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REFLECTIONS ON UNIVERSITY EDUCATION

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What is the aim of obtaining an education at university level? This is a matter about which we must draw special attention. The reply to this question has to be given not paying regard to world conditions which existed about a hundred years ago. The need for university education at that time was to make oneself competent to undertake research for the advancement of the social conditions of the world. The concepts which were in vogue at that time are not valid at the present day. In a country like ours where the economic conditions of the people are of an extremely low standard, it is not possible for us to expect such high standards of living and concepts to hold ground.

Even then, it is not possible for us to discard the former concepts all together. It is important that we make use of them in conformity with modern conditions of living. Our society as it exists today is not what it was a hundred years ago. The conditions that were in existence at that time have undergone changes in a manner that is extremely difficult to comprehend. Even the educational programmes of our country have got subjected to hundred percent changes. The University College which was established in 1921 was affiliated to the University of London and examinations were held in this country for students who were taught in the University College. For quite a long period of time the principal of that college was prof. R.Marrs. Many of those who were educated there at that time are not among the living today. Within a few years after the establishment of this college, there were resolutions moved in the Legislative and State Councils that an independent university should be established in this country with powers to confer its own degrees. Once the motions were accepted it was resolved that a residential university be brought into being located in Peradeniya. Until the buildings came up, the newly formed university continued to carry on teaching activities in the buildings in Thurstan Road. The newly appointed Vice-chancellor was Dr. W. Ivor Jennings who assumed duties in 1941. Thereafter the university began to confer its own degrees but there were students who appeared for London University examinations as external students.

There was only one university established in 1941 but nowadays more universities numbering about 17 have come into being. It is a matter

for serious consideration as to what are the sources of employability for the young men and women who are passing out of the universities. From news items appearing in the daily papers it is to be gathered that graduate unemployment is becoming a serious problem. It has to be borne in mind that the young girls and boys passing out of our schools and universities should be an asset to our economic upliftment. Those who are responsible for formulating our educational policies should bear in mind a very important factor. That is that our economy which still has its roots in a colonial fame should gradually be converted into one which is of importance nationally, socially and culturally and contributive to the prosperity of the nation.

The traditional concepts of university education were based on the development of mental faculties in the first place. Secondly there was the need to make use of such manpower for the nation's economic prosperity. The development of mental faculties should arise from the need for the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake. These traditional concepts should be carefully weighed in the context of problems of the present day. They should then be adjusted, in my opinion, be related to each other as far as is conveniently possible. It is very important subjects of practical value. Acqisition of knowledge is a matter that should be pursued with devotion. It may be emphasised that university teachers should pave the way to exchange among themselves the treasures of knowledge.

I would like to emphasise on certain matters that an undergraduate while going through his courses of study should keep in mind for his betterment. He should obtain a specialised knowledge of the subject that he intends to pursue. The certificate that he receives at the end of his university career has to be a good witness of the kind of training in the particular is rendered useless or valueless. It also means that the education that he has undergone at university level was extremely unsatisfactory and non-productive in bringing out a useful citizen. Such a person will be regarded as one unwanted by the society and his country. A situation as such is undoubtedly a blemish to the university from which he obtained his degree.

Next- Once when a person has completed his degree course and gets out into the world, he should be able to regard the world of which he is a member, as qualified scientists do when they are in a laboratory. He should be able to handle fearlessly the problems he is faced with just as a scientist does with an analytical mind. He should be able to separate fact from fiction and arrive at decisions for the wellbeing of his employers, himself and the persons connected with the problem. A critical mind and the ability to evaluate successfully the root causes of the problems in hand are essential pre-requisites. There should also be a craving for furtherance of academic learning. A university graduate should be armed with all the

aforesaid pre-requisites when he is out in the world to cater to the needs of the nation at large. The skills acquired at the university should not be confined necessarily to one's field of study. The important problems facing the society at large should be identified skilfully and the remedial measures introduced unfailingly. University graduates are the future leaders of our country.

