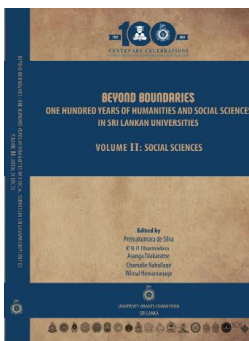


BOOK REVIEW



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One Hundred Years of Social Sciences in Sri Lankan Universities

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INTRODUCTION

According to Scott Gordon, who was a professor in the Department of Economics as well as in the Department of History and Philosophy of Science at Indiana University, "The traditional social sciences focus their attention upon the behaviour of the species *Homo sapiens*, examining how people interact with one another and how they organize themselves for co-operative activities." He extends this explanation to include the study of non-cooperative behaviour, such as crime and war and malfunctional phenomena, such as unemployment and pollution (Gordon, 1991). Gary Becker, Nobel Prize winner for Economics in 1992, dedicated his time to researching the economic aspects of various social issues such as education, crime and punishment and family relations. He introduced the concept of "human capital" in 1964 with his book by the same name where he views education, not as a form of consumption that represents a costly expenditure for government but as an investment that improves the economic worth of individuals (e.g., human capital) and thereby raises a country's overall productivity and economic competitiveness. Though there has been a continuous effort in strengthening STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) education, specifically over the last two decades, educators all over the world agree that a complementary effort in strengthening humanities and social sciences education is equally important, if not more (American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2013). In a world where the physical and mental satisfaction of human beings are directly affected by economic, military,

ecological, religious, and technological challenges, the extraordinary promise of being knowledgeable on all fronts of Humanities and Social Sciences cannot be over-emphasized (Mapping the Future, 2013). Especially at this juncture when the country is trying to find the best possible ways to come out of the economic crisis, which is embedded in the social and political crises, the importance of understanding the interconnectedness of all aspects of social sciences cannot be overemphasized. Faced with the unenviable task of preparing the next generation of citizens to be educated in the broadest possible sense so that they can participate in their governance and engage efficiently and productively with the rest of the world, it is very timely that the University Grants Commission embarked on this massive task of summarizing and analysing the hundred-year history of the evolution of humanities and social science education in Sri Lankan universities.

This review focuses on *Beyond Boundaries: One Hundred Years of Humanities and Social Sciences in Sri Lankan Universities; Volume II: Social Sciences*, as a collection of fourteen chapters covering all the disciplines of social sciences edited by Premakumara de Silva, K.N.O. Dharmadasa, Asanga Tilakaratne, Chamalie Nahallage and Wimal Hewamanage, published by the University Grants Commission (UGC) of Sri Lanka, printed at the Government Press of Sri Lanka, Colombo, 2021.

ANALYTICAL REVIEW

Evolution

Thoughtfully chosen quotes by Mahatma Gandhi, Judith Butler and Gunapala Malalasekara in the introductory chapter appropriately set the tone for the rest of the chapters arousing the reader's curiosity to find out the way social sciences would essentially connect the three ideologies. Though Volume II covers the disciplines of Social Sciences, the simple description of the difference between the two sets of disciplines the world has come to accept under Humanities and Social Sciences seems appropriate since the introduction covers the Hundred Years of Humanities and Social Sciences in Sri Lankan Universities, as a wholesome evolution. The brief description of the hundred-year evolution of the Sri Lankan university system in the introduction reminds the reader that the whole exercise of exploring the past and publishing these two volumes came about as part of the contribution the UGC made towards the centenary celebrations of the university system in Sri Lanka. It is also commendable that the discussion is not only about the achievements but also about the setbacks and the relevance and legitimacy of the questions such as the quality of the graduates, the quality assurance of study programs, and most importantly the employability of the graduates with degrees in Humanities and Social sciences. Concluding the introduction with a self-evaluation about the UGC itself and the policymakers in general, and the academic community not being serious enough in making a legitimate effort to bring sustainable solutions in improving the Research and Development (R&D) culture and the

employability of the graduates in these disciplines could certainly be appreciated as an unbiased self-criticism. Having Chapter 2 as an introduction to Volume II makes it easier for the reader to glance at each chapter's content summary and go directly to their favourite discipline first. The flow of information from the Humanities and Social Sciences to specific areas of Social Sciences leaves the average reader's interest undisturbed.

