantially increased demand for the best performers at the Bachelor of Arts degree examination from the newly established universities within Sri Lanka, the declining attractiveness of university teaching as a field of employment, the restriction of opportunities for new recruits to the staff for post-graduate studies in foreign universities, and, above all, the 'brain-drain'.

By the latter part of the decade, when the English medium stream in most Arts departments had dried up for want of students, there developed a language-based (Sinhala-Thamil) dichotomy which was often featured by ludicrous differences and anomalies between one medium of instruction and the other in respect of what was taught and learnt, despite the nominal availability of stipulated syllabi. Staff-student interaction within the class-room invariably became a 'closed system' without the benefits of either external inputs of information into the system or feed-back processes within the system. Thus, formal learning in the Arts at the university came to take the form of uncritical acceptance by students of the wisdom conveyed orally by individual teachers working in isolation from one another. For the large majority of Arts students, university

learning became one of recording notes at lectures, and reproducing those notes at examinations, to be evaluated by the very same persons at whose lectures the notes, including the occasional joke, had been hurriedly copied. The change from English to *swabhāshā* also meant the severance of the earlier links which departments of study in the Arts at Peradeniya had with reputed British universities in examinations – the 'moderation' of question papers and the 'second marking' of answer scripts.

Perhaps the most significant negative impact of the wayward expansion of the Arts at Peradeniya and elsewhere during the 1960's was the resulting glut of arts graduates – a supply to the job market far in excess of demand – creating, especially among the students, disinterest and despair. Politicized procedures frequently adopted in the recruitment of arts graduates to public sector employment generated widespread cynicism among them, and a feeling that what eventually counts is not what they know but whom they know at the higher levels of the prevailing 'regime'. Apart from its direct harm on the quality of learning, it generated the type of student unrest in the university which made it appear to those in authority that the faculties of Arts were a breeding grounds for subversion and militant forms of protest.

By the early 1970s the concept of an 'autonomous, unitary, and residential' university at Peradeniya had been entirely abandoned. The intellectual and cultural role ascribed to it had been forgotten. The university had lost its earlier image as a trail-blazer in aesthetic, language, and religious studies. Scholars with ability and promise had left the faculty in large numbers; and its teaching programmes, especially in the popular disciplines, were being conducted for the most part by inexperienced and relatively ill-equipped graduates. Unemployment was rampant among those graduating from the

faculty, and the notion that Arts graduates are unemployable was firmly entrenched in many quarters. The output of research had been reduced to a mere trickle, and consisted almost entirely of the work of a tenacious few who appeared to be writing mainly for a foreign 'market' and who, in any case, had only a tiny local readership.

This was made evident by two sets of data that I compiled in the early 1990s. From 1942 to 1992, the university had awarded Master's and Doctoral degrees in the 'Arts' to 322 students, of which 257 were the latter – the 'Master's' – which included 116 awarded by the Department of Education (M. Eds) that had a large course-work component. PhDs and MAs in other disciplines of the faculty thus constituted an aggregate of 206, which averaged out of about *4 per annum* over the 50-year period, while the corresponding annual average of the baccalaureate degrees awarded was about 400 – a ratio of 1:100 at the two levels! Clearly, the students' research output was minute.

What of staff research? On this my probe was based on a laboriously compiled set of information on their works of research, written in English, and published from the time of the faculty's arrival at Peradeniya in 1952 up to August 1991 as monographs, consultancy reports, chapters of books, and articles in refereed journals. On the 'volume' of research, what the compilation indicated was that: (a) the total number of authors of published research was 167; (b) of this total, there were 11 authors, each of whom had more than 12 publications to his/her credit, and accounted for a large share of the total output enumerated; (c) of the 149 persons in the permanent staff of the Faculty at the end of 1991, only 57 had authored *even one* published work of research in my compilation; and (d) while 38 out of the total of this 57 were above the age of 50 years, *only one* person below the age of 40

years in the entire faculty had authored a work of any of the types referred to above. While not discounting the possibility of a few publications being missed in my reckoning, I have no doubt about the validity of my view that the alarming situation discernible in these findings was not extenuated by the non-availability of journals, and had not being compensated either by a proliferation of research purveyed in Sinhala or by the qualitative worth of the meagre output.