Finally-Once a person has acquired knowledge, it is important that he should develop a condescending personality. Why? He should realise that he has come to be in possession of only a very minor portion of an endless sphere of knowledge. As a result of such condescension, he should automatically be craving to be a pursuer of further knowledge. If he becomes desirous of adding to what he has already acquired, such pursuits will be always helpful to his advancement. Then his merits will get augmented and confer upon him abilities to assume leadership as and when occasion demands. He will also be in a position to be indifferent in times of victory and show an honest smiling face in accepting defeat. Active participation in social undertakings and dedicated service for the welfare and upliftment of the society in which he lives are some of the noble human qualities which are to be regarded as commendable and which are to be expected of graduates assuming responsible positions in society. It is necessary that such persons should be holders of high moral values. Honesty and dedication to work are very rare qualities to be noticed in present day society but it is the responsibility of a person who has completed his education at university level to build up an exemplary character as a model.

From very early times up to the present day there has always been an enthusiasm in our society for furtherance of knowledge and show a respectful attitude to persons of learning. These are rare social characteristics which have come down by tradition and about which we should be proud of. These are distinctive features which have been kept alive for posterity. Acquisition of knowledge not only means aggregation of facts and keeping them in mind. Whatever facts which come into one's knowledge have to be examined thoroughly and there by one should become a good examiner having a critical mind. Thereby our graduates can be good leaders as occasions demand their participation.

It is not possible to release these ideals merely from attendance at lectures in classes or passing year end examinations. Undergraduates should strive to attain high moral standards while being students as that is what is expected of them as useful citizens of the future. Participation in sports activities, attendance at plays and cinemas, student meetings and listening to talks delivered by distinguished visitors on invitation. These are some of the numerous methods by which the general out look of an undergraduate can be broadened.

when a person has obtained a degree from a university and passed out, it is generally accepted that he is an intellectual. It should be the ambition of every graduate to see to the continuance of such a concept. In this connection it is worthwhile bearing in mind the dictum "When facts have been studied and forgotten what remains in the mind is culture".

It is worthwhile inquiring whether our universities provide ample scope and opportunities for the successful execution of the norms stated above. Do most undergraduates confine themselves to classrooms and prepare for examinations or do they get themselves engaged in out side activities as well? Our humble opinion is that in older as well in younger universities, an education which broadens the out look of students to give them an all-round knowledge of the basic needs of the society, is yet an unrealised dream. An environment to bring about such a situation has not come into being. Even the older universities are far removed form converting them to be such ideal institutions.

The reasons for the existence of such an unfortunate situation may be briefly stated. During school days it became necessary to prepare for examinations and spend much money to bring about good results. In the universities more emphasis was given to terminal and annual examinations. Parents became busy in attempting to admit young children to super grade schools having future employment prospects in view. Students form remote areas where facilities were less happen to travel to universities to attend lectures, thus involving much expense and time. Even within the universities facilities for accommodation being limited, a large percentage of students had to get boardered out side. These are some of the reasons that have been found out to be the major causes of student unrest. Some of the reasons given above are quite valid and cannot be disregarded and every effort should be made to overcome these deficiencies.

Of course there are a few social obsoletes which form a barrier to overcome the objectives mentioned. We must accept that there are economic barriers for their successful accomplishment and that they are being always put forward as major short comings. It may be difficult to over come economic barriers as well as non-availability of qualified teachers. But we must act with determination to overcome these difficulties to the best of our ability. It is true that Sri Lanka is one of the poorest countries in the world and that overcoming these shortcomings is no easy task for which many sacrifices have to be made.

Another point worthy of our notice is that we have to accept that these problems are mostly our own creations. They can be divided into two categories namely social and cultural. University teachers, administrative machinery and the student bodies are all responsible for this unfortunate state of affairs. Noble objectives to be accomplished by a university are

undoubtedly their responsibility but these appear to go unnoticed. There is obviously no co-operative effort for the accomplishment of these lofty objectives. The moulding of the character of the future generation depends mostly on those university members of the present day who should act with diligence to safeguard the honour of the institution. University teachers should realise that their task is not only the teaching aspect but also involvement in researches for the further advancement of their fields of study. Many of us fail to realise that we can learn much from students. We have to encourage them to ask questions and also make them criticise what we teach them. Thereby the teacher learns and so does the student. There is another point worthy of notice. Our local traditions are such that we get inclined to accept that the teacher is an all-knowing person. It is necessary to get rid of that traditional concept even at this late stage. According to this age-old concept whatever is taught by the teacher has to be accepted by the student without examination or fuss. According to this long standing concept, there is no room for critical assessment. In this 21st century it is time that we refuse to follow these traditional ways of thinking. These concepts were held valid in the age-old ways of Indian teaching which are now almost outdated and which may now be considered as serious drawbacks to modern methods of learning and teaching. If this antiquated method is allowed to survive, it leaves no room for an intelligent student to sort out fact from fiction. A university education has to be completely different from these traditional methods. Respect due to teachers is admirable and praiseworthy when it is extended in a meaningful way but it is contemptible otherwise.

