

The Vice-Chancellor, Members of the Executive Council, Members of faculty, Distinguished Guests and my dear Graduates,

It is indeed a great privilege and honour to deliver the first Convocation Address of the South Eastern University of Sri Lanka (SEUSL). I feel particularly happy to participate in this Convocation since this young University has come up very well and is making its unique contribution in the realm of higher education. The Vice-Chancellor, dedicated faculty, students and non-teaching staff through their work and achievements have assured the future all-round growth of SEUSL. I am sure in the years to come this University will play a major role in enhancing the quality of higher education in Sri Lanka.

Higher education is at cross roads at a time when we have moved into the Third Millennium, with its tremendous challenges and opportunities. Tremendous challenges, in the sense, that the phenomenon of globalisation and the extant information technology revolution have major implications for societies all over the world. Such a seminal process requires everyone to measure upto the needs of a complex global society creating new values, norms, perspectives and imperatives. At the same time, the opportunities are manifold and people everywhere can find placements in different and exciting spheres of human endeavour in consonance with a material civilization based on an acquisitive culture.

The Indian sub-continent is in the process of transition from tradition to modernity, where the bullock cart and the missiles co-exist reflecting this persisting but paradoxical reality. The ancient co-exists with the modern and the post-modern. There is an innate urge in metropolitan centres and in cities, towns and villages to leave the past behind and to plan for a hopeful and prosperous future. This kind of forward-looking

positive approach is testimony to the national objective of moving ahead in the competitive quest for a meaningful role in world affairs. These compulsions motivate the Indian people to expect rapid economic growth, social cohesion, and political stability. It is in this larger context, reforms in higher education assume great significance for the future well-being of the nation. Reforms in higher education is a recurring theme covering within its ambit many areas of ongoing concern to all of us. I would like to take a fresh look at the university curricula by linking it with national needs and emerging global trends and its multidimensional impact. In the contemporary period, educational administrators, elites, policy makers, parents, students and teachers have realized the enormous significance of University curricula. Excellence, quality, relevance, equity and significance of higher education is directly correlated to institutional evaluation. Development of the University and effective curricula are two faces of the same coin, one reinforcing the other providing qualitative national and global relevance to the work done in an University. In other words, functional and creative relationship emerge between University curricula, national needs and emerging global trends in higher education. It does not require much justification to argue that such a triangular relationship must be harmonious, positive and development-oriented rather than disjointed, disorganized and dysfunctional.

Curriculum may be regarded as a scheme, plan project, process, tool, method and strategy to modernise higher education by providing a qualitative dimension. It could also be regarded as a programme of studies or activities or guidance, whose primary objective is to enable the student to come to grips with the environment in which the functionaries through a sequence of potential experiences relate thought to disciplined action. Curriculum development is nothing less and nothing more than a well planned programme of guiding-learning experiences to bring desired

attitudinal/behavioural changes among students, keeping in view the objectives of the particular institution or the larger interests of the society or nation/world. In this sense, an ideal University curricula is the product of a well-conceived, carefully considered, deliberate, scientifically planned endeavour to transform students through appropriate behavioural modifications. Such an understanding of curricula is inclusive of academic subjects, as also the totality of experience of students in Universities. The interaction of students among themselves and between themselves and teachers through curricular activism develops in them an integrated personality. Contemporaneously curriculum development has acquired enormous importance because of its emphasis on structured learning. The idea of structured learning is part of a dynamic process whose ultimate objective is to combine theoretical with practical knowledge, skills and wholesome/positive, pro-active attitude among human beings. In this context, any serious review of University curricula points out to the inadequacies at the three levels of planning, implementation and evaluation. Unless a clear-cut and functional three-fold linkage is worked out at each of these levels, University curricula may not be able to adequately and effectively cater to national aspirations and emerging global trends in the new century. Basically, the problems of University curricula can be gauged from the fact that most Universities are unable to ensure desired level of quality, excellence, relevance, equity, and social justice to the stakeholders in the system. The enormity of the problem is such that we need to ask basic questions like, what to teach?, How to teach?, Why to teach?, What is the significance and relevance of what we teach? and how to evaluate what we teach? Answers to these questions point out to the urgent need to develop core competencies of a higher order involving a variety of skills of leadership creativity and problem-solving abilities. Teacher core competencies include a thorough knowledge of the subjects in all their dimensions within a learning environment. Appropriate

communication skills and use of resources (information technology) in a student/learner-centered system of higher education constitute its foundation.

One of the crucial problems of higher education relates to undergraduate and post-graduate courses which have remained unchanged for a long time, simultaneously matched by archaic teaching methods. Many Universities still follow the continental method of teaching-a hang over of the colonial legacy. Lecturing method is teacher centered and such a one-track approach does not encourage creativity, innovativeness and imagination of students. Effective teaching is a two way process with the teachers and students part and parcel of the collective interactive process.