UNIVERSITY REORGANIZATION OF 1972

Confining myself to brief references to several later efforts towards unleashing minds of the 'Arts' community, I refer, first, to the 'reorganization' attempted in 1972 in the aftermath of the insurrection of 1971. Its main ingredients were the conversion of all universities to 'campuses' of a single university functioning under the office of a Vice-Chancellor in Colombo, with *de facto* control of even certain routine university matters by the Ministry of Education; changes intended to eliminate "wasteful duplication of courses" – mainly by banishing a part of the Arts Faculty from Peradeniya (mostly its Humanities and Languages segments), and a prescription for orienting the Arts and Humanities courses towards the job market. This, as shown in several writings, had a disastrous impact especially on the morale of the faculty, causing among other things a massive brain-drain.

UGC SYSTEM OF UNIVERSITY GOVERNANCE IN 1978

Introduction of the UGC in 1978, another attempted 'unleashing minds', was supposedly modelled on the UGC of Britain. The main function of that model is regulating government assistance to the universities. Although the British version does permit a measure of centralized control of tertiary education, it has hardly ever been known to

violate the precept of university autonomy in academic and administrative affairs. In that respect the UGC of Sri Lanka has hardly ever had any resemblance to its parent model, not so much because of interferences of politicians (which is largely confined to using the universities as a job bank for the non-academic staff), but due to the arrogance of some petty-minded Brahmins to whom its operation was entrusted right from its inception. There is an interesting similarity between the University Act of 1978 on which our UGC system is based, and the country's new constitution promulgated a few months earlier, in that both reforms were created by persons who were aware that they would themselves be at the helm of affairs of the new statutory dispensation – in perpetuity, did they think? So, it is certainly not that the executive presidencies and the university grants commissions are intrinsically defective. The defects are in their modalities that have taken root here in Sri Lanka. The defects associated with our UGC, identifiable in several operational aspects of university governance, are seen more distinctly than in all else by the incessant flow of hundreds of its 'Ordinances' and 'Circulars', much of it in attempts at tighter control of the universities or to remedy defects of its own making.

CURRICULUM CHANGE: 'COURSE UNIT SYSTEM'

Since this attempt was initiated after my retirement I dare not comment on its routine operation, especially on whether it has achieved an elevation of quality of the academic work of the faculty. Confining myself to two general observations, I recall that the earlier curriculum structure leading to the 'special' BA degree in our faculty was featured by a first year of learning the basics of three academic disciplines, followed by procedures of specialization in one discipline over the next three years (emulating the 'Tripos' system of the older British universities), and

that one of its main objectives was leading the undergraduate to the frontiers of research is his or her speciality. We know that at least some of the departments here did achieve that objective because our graduates had no difficulty in meeting the rigorous demands of doctoral programmes even at some of the best universities abroad, primarily since they had the required language competence. I am not at all sure whether our course-unit system achieves that. Secondly, the new structure, I think, has fallen far short of the objective of breaking inter-faculty or even inter-departmental barriers, which a course unit system is meant to facilitate. A suggestion made some years ago when the faculty was contemplating the introduction of a CU system that is should be accompanied by making provisions for 'course clusters enabling multi-disciplinary specialization in fields such as 'development studies', 'ecology and environmental conservation'; 'poverty alleviation', 'urban planning', 'gender studies', 'international relations', and 'South Asian studies' (similar to those observable in some of the more prestigious universities in the US) does not appear to have received serious attention.