When the university college was established in Colombo as an affiliated institute of the University of London, there were some teachers at that time who were devoted to pursuits of research and who made way to examine problems critically. One such teacher was Prof. R. Marrs who worked as the principal of that institution. On a certain occasion, he read and carefully examined a tutorial written by a certain student. He remarked, "I have read over and over again several times the tutorial submitted by you. I disagree with almost every conclusion made by you but in order to encourage your critical examining powers, I award you one hundred percent marks". At the end of his university career he sat the final examination and passed out with First Class Honours.

The first Professor of English at the University of Ceylon, E.F.C. Ludowyke wrote a book entitled "Understanding Shakespeare" and got it published by the University of Cambridge. In the dedicatory note was the following statement. "I spent quite a long period of time in attempting to understand Shakespeare's works. For nearly 25 years I taught them to undergraduates of the University of Ceylon. On numerous occasions my students continued to ask me questions about Shakespeare's writings

which enabled me to awaken my critical understanding of Shakespeare more fully. Therefore in order to be grateful to these students I dedicate this book to them as a token of goodwill".

In addition to these events, it is necessary to mention the steps taken by the academic staff of the University of Ceylon for the advancement of research, literary activities and particularly drama. Sri Lanka achieved independence in 1948. Up to that time and a little longer, there were English medium schools where dramatic activities were performed in the English medium. These were attended to by the English educated middle class audience. Plays were produced annually by the undergraduates of the university (pre 1942) under the direction of Prof. E.F.C. Ludowyke. These plays were based on the works by playwrights such as Moliere, Bernard Shaw and Shakespeare. After the opening of Peradeniva campus. Prof. E.R. Sarachchandra became anxious to train students of the Faculty of Oriental Studies to produce plays using the Sinhala language as the medium. There were young students who underwent courses of study at the Shantiniketan in India and who were much influenced by the freedom struggle of the Indian people. They came to Sri Lanka and took steps to organise cultural activities on a national scale. This trend of events which had its beginnings in the forties, found expression in Pabavati produced by E.R. Sarachchandra in 1952. Sarachchandra continued to do researches in rural dramatic activities and produced "Folk Drama of Ceylon" as a result of these researches. The play Pabavati was based on the tale named "Kusa Jatakaya" which is a well known story among the Sinhala people. However the production of this play was influenced to a great extent on the western dramatic tradition and as a result it was subject to much criticism from certain quarters.

At the time when Sri Lanka was granted independence, there was speculation among academicians that this country is a cultural desert. It may be that there is some truth in these reflections but some of our done- to name but a few, G. P. Malalasekera and E.R. Sarachchandra wished to rectify these short comings. Saratchandra took steps to produce more plays such as Maname, Kadavalalu, Pemato Jayati Soko, Hastikanta Mantare, Elova Gihin Melova Ava etc,' training his students in dramatic activities.

Maname can be regarded undoubtedly as the most successful play so far brought into the stage. Sarachchandra entered the field of dramatic activity for the first time in 1943 by bringing into the stage Mudalalige Peraliya which was written on a play by French Playwright Moliere. The experience gained there by made him do more research work into the field in order to explore the possibility of bringing about a dramatic style to suit the cultural traditions of Sri Lankan theatre. He went into almost every nook and corner of Sri Lanka, undergoing many unforeseen

difficulties, some time even foregoing his meals, in researching about the folk plays of the Sinhala people. In addition to all these researches he travelled abroad to study the folk plays of various people. The result of all those exertions was the production of **Maname** which was staged in November 1956. I have stayed a little away from my purpose and made mention about the Sinhala theatre because I wanted to emphasise that our university teachers have been conscious and have made successful attempts to give Sinhala cultural traditions a new outlook in answer to the numerous viewpoints publicised by foreign academics.