New group learning techniques like modified lecture method, individualised instruction, panel discussion, lecture-cum-demonstration, learning cell, step by step discussion, case discussion, snow ball groups, cross over groups, horse shoe groups, T-group, brainstorming sessions, synectics etc., must be incorporated in the teaching and learning processes to give it a qualitative and functional edge. In essence, dynamic teaching is productive, creative and functional at the same time. On the other hand, the courses and their contents are retained without any or much change. Lack of flexibility and innovation through modern techniques of education act as a major drag on the all-round development of the University. The courses are traditional and of vintage stuff in thrust and substance and accordingly students get information and knowledge which are outmoded and outdated. Flexibility and adaptability entail a policy where courses and their content undergo changes, keeping in view the extant needs of the society and modern developments at the global level. The contemporary information technology revolution envisages the

designing of new courses which are in tune with the national Constitution. The imperatives are so pervasive and far-reaching in such a scenario where teaching, learning, research and extension will focus upon new instrumentalities like Fax, E-mail, infibnet, Internet, Website, Flowsheets, Charts, Diagrams, Algebraic equations. These will constitute the intellectual baggage of a University, and new courses in the new age resplendent with its new vocabulary will be the order of the day. Universities per se will have to quickly adapt to these revolutionary changes or alternatively become dysfunctional, antiquated and moribund entities without much significance and relevance. In sum, it is a question of either/or with no space between the two ends of the spectrum, where there is a haphazard expansion of faculties in certain areas and deficiency in others, provide a fertile ground for frustration, ennui and de-motivation to students, teachers and academic administrators in the stream of University education. The anti-study, anti-social and anti-developmental activities of students is due to apparent failure on the part of the authorities to come up with effective policy initiatives. Such 'philosophical schizophrenia' is reflected in the curricula of Indian Universities with mere cosmetic changes that neither acquire an indigenous form nor a Western format. The painful fact is that radarless shunting of the mind and thought of students and teachers without any mooring in the vast oceanic global society. In many Universities the psycho-moral-intellectual vacuum is manifested in the aimless and purposeless pursuit in the classrooms and on the campuses. The fall out from such an enervating atmosphere is inevitably one of agitations, strikes, work-to-rule movements, boycotts of examinations etc. In a fractured society with a fragmented political culture prescribing a course of study or introducing new courses of study vitiate the atmosphere leading to academic miscarriages. The work culture in academia bears no meaningful relationship to the challenges of globalisation resulting in disappointments. Depression, punctured-egos and run of mill performance.

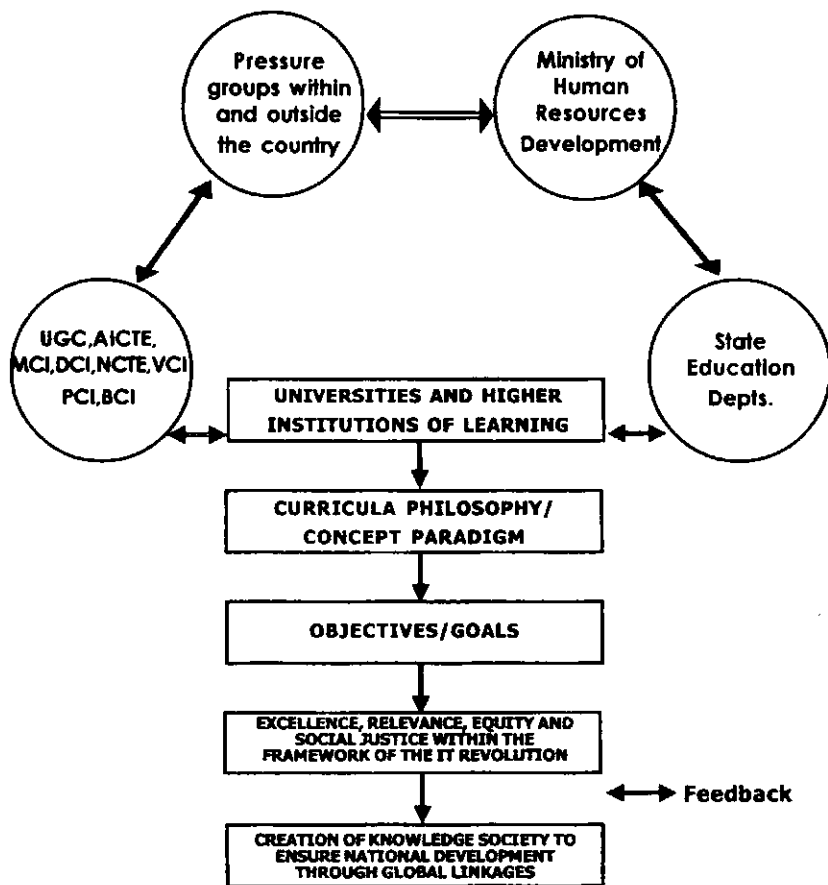
In terms of the limitations of Universities in the operational domain, the fact is that student-teacher interactions do not foster a culture of regularity, efficiency and commitment-the hallmarks of a professional system of higher education. With the rapidly booming population, Universities appear very crowded where quality is sacrificed at the altar of quantity. The proliferation of numbers has converted Universities into degree manufacturing mills, adding to the stream of educated unemployed. The ills of stagnation, routinisation, ad-hocism and bureaucratization have dehumanized the quality of higher education in most Third World countries. It is no wonder many educational systems function at only the minimum survival level, with rigidity replacing flexibility, quantity in juxtaposition with quality and operational inefficiency in place of professionalism.