The line-up of the eleven disciplines of Geography, Economics, Education, Archaeology, Sociology & Anthropology, Political Science & Public Policy, Management Studies, Communication & Media, Demography, and International Relations under the umbrella of Social Sciences within the university system of Sri Lanka shows the evolutionary process of the efforts of making social sciences an essential part of the postsecondary education.

Geography

Geography, space, place, mapping, and geographical imagination have become important in contemporary Anthropology, Language studies, Sociology, Religion, Political Science, Music, Dance, Drama, Film and Cultural Studies (Warf & Arias, 2008). Though the advancement of technologies and the concepts of globalization have made the physical location of one's existence immaterial in some sense, the detailed analyses of "Why we do What we do" certainly have accentuated the significance of the location. As the National Geographic Society of the USA describes: "Geography is the study of places and the relationships between people and their environments. Geographers explore both the physical properties of Earth's surface and the human societies spread across it". This concept is embraced well in Chapter 3, with the title: "Geography: Gateway to Understanding the World", stimulating the reader's thinking process by taking it through possible causes for the 'geographic perspectives' of prehistoric man. It will open the receptors of the reader to recognize the role of geography as a way to understand the diversity of people and places around the world. Highlighting the distinctions between the evolution of geography education in Europe and the Indian subcontinent shows that the Sri Lankan education system will have to introduce many changes in the curriculum and evaluation methods to improve geography education, especially in the primary and secondary levels. The transition from Geography in Chapter 3 to Economics in Chapter 4 seems to have taken a natural path showing interconnectedness of the two disciplines from the early days since man's survival depended on "accurate knowledge of places, the probable locations of enemies, edible plants, water, and cave home sites". The explanation about the change in man's geographic perspective due to surplus farm production where field boundaries, city lines, market centres, and communication routes had to be defined fits well with the explanation Adam Smith provides in "*An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*" as: "As soon as the land of any country has all become private property the landlords, like all other men, love to reap where they have never sowed, and so demand a rent even for its natural produce" (Smith 1976a: 56).

The team of John Gallup, Jeffrey Sachs, and Andrew Mellinger of the Centre for International Development of Harvard University were able to show the evidence that geography continues to be an important factor in economic development together with the economic and political institutions. Even with the usage of advanced technologies that make the geographical location immaterial for all types of communications and transactions, Gallup et al. suggest that geographical considerations should be re-introduced into the econometric and theoretical studies of economic growth. Though the social science curriculum in our university system has not paid much of attention to the connection between Geography and Economics, the comparisons they bring in among the economies of tropical and coastal regions, landlocked countries, areas with high population densities and areas with different rates of population growth seem to be important aspects to be addressed within such curriculums. They seem to agree with the Nobel Prize-winning economist Paul Krugman's creative approach to 'new geography' following the 'new trade theory'.

Economics

Economics, arguably the "Queen of social sciences", has become an interdisciplinary subject in many faculties dealing with Social Sciences. Every human being is a practising economist making decisions about his/her own and their families' economic well-being, at least at the primary level. The Online Etymology Dictionary shows that the origin of the word "economy" can be traced back to the Greek word "Oikonomia", which means "Household Management", and therefore "economics" would mean the "knowledge and principles of household management". 'Home Economics' used to be an essential subject in primary and secondary education systems worldwide, providing an insight into the processes that constitute the human nature of the family as an institution (McGregor, 2011). This chapter tries to blend the historical orientation of economics with contemporary historical, philosophical, and political developments by taking the reader back in time through the Evolution of Economics teaching in Sri Lanka from the university college days to what it is today. Interestingly enough, the International Federation of Home Economics (IFHE), in its position statement released commemorating 100 years of its existence, states: "Its historical origins place Home Economics in the context of the home and household, and this is extended in the 21st century to include the wider living environments as we better understand that the capacities, choices and priorities of individuals and families impact at all levels, ranging from the household to the local and also the global community" (IFHE Position Statement, 2008). IFHE believes that the transformation from a well-established knowledge of Home Economics to abstract concepts of Micro and Macro Economics through higher education would have been the easiest and most natural knowledge progression one could experience in economics.