It is also necessary to state that our university teachers have made enough contributions to the advancement of knowledge in respect of language and literature, history, archaeology and numerous fields in science. In this connection it is worthy of mention that our university students too have made their contributions in these fields. we must unhesitatingly admit that when we peruse the vast literature produced by our university population in Sinhala, Tamil, English and Hindi languages in connection with almost all subjects taught in our halls of learning-that is to say-novels, short stories, poetry, dramatic compositions, grammers, encyclopaedias, dictionaries, scientific research publications connected with botany, chemistry, physics, zoology, biology, medicine, engineering, mathematics etc. we can certainly be proud of our men and women, both young and old who have passed away or are still living. In this connection the names of such distinguished academics like Prof. S. Paranavitane and Prof. GP. Malalasekara should be respectfully mentioned.

It is with much pain of mind that I am compelled to make some remarks about the so-called rags which have caused headaches to the universities, the general public and the police. It had its origins in the British universities on occasions when the senior students organised themselves to come into contactact with the incoming first year freshers. It was harmless at first but in course of time it developed into in human proportions. To begin with, first year students were made to stand on tables in their nude form and answer questions put to them. When the question of ragging came up in Sri Lanka Parliment in the early fifties, Mr. A. Amirthalingam (M.P) stood up to say that when he entered the university as a first year student, the seniors dared not come near him because they were frightened to see him in the nude.

This despicable trend of events spread out to the schools in the towns as well as into the rural areas. It has come to our knowledge that those who got admitted to universities in U.K. such as Oxford and Cambridge in the early days of British rule also had to undergo this loathsome habit which in course of time took turns into extremely dangerous practices in our country. One of the most pathetic events was

that of a young girl jumping down from a two storeyed building as she could not undergo the atrocities committed in the course of the rag. It has been reported that some parents who accompanied their children on the first days of admission were also humiliated and compelled to undergo in human treatment. As the situation assumed serious proportions, there occurred disputes, estrangements, quarrels and unrest among students. On certain occasions the police having been called in, had to intervene along with teachers. Unfortunately they too had to face unpleasant incidents. It is on record that some senior students who pass out of the universities return to their campuses at the time when freshmen are admitted in order to participate in this deplorable habit. I have made it a point to make mention of this situation because I think that this is a problem which has assumed a serious character. Persons belonging to whatever social strata or religion should abhor these practices and keep away even from encouragement.

From being educated at a university, it is a requirement that such a graduate should contribute to the prosperity of his country especially with regard to social, economic and cultural aspects. Scientists, Doctors, Engineers, Teachers, Artists, Linguists, Politicians have all got to emerge from these high seats of learning. It is by formulating an educational policy in accordance with the needs of the country that it becomes possible to get specialists trained to build up the wealth of the nation. We should be getting students from overseas to follow graduate or postgraduate courses. I am afraid we are not so fortunate to make such exclamations honestly and in accordance with our conscience. The future of our country depends on the graduates passing out of our seats of learning - because they are the people who can create a prosperous and peace-loving nation.

Up to about the year 1975, it was the aim of our universities to turn out graduates in science, arts, commerce, engineering and medicine. Since then it appears that these aims have got diversified to include researches in indigenous medicine, technology, fisheries, oceanography, defence, music, religions and philosophy. Separate institutes devoted to the pursuit of researches in these fields have come into being. When university education gets diversified in so important aspects, it is a very healthy and encouraging achievement. Even then we must remember that we are living in the 21st century and we ought to aspire for a speedier approach to economic progress. Are we in a position to be satisfied with the amount of progress we have made?

In course of time, unemployment among graduates rose sky high and as a consequence, administration of universities, the syllabuses and courses of studies came to be heavily criticised. Mr. I.M.R.A. Iriyagolla, a minister of education at one time attempted to make changes in this respect but on account of the various political influences prevailing at the time, his attempts met with little success.