FINANCIAL INCENTIVES FOR RESEARCH

During the economic recession of the 1970s when university salaries were low in relation to the cost of living and when even the locally produced paper was in short supply in our university, conducting research, especially of the type that necessitated venturing out of Peradeniya, was a hard personal struggle. The changes that accompanied the 'economic liberalization' initiated in the late 1970s brought about an improvement in terms of the availability of material inputs required for research; and, over time, the more prolific researchers also found access to funds from internal and external courses for the type of work they wanted to do, though

by no means in abundance compared to that enjoyed by their counterparts in more affluent countries. The ease of access to information accumulating in government institutions (and even to their facilities such as 'circuit bungalows') was a mitigating privilege some of us enjoyed almost throughout, especially because our former *machangs* and students were spread throughout the bureaucracy. But since salary revisions in the state sector barely kept pace with the escalating cost of living, trade unions representing the interests of the different categories of university workers became increasingly vehement in their demand for higher salaries.

It is against the background of the considerations referred to above that the impact of the recent addition of a 'Research Allowance' to the monthly salary of the academic staff both on research as well as on the morale of the non-academic staff ought to be examined. As far as I am aware, this has not been done. But once again, on the basis of my sporadic contact with the university since retirement I am inclined towards the view that the 'research allowance' is yet to achieve its declared objective, but does have the potential of facilitating productive research, provided there is interpersonal 'amity and concord' which, as Professor W. S. Karunaratne lamented long years ago in the course of a fiercely hostile attack on one of his colleagues, has remained sadly deficient in our community.

* * *

FOR A SUSTAINABLE TRADITION OF PRODUCTIVE RESEARCH

It would obviously be unrealistic to compare the attempt made through this conference for promoting a sustainable tradition of research in our faculty to the stimuli it received in the 'University of Ceylon' fifty-four years ago. Quite apart from the scale of that effort, one cannot find now a mass of intellectual talent

in the 'Arts', straining at the leash as it were, to be released through institutional devices as there certainly was at that time. Yet, the timing of the laudable effort epitomized by this conference is fully justified by what I see as a significant change taking place in the university community here in its attitude towards English, from *kaduwa* to *nagul thalaya* ('sword to ploughshare'), still barely perceptible to those outside the university mainly because of the publicity given to the seemingly endless demonstrations of 'unrest' in which many of our students participate.

To refer to the specificities of this phenomenon – even in the science-based faculties of the university where students remained reconciled with the reality that it was essential for them to acquire competence in the use of English, I have been reliably informed that fairly large segments of the student body continued to be seriously handicapped by their lack of adequate proficiency in English - the medium of formal learning and communication in their faculties, but that there has evidently been a declining impact of that constraint in the recent past. Some among those with whom I have discussed this attributed it to the spread of the 'internet' (the widespread use of PCs, laptops, and smart phones even in our villages). An upsurge of competitiveness has also been suggested as a possible impulse. This welcome tide, whatever its cause, has been seeping into the Arts Faculty which, in the past, experienced not merely student disinterest on acquiring proficiency in the use of English but hostility towards those who possess that competence. The change has been distinct enough for several departments of the faculty (including mine) to conduct lectures in English with hardly any resistance from the students. The English used might not be of a standard that would please the 'Queen', but from perspectives of potential benefits that does not matter.

On the question of what should be done to

harness this incipient change towards a tradition of research in the Arts, I confine myself to submitting a series of suggestions for your consideration. Most of my suggestions would necessitate enlightened collaboration between those at the commanding heights of the higher education systems, and our people here. Some require internal initiatives based on collective commitment and effort, and an understanding that reversal of earlier trends is bound to be a slow and arduous task.

1. Reduce the intensity of centralized control of the university system

This should be realized by confining UGC functions to matters concerning government policy, with an understanding of the fact that it is not necessary and not desirable to equalize and standardize the functions and capacities of all universities in the country – no country has achieved that.