Though the transformation of Economics taught in English to *svabhāṣā* (people's language) in Sri Lanka in the 70's was a challenge due to the dearth of teaching material

in native languages, it was overcome because of the commitment of many economists in the country who were committed to filling the vacuum. As a result, the number of students who opted for Economics was soaring. Graduates with degrees in Economics were showing greater success in securing better jobs than those who specialized in other disciplines, mainly due to the value placed on the degree programs in economics by the changing dynamics of the socio-economic and political landscape of the country and around the world as well.

Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines "Economics" as "a social science concerned chiefly with description and analysis of the production, distribution and consumption of goods and services" while Adam Smith (1776) defined it as "An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations". The economic philosophy of Hebrews, dating back to about 2500 BC, did not consider any economic problem without connecting the dots with the existing philosophical, ethical, and political framework at the time.

The brief description of the transformation from the colonial era to the beginning of the free education system in the country and the evolution of university-level Economics education through a multi-disciplinary framework to the monolithic speciality as we have come to accept it today is an intriguing journey for the reader to have the receptors open for the rest of the chapter. The Author goes on to say: "The inter-disciplinarity in Economics teaching at these early stages enabled students to gain a more broad-based knowledge in Economics as a Social Science discipline. In a philosophical sense, the international study of economics has moved away from the perception of it being a Social and Behavioural Science." Coincidentally, this concept of an inter-disciplinary approach to Economics Education is highlighted in the report produced by the University of Oxford commemorating the hundredth anniversary of the establishment of its Philosophy, Politics and Economics (PPE) degree. Graduates of this degree program have become government ministers and even Prime Ministers in the country. James E. Meade, who won the Nobel Prize for Economics in 1977, graduated with first-class honours in PPE in 1930. Though there were sceptics about the program at the beginning, hundred years later, it has been replicated at 172 institutions in 33 countries, indicating the importance of the inter-disciplinary approach in teaching and learning Economics (One Hundred Years of PPE, Oxford-Report).

Explaining the mismatch between the graduates and the job market in Sri Lanka, the Author states that the youth insurrection in 1971 was because the educated youth were against the country's higher education system as it did not make the youth eligible for worthwhile employment after graduation. Subsequently, specialization options were motivated by the widely discussed contemporary issues of making the degree more employment oriented. In the process, many subject areas were added to suit the market demand. However, the Author disagrees with the objective of making graduates able to find remunerative employment soon after graduation, as it was proven to be elusive, even after a series of curriculum reforms extending over several decades. The issue involved

was explained as something going beyond university curriculum reform and extending into the performance of the overall economy of the country, as well as various other factors influencing the labour market movements. Systematic analysis of Global transformations affecting international markets, international trade and payment systems, relationships between nations, foreign exchange rate regimes and wars in different regions of the world and their impact on Sri Lankan economy and Economics education under several sub-themes makes it much easier for the reader to grasp the interconnectedness of almost all disciplines of social sciences. Economists generally agree that using mathematics and statistics, as and when needed, with the proper intentions, is necessary and helpful. The use of mathematics in this context is seen in economics and almost all other disciplines, irrespective of their categorization being in the physical or social sciences. Disciplines coming under physical sciences usually welcome the mathematization with open arms with the feeling of welcoming a long-lost family member who is back to help them out in a difficult situation. However, the concern about the overuse of mathematical theories in economics, sometimes even overriding the inapplicable and unrealistic outcomes, created an opposition to the mathematization of economics. This overreliance on mathematics may have contributed to global economic disasters, including the failure to predict international financial crises in time to make relevant players aware of the imminent dangers (Southerton, 2011). No matter how beautiful the mathematical theories look and how smoothly the models work in a perfect environment defined by the variables included for the model and subject to the assumptions made, there is a very good chance that it will not work in real life since it is impossible to formulate human actions. The narrative of the evolution of the system in general and Economics education in particular over the last one hundred years, about half of which is through the Author's intellectual journey from his undergraduate days to becoming a senior professor in Economics and the Vice Chancellor of the University of Colombo, provides a holistic view about, not just the Economics but the progression of social science education within the system of Sri Lankan universities.