From the above prognosis, relating to a review of India's University curricula vis-à-vis national needs and emerging global trends in higher education the shortcomings and inadequacies are less apparent and more real, less as aberrations but more of an enduring nature and less as superficial maladies but more as root and branch problems. The underlying global trends will have far-reaching consequences for the University educational system in India unless the complex issues are tackled on a top priority basis. What is required at this juncture is for all Third World countries to opt for peaceful but revolutionary changes in the existing archaic system of University education. Knowledge acquisition in the Western world is expanding in an exponential fashion within the framework of scientific and technological societies of the future. Information Technology is the motive force driving Universities to offer new and exciting courses in frontier areas of knowledge. The gap between the Universities in the Third World and the West is widening and the only way out is to make a quantum jump by reforming and reorienting out system of higher education. The compulsion of globalisation, privatisation, free market

competition and the new trade regime of the revitalised WTO prescribe a culture of professionalism, quality and excellence. From this holistic perspective, it is advisable to review and reformulate our objectives in favour of full-scale semesterisation as a potent strategy to meet the ongoing challenges. The Semester system can be a liberating force for securing equality, equity and social justice for all. It can also promote what the Kothari Commission on Education stated: "Commonality of Citizenship and culture through a process of comprehensive national integration and to eventually contribute towards a rapid increase in national productivity and the World stock of rapidly expanding knowledge and technology". This new system of education can bring about equality of opportunity, development of self-study habits among students, a high degree of flexibility in processes and techniques evaluation vis-à-vis structural and content of subjects and courses. In the event, an equitable balance between what is academic and what is extra-curricular are precisely spelt out to give depth and substance to higher education. In such a scheme of things, academic audit and prioritisation through a dynamic University curricula focusing on innovation and creativity will be in accordance with ongoing global trends. Pondicherry University has evolved its own Model-Choice Eased Credit System—as part of a larger system to measure up to the challenges of a knowledge society. This is popularly called as the cafeteria model of higher education which allows for built-in flexibility and complete freedom for students to offer any courses of their choice within the same Department or across Departments and for teachers to float any courses of their choice for the benefit of students. The CBCS is inter-disciplinary and multi-disciplinary at the same time. Many other Universities in India have evolved their own model of semesterisation to suit their requirements, which are variants of the Pondicherry University Model. I am presenting the University Curricula Model as a frame of reference and for consideration and adoption by other Universities in India and abroad.

UNIVERSITY CURRICULA MODEL

(Under the Semester System of Higher Education)



- UGC = University Grants Commission
- AICTE = All India Council for Teaching Education
- MCI = Medical Council of India
- DCI = Dental Council of India
- NCTE = National Council for Teachers Education
- VCI = Veterinary Council of India
- PCI = Pharmacy Council of India
- BCI = Bar Council of India

The above University Curricula Model represents a conceptual scheme of the process of higher education as also the fulcrum of a reformed and reformulated semester system in the 21st century with its emerging global trends. Interactive networking between Universities and the industry and other entities for curriculum improvement and implementation will also include sharing of human, physical and infrastructure resources at micro and macro levels. This curricula model also envisages application of knowledge and skills gained by solutions to problems through process of analysis, synthesis and evaluation, transforming input (people, material or information) into an output (people with modified behaviour, equipment or processed information). The end users of curricula, namely students, teachers and academic administrators must also be aware of the collection and supply of feedback systems. The above model is relevant also for teaching and learning in the distance/open mode of higher education which is likely to be the wave of the future.

In conclusion, it must be stated rather emphatically that University curricula is the primum mobile of a dynamic system of higher education catering to the needs of the nation and the emerging global trends. Curricula that is flexible develops the core competencies of students provides the motive force for peaceful revolutionary change creating new values, new norms and a new ethos in the new millennium. Universal values have to be operationalised and Universities have a major role to play in such a process. Quality education with appropriate course content (curricula modification) must become the obiter dicta of higher education throughout the world. SWOT study, strategic planning with appropriate and well-conceived action plan can subserve the purpose of strengthening Universities to perform fruitfully at national and global levels. A thorough analysis of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats can improve the quality of higher education with priority to universal values

as intrinsic part of the curricula of Universities. It is in this large but realistic sense, universal values can contribute a uniting thread for developing common civilisation values and for building-up of a stable, peaceful and enduring world order.

As a message for the graduates of the year, may I say, you are what you think and you think what you become. On this auspicious occasion, I wish you all the best to all of you in your future endeavours to serve your country.

Printed at:

Academic & Examinations Branch
South Eastern University of Sri Lanka
University Park
Oluvil