2. Rectify at least the more obvious defects of the ‘University Councils’

Established under the provisions of the ‘Universities Act No. 16 of 1978’, these have several ludicrous features perhaps the most conspicuous one being their composition. The Act stipulates that appointees by the Minister must exceed the number of ‘internal’ members – ex-officio and elected. In the governing body of Peradeniya for instance there are, thus, 13 persons (highly distinguished, no doubt) appointed by the Minister. Having attended all the Council meetings from the time of my appointment until being evicted about 6 months later, my conviction is that most of them had nothing worthwhile to contribute to this university. Each meeting I attended lasted over many hours; and I swear to the fact that eight of the ministerial appointees never opened their mouth except perhaps to yawn or to consume refreshments. Should this kind of comedy be permitted in ‘Governing’ these exalted seats of learning?

3. Curtail waste in the university system

Excessive waste is seen more prominently than in all else in the bloated bureaucracy functioning with a massive workforce, an immense amount of purposeless paper-work, and ostentatious ceremony. These could be curtailed. For instance, those bulky tomes distributed among members of the Council, the Senate and the Faculties could surely be e-mailed at a minute fraction of the present costs. The resulting savings could then be transferred to fund dire needs such as the repair of residential hall latrines that are literally bursting at the seams, constructed more than half a century ago to cater to less than quarter the number of their present users.

On our gigantic ‘Administration’, let’s not forget the fact that Sir Jennings had only a few extraordinarily dedicated men and women to assist him in his awesome task and that even Sir Nicholas had his administrative domain in Peradeniya confined to a part of the palace on pillars, most of it being occupied at that time by the Department of Geography. Our bustling faculty of the early 1960s, with a much larger student body than at present, was being administered with almost effortless ease by the great dons turned deans in an office room equipped with nothing more elaborated than a couple of typewriters and a ‘Gestetner’ machine, and with a clerical staff of three; but with no delays and no academic or administrative hiccups. When faced with a problem concerning even a formal regulation, such as I did in my second year as a student, it was the Dean, Professor Passé, who walked across to the VC’s office where an unprecedented and ingenious solution was promptly found. I recall this with an immense sense of gratitude for the lifelong impact it has had on me, and because it reflects the ethos of that time – unimaginable in the present bureaucratic mess.

4. Spend as much as possible on improving the living conditions of the staff and the students

Special emphasis in this regard should be paid to residential facilities within the university.

5. Implement a major restructuring of the Faculty Curriculum

I suggest the introduction of a carefully planned 5-year degree programme of full-time study, operating concurrently with the present curriculum at least over a transitional period, with (a) The first 2 years devoted entirely to improving the language competence of the students – the mother tongue and English (or a preferred major international language such as Chinese, Arabic or Japanese) reinforced with a *substantial* IT input; (b) 3rd and 4th years of learning in a selected academic discipline or a field of study involving multidisciplinary inputs, conducted entirely in English, leading to the Bachelor of Arts Degree; and (c) a 5th year of full-time advanced study to which only the best performers at the BA level are granted admission, leading to a Master's degree. It should contain a component of supervised research (for which provision should be made to obtain the services of persons with proven scholarly credentials outside the university), and a component of training in the designing of research proposals, in research communication in the form of presentation of formal seminars and lectures. In its MA courses the faculty should also probe the possibility of developing 'internship' links for its students with institutions in cognate professional fields – for example, community health care, urban planning, business management, law, IT, media, etc. – within and outside the university.

6. Change the procedures of recruitment to faculty

An exceptionally high level of performance in

a Master's degree programme (as referred to above or comparable to it) should be made the basic requirement for applying to permanent academic posts. Short-listing of applicants should be done by a panel of competent persons, on the basis of a detailed study of the applicants' career record, including research writings. Each of the short-listed applicants should be requested to participate in a rigorous assessment involving the presentation of a seminar to an all-faculty audience (this is how things are done in the best places). The 'points scheme' presently used by Selection Committees should be discarded, and a more reliable method of evaluating research publications and other achievements of the short-listed applicants should be introduced. The university should provide substantial assistance to those recruited as 'probationary' lecturers for advanced foreign training.