Sociology and Political Science

The intimate connection between the two disciplines of Geography and Economics and with Sociology, Social Anthropology and Political Science and Public Policy (Park, 1921) could easily be viewed through this one-hundred-year evolutionary process of Social Sciences in Sri Lankan universities if the reader focuses on Chapters 7 and 8 right after the Chapters 3 and 4. Mainly Chapter 8, 'Political Science and Public Policy: Cultivating the Critical Spirit,' describes the intimate connection of the discipline with Sociology, Economics and Geography (Warf & Arias, 2008). It is interesting to notice here again that the British tradition of the political economy focused on interrelationships between the government and economic policy was highlighted through political science education. Not only do they mention the 1971 insurgency, ethnic conflict and internal war during the 80s, the politicization of academic and student communities, and the university

administrations as major factors influencing the intellectual life in all Sri Lankan universities since the early 1970s. Two veterans in the field of Sociology and Anthropology, Professors Kalinga Tudor Silva and Sasanka Perera have organized Chapter 7, “Sociology and Anthropology: Evidence-Based Inquiry into the Social World”, into a logical sequence of six themes starting from the “Origin and Development” to suggestions for “Way Forward” covering the contributions made to the Sri Lankan society through the education process of the discipline with a brief comparison to that of the Indian system. It is essential to note that Sociology, Anthropology or any of their cognate subjects were not taught in the Sri Lankan university system, University Colleges at that time during the first twenty-one years of its existence. Introduction of Sociology to the University of Ceylon as a separate department under the leadership of the American Sociologist Bryce Ryan and offering the subject as a specialization within the Economics study program is an exciting turn of events. Authors have highlighted this in the introduction as follows: “In any case it is important to point out that the discipline of Sociology was established in Sri Lanka under the influence of American Sociology rather than British Sociology or Social Anthropology, even though Sri Lanka was a British colony, and the University of Ceylon was established under the leadership of Ivor Jennings who came from Cambridge University”. Contribution to the society in a tangible way was started in the early 1950s with recommendations to establish governmental institutions such as the Departments of Social Services, Probation and Child Care and Rural Development and also by introducing Sociology as a subject for the civil service examination. The author’s narrative on the first generation of sociologists produced through the Sri Lankan university system in the 50s and 60s provides the reader with a clear picture of how strong the program was at the time, and it paints a vivid picture of the type of intellectual discussions and debates that may have taken place at the time. The country has run out of its fortune in the seventies and eighties due to political unrest and a lack of understanding of how important education is for the development of a country, resulting in an exodus of the first generation of Sri Lankan sociologists, perhaps among intellectuals from other disciplines too. Suggestions made by the author for improving Sociology education within the university system in the country start from changing recruitment methods of academics to delivery methods, funding for research, introducing the subject in other areas of studies to educating the public in the process of achieving social harmony are food for thought not only for educators but also for policymakers and investors.

Stepping on to Chapter 8, ‘Political Science and Public Policy: Cultivating the Critical Spirit,’ the reader can experience the intimate connection of the discipline with Sociology, Economics and Geography. Professors Navaratne Bandara and Jayadeva Uyangoda, both veteran political scientists not only in the academic arena but also as real-life political activists, display the wealth of experience they have had both on and off the academic discourse take the reader through a fascinating journey in this chapter. It is interesting to notice here again that the British tradition of the political economy focused