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As the economic conditions of our country are undergoing rapid changes it is of the utmost importance to maintain high standards of quality in the graduates passing out of the universities. There are about 17 universities in our country at the present day but it is with regret that we have to state that the quality of the academics engaged in teaching is of a low level

In developed countries, when financial estimates for the maintenance of universities come under consideration, the important factor taken up at first is the quality of research produced for development factor taken up at first is the quality of research produced for development activities. Therefore in such countries the university teachers have to engage themselves in research projects and actively participate in the schemes connected with the increase in national wealth. It is not possible for them to take their pay packets and remain inactive. Their terms and conditions of service are reviewed from time to time and extensions are given only after certain assessments being made. It is not so much the quality of teaching that comes up for review. Evidence with regard to the quality and quantity of research has to be produced by way of publications if a further extension is to be given. Some teachers of these developed countries fail to get their services extended because of this reason. It thus becomes obvious that those who are lazy have little or no chance of remaining as teachers for long.

It is necessary at this moment to make some remarks about the political influences that are known to be at work in the moulding of the character of the university student. We are aware that numerous political parties in this country and the followers there of are keen to get as many university students as possible to become members of their organisation. As a result there have been various unpleasant incidents among student bodies which have ended up in physical injuries to several individuals. A student should join a political party after a careful study of its motives and programmes of work but in the case of our students this is unfortunately not the case. Influence of senior students or of those who have since left and returned to do ragging is the main reason for getting caught into groups which identify themselves by various names. The freshmen with an incomplete or little knowledge of political science are harassed and forced to join such parties. Thus they get involved in situations out of which they find it difficult to disengage. I think it is appropriate to make these remarks at a convocation of this university of which I was associated with as a staff member for over 40 years. I recall to mind an instance where an undergraduate came before Sir Ivor Jennings, the first vice-chancellor of the University of Ceylon in the early fifties. The

Vice-chancellor was a Queen's Counsel, a Doctor of Laws and a Professor of Constitutional Law. He asked the student as to which political party he belonged. The answer was that he was a member of a prominent Marxist party at the time. Sir lovor Jennings examined him more closely and concluded that he was no Marxist at all but that his political beliefs were quite in conformity with Gladstonian Liberalism. This goes to show that students have not got much knowledge of the activities in which they are engaged in.

The facilities that are available for students in our universities cannot be said to be quite satisfactory. It appears that class rooms, science laboratories and residential quarters are inadequately furnished in the newly established Universities. There has not yet been any comprehensive planning to give the students an education which can be of use to themselves as well as to the country at large. It is with regret that we notice that graduates passing out of our universities have sought employment opportunities in foreign countries and eventually have left our shores. It is indeed a great loss to Sri Lanka. Many persons have gone for postgraduate work abroad and have not returned. What can be the reason for this situation? When one leaves and goes away to a more developed country. they find a better standard of living, more employment opportunities, better schools and universities to get admission for their children etc. These are the reasons which may be adduced in this regard. There may be reasons other than those mentioned above. It is the responsibility of our politicians to inquire into these short comings and take remedial measures.

Some criticisms have been levelled in recent times into the working of recently established universities. There is no doubt that it is necessary to afford opportunities for young men and women living in remote regions to get an education at university level. But it is equally important to consider the difficulties in obtaining financial support, various drawbacks in the successful completion of courses of study, the steps to be taken to organise faculties in order to minimise difficulties, preparation of courses of study which will cater to the employability of graduates passing out, residential facilities for students etc. These are matters for which immediate attention is necessary.

There is one point which should not escape our notice. When we compare the numbers of students attending our universities with those of universities in other countries of the world, it becomes apparent that a fairly large gap is visible. We must remember that ninety percent of our adult population is literate. If so is it possible for us to be satisfied that the numbers seeking admission to our universities are comparatively equal? When new courses of study are planned it is important that the heads of departments should keep in mind of the availability of qualified staff to undertake teaching.

There are some points worthy of the attention of the young graduates who are passing out today. Having received your education at the university, are you entering the world of the adult population with self confidence and courage? Are you at the employment bureau with the necessary qualifications? Was the education that you received at the university of any benefit to you? Do you have the courage to face the numerous trials and tribulations which await your arrival in the outside world? Are you sufficiently courageous at times of trial to accept defeat with a smiling face? In the event of being victorious is it possible for you to adopt in indifferent attitude?

It is to your advantage to keep in mind the above questions and have the necessary answers ready for your own future guidance. I am most anxious to repeat that the first and foremost aim of education at university level is to produce young people who can be of service to the country. The answers to the questions asked above depend on the type of education that the university has given to the student body. Lessons taught in classes and the academic environment within the university should bring about the maturity of a student to face the burning questions of the out side world. Our university should produce a young and brave generation that can be of service to our country and to the nation at large and about whom we can be proud of.