7. Dispose of the staff 'Promotion Schemes' used at present

These schemes contain some monumentally stupid features. Their sole aim appears to be the prevention of malpractices, especially on the part of members of the Selection Committees – apparently a permanent mindset of the UGC since 1978.

8. Initiate large-scale investigations and monitoring procedures in research especially on issues of vital concern to Sri Lanka

The paucity of the type of research produced through sustained commitment set within a field of scholarly inquiry is, I think, a deficiency of the faculty's record of research. While not discounting the value of the works authored by our veteran scholars of former times like Kingsley de Silva, Ian Gunatilleke, Leslie Gunawardena, Michael Roberts, Madduma Bandara, KNO Dharmadasa, and Sudharshan Seneviratne, their legacy appears to be largely replaced by ream after

ream of 'abstracts' (of research papers that seldom see the light of day) published as proceedings of 'Annual Research Sessions'. Not denying the significance of the thin scatter of gems still being unearthed by a few of our extraordinarily gifted scholars, what I suggest is that the university, while encouraging research interests and inclinations pursued solo, should also promote large-scale and well planned research projects and monitoring programmes of long duration, involving staff-student collaboration and interdisciplinary inputs, thus making optimum use of the manpower at its disposal. Now that there are about 14 universities in the country, there is also a case for such group research to focus on the region and the city in which the university is located. Multidisciplinary research projects of long duration are found in many universities the world over. I have had the opportunity to observe closely (as a participant) two university-based monitoring programmes – one at Cambridge in my discipline that had by the mid-1960s produced a unique data-base generated through annual field investigations in northern Scotland, conducted almost uninterrupted since the early 20th century; and the other at the University of Manila in the form of a network of 'Social Weather Stations' working on socio-economic phenomena in different parts of the archipelago, which is exactly what meteorological stations do on atmospheric phenomena. The spectacular success of the latter has received global acclaim.

7. Do not forget the students who pass out of the faculty

The Faculty of Arts should maintain through interdepartmental collaboration a record of its former students' post-university progress, in addition to communicating with them and, where possible, inviting them to faculty functions. Related praiseworthy initiatives of the recent past should be expanded in scope. The Faculty of Medicine in our university

has established such a vibrant tradition in the form of its 'PEMSA'. Also remember that our former students have been paying us (undeserved?) homage in the form of *guru upahāra* organized at great expense of their effort, time, and money. Why is it that we do nothing to reciprocate such gestures of affection and loyalty to this institution? Although completed my graduate studies more than fifty years ago, I still continue receive from that university (probably like thousands of its other alumni) its delightful journal, published thrice each year, in addition to an invitation to dinner once in about five years – amusing? But that I think is one of the ways great universities differ from tutorials. And that is why they have had, down the ages, the occasional Bill Gates donating billions. We have had one such benefactor, the late Ian Gunatilleke whom, ironically, the university kicked out, but repented later by awarding him an honorary doctorate.

8. Do not bury the retired teachers before they are dead

Make maximum use of retired faculty to elevate the quality of the 'Arts'. This is very definitely not a personal plea. I have received enough from this university, and, I have enough things to do to keep myself busy.

I offer the University of Peradeniya my very best wishes for its present and future endeavours.

REFERENCES

- Driesen, I. & H. Vanden. (1956). Plantation Agriculture and Land Sales Policy in Ceylon: The First Phase 1836-1886. *University of Ceylon Review*, vol. XIII, nos. 1&2, pp. 6-25
- Jayaweera, S. (1966). Local Government Institutions and Education in Ceylon 1870-1930. *University of Ceylon Review*, vol. XXIV nos. 1&2, pp. 29-60

Oliver, H. (1963). From Dependent Currency to Central Banking in Ceylon: An Analysis of Monetary Experience, 1825–1957. *The Journal of Economic History*, vol. 23 no. 1, pp. 103-104

Tambiah, S.J. (1986). Ethnic representation in Ceylon's Higher Administration Services, 1870-1946. *UCR*, vol. 12 no. 13, pp. 113-134