on interrelationships between the government and economic policy was highlighted through political science education. Not only do they mention the 1971 insurgency, ethnic conflict and internal war during the 80s, the politicization of academic and student communities, and the university administrations as significant factors influencing the intellectual life in all Sri Lankan universities since the early 1970s. The authors provide a detailed narrative about the evolution of the discipline within the Sri Lankan university system over the last one hundred years with noteworthy contributions by the pioneers in the field. Among many other contributions described in the chapter, what stands out the most are the books on all different aspects of the Sri Lankan political landscape by Professor A. J. Wilson, who has also been an advisor to President J. R. Jayewardene in drafting the constitution in 1978. Though the system has produced numerous world-class academics who have contributed significantly to the field of Political Science education, the chapter opens the possibility for a reader to wonder why the system has not been able to produce a single sensible politician who could have accelerated the development of the country with the knowledge gathered through the program over all these years.

Management Studies

Continuation to Chapter 9, “Management Studies (MS): Disciplinary History in Sri Lanka” takes the reader through the evolutionary process of the discipline, which has become popular among undergraduate and postgraduate students mainly due to the applicability of knowledge and employability in today's global economy.

The 21st century brought demands for a new workplace - one in which everyone must adapt to a rapidly changing society with constantly shifting expectations and opportunities. Management Studies refers to the education of theories, policies, practices, systems, methods, and techniques of managing organizations in today's high-performance work settings. MS, or Management Education (ME), is a popular field that focuses on imparting knowledge, skills and attitudes of the art and science of managing organizations successfully. In addition, management scholars Charles O'Reilly and Jeffrey Pfeffer concluded that those companies achieve success because they are better than their competitors at getting extraordinary results from the people working for them. Hence, the MS is considered indispensable, especially in the competitive world where the survival of organizations depends on how well they perform. The theories and strategies taught and learned through ME are essential in the business and entrepreneurial worlds and in managing individual household economies. The strength the programs have achieved through the evolutionary process over the last hundred years can be gauged by the achievements of the graduates who ended up being highly successful entrepreneurs and businessmen contributing to the economic development of the country.

Developing Disciplines

The authors did not go into a detailed review of the disciplines that are still in the initial stages of development within the system, such as Archaeology (Chapter 6), Demography

(Chapter 12) and International Relations (Chapter 13). However, since media and communication influence most human behaviour, the review would not be complete if a few remarks about Chapter 10, “Communication and Media: Imperative Element of Human Interactions”, were not made.

The recognition of McLuhan about the evolution of communication and its crucial role in human development (Kirillova, 2016) is highlighted in the chapter so that even a non-professional can understand easily. By using discourse analysis, the authors have successfully explored the efforts concerning education administration and diversity as well as the topic. The innovative methods seem to have allowed the authors to disclose how university policies promote diversity. Communication, history, mass media, career orientation, and university education communication have been identified in the paper as crucial elements. However, the author seems to have given excessive attention to the historical data on the subject of communication. Although such information may be helpful to an outsider or a novice, an undergraduate may already be aware of the long and descriptive content. However, the details of the courses available and their subjects were described for an outsider to easily grasp the importance of the topic.

The chapter also described the technologies that contributed to the transformation of the world into a global village (Paolo, 2012). The evolution of modern communication, since the first radio transmission under the name Radio Ceylon, is described analytically by the authors. The establishment of the Communication and Media Research Unit (CSMR) and the Communication Research Unit (CRU) has helped expand the academic field of communication.

Considering the overall content provided in the chapter, the reader would see that the authors have amply explained the past and future trends in communication. The contribution to society and the country as a whole by the graduates who enter the employment market will be enhanced by the advancements achieved by the universities. Although the prominence and importance were not studied adequately, the recognition of communication as a career-oriented pathway will provide immense opportunities to youth.

No amount of education in any of these disciplines will matter if the law & order of the country is not maintained correctly. Improving the knowledge of the legal framework and criminal justice system, including investigative and crime solving, is essential to law enforcement. The process of teaching and learning Criminology and the criminal justice system becomes essential within that framework. Criminology and Criminal Justice have distinct differences, although the two subjects are interrelated. While criminology predominantly focuses on the psychological and sociological behaviour of criminals, criminal justice is the operational aspect of law enforcement where legal procedures of the system are applied. The graduates of criminal justice programs often pursue careers

in law enforcement, while criminologists become investigators or analysts within the system.