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වහා වාර්ය නන්දයෝන මුදියන්යේ

විශ්වවිදහාල අධාාපනයක් ලබා ගැනීමේ පරමාර්ථය කුමක් ද යනු අප විසින් අවශායෙන් සලකා බැලිය යුතු කරුණකි. මේ සඳහා පිළිතුරු දිය යුත්තේ මීට අවුරුදු සියයකට පමණ පෙර ලෝකයේ පැවති සමාජ තත්ත්වය අනුව නො වෙයි. අධාාපන තත්ත්වය උසස් කර ගනු ලබන්නේ පර්යේෂණ කරා සිත් යොමු කර ගැනීම ආදී උත්තරීතර අපේඎවන් සාඎත් කර ගැනීම සඳහා බව එකල පැවති මතයයි. අඛීතයේ පැවති එබඳු ආකල්ප නූතන ලෝකයේ සමාජ තත්ත්වයන් හා නොගැළපේ. වැඩි වශයෙන් දූගී ජනතාවක් වාස භූමිය කර ගත් ලංකාව වැනි රටක එබඳු තත්ත්වයක් බලාපොරොත්තු විය නොහැක.

එසේ වුවත් එම ආකල්ප සම්පූර්ණයෙන් ඉවත ලා සිටීම ද යෝගා නො වේ. ඒවා කාලානුරූප ව වර්තමාන සමාජ තත්ත්වයන්ට අනුව ගළපා ගැනීම අවශායෙන් සිදු කළ යුත්තකි. අපේ සමාජය මෙකල පවත්තේ මීට අවුරුදු සියයකට පූර්වයෙන් පැවති ආකාරයෙන් නොවන බව අප කවුරුත් දන්නා කරුණකි. එදා පැවති සමාජිය හා ආර්ථික ජීවන රටාව බලවත් වෙනස්කම්වලට භාජනය වී ඇති බැවින් පාඨශාලීය සැලසුම් වුව ද සියයට සියයක් ම වෙනස්කම්වලින් යුතුව පරිණාමය වී ඇත. ලන්ඩන් විශ්වවිදු හාලයට සම්බන්ධ කර වෂී 1921 දී පමණ ලංකාවේ පිහිටුවනු ලැබුවේ ලන්ඩන් විශ්වවිදහාලයට අනුබද්ධ කළ ආයතනයකි. එමගින් එහි විභාග සඳහා ශිෂායන් ගණනාවක් පහුණ කරවන ලදි. එම ආයතනයේ පධානියා වශයෙන් බොහෝ කාලයක් සේවය කළේ මහාචාර්ය ආර්. මාර්ස් මහතාය. ඒ කාලයේ අධාාපනය ලැබූ ශිෂායන්ගෙන් වැඩි දෙනා අද ජීවතුන් අතර සිටී ද යනු සැක සහිතය. ලන්ඩන් විභාගවලට ශිෂායන් පුහුණු කරවීම නවත්වා, ස්වාධීන විශ්වවිදාහලයක් පිහිටුවිය යුතු යයි එකල පැවති වාවස්ථාදායක හා රාජාමන්තුණ සභා ආදියේ දී යෝජනා ඉදිරිපත් වී අතුමත වයෙන් 1942 දී පමණ සර් අයිවර් ජෙනිංග්ස් මහතා උපකලපති වශයෙන් පත් කරනු ලැබ ලංකා විශ්වවිදාහලය ආරම්භ කරනු ලැබීය. ඒ හේතුවෙන් ලන්ඩන් විභාගවලට ශිෂායන් ඉදිරිපත් වීම තරමක් දුරට අඩු වූ නමුත් පුද්ගලික අපේඎකයන් වශයෙන් එම විභාගවලට බාහිර ව පෙනී සිටීම නොකඩවා සිදු විය.

1942 දී පිහිටුවනු ලැබුවේ එක ම විශ්වවිදාහලයක් වුව ද අද එබඳු ආයතන 17ක් ඇති බව වාර්තාගත ව ඇත. මේවායින් උපාධි ලබන