The key factor discussed in Chapter 11, 'Criminology and Criminal Justice: A separate Discipline' is the revelation that the two subjects are still at the primary level in the Sri Lankan university system. According to the authors, Sir John Kotelawala Defense University (KDU) has established a faculty for criminal justice. Though the subject is followed and studied in graduate programs infrequently, the faculty will produce much-needed professionals for society.

The reader would appreciate the detailed description of the unique nature of this field of study and the explanation of 'how' and 'why' many professional career opportunities are available for graduates. Even in the international arena, many opportunities are open due to the rarity of criminology and criminal justice graduates. In particular, those specialising in criminology are immensely useful in making new laws, studying and recommending psychological treatments, and making recommendations on social well-being. Both subjects, when learned systematically, help prevent crimes in any country.

The establishment of the faculty of criminology at KDU is of national interest. The time is also suitable for the other state universities in Sri Lanka to follow the same pathway and initiate programs on the subject.

CONCLUSIONS

The book's concluding remarks mention: "Re-establishing the connection between Social Science and social problems should be a high priority for all of us -- social scientists and citizens alike". The social problems (deepening poverty, deepening inequalities of wealth, income, and quality of life, violence against individuals and groups, oppression of women and girls, climate change, resource exhaustion, environment degradation, persistent authoritarian regimes, imperfect democracies, corruption, inadequate systemic response to disaster etc.) we face are crucially important, they are intractable, and they are often trending in the wrong direction. The solutions for such problems will require the artful design of new institutions and ways of coordinating social behaviour." It shows that the country's education system has a greater responsibility in addressing these issues. Education, though it is considered a discipline under the umbrella of Social Sciences, will have to take a lead role in guiding all the disciplines in the right direction, starting from primary and secondary levels to postgraduate research and knowledge production and raising the level of awareness of the society in general.

Therefore, it seemed to be a better fit to include the review comments about Chapter 5, "Education: Professionalization for the new era", within the concluding remarks of this review. At the beginning of the chapter, the Author reminds the reader about the importance of the multidisciplinary approach to the teaching/learning process. Though the chapter provides a detailed description of the evolutionary process of the Faculties of

Education and the prominent figures who were involved with establishing those faculties and various degree programs, it lacks information about the changes in the Education Philosophy of the country. Since the volume is about "One Hundred Years of Social Science Education in Sri Lankan Universities", the reader would have benefitted more from the information about how some of the leading universities around the world have catered to the changing socio-economic-political factors through appropriate adjustments in their educational programs, if there was an attempt to discuss what Sri Lankan universities have achieved over the last hundred years in comparison to other universities around the world. The narrow-mindedness of the educationists and the policymakers in the country is highlighted by the examples such as the failed attempts of the Universities of Jaffna and Colombo in establishing combined degree programs of Science/Education mainly due to the inability of the academics and administrators to agree on the nomenclature, whether to call it a B.Sc. or a B.Ed. Distribution of the workload among the lecturers and timetabling issues are also mentioned as barriers to cross-disciplinary collaboration in the field of Education. Inability to get much-needed collaborations off the ground due to petty-minded reasons such as the name of the degree or the timetabling and workload issues, while the rest of the world is moving towards cross-disciplinary teaching/learning and research, the Author of the chapter provides, perhaps unintentionally, a good opportunity for the reader to think how much of the responsibility for those failures would fall back on the very same Education Faculties for creating educators with incompetence and such selfish behaviour through the education system of the country.

In conclusion, the initiative by the UGC and the efforts of producing '*Beyond Boundaries: One Hundred Years of Humanities and Social Sciences in Sri Lankan Universities; Volume II: Social Sciences*' could be appreciated by the reader mainly since it provides important information about the evolution of these disciplines over the last one-hundred-years. It certainly would help the reader to understand why the country is where it is today concerning Social Science education.

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