

**Keynote address delivered by Mr. Anand Panyarachun  
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“Higher Education for All”  
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Higher Education and an Enterprising Society  
Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure and an honour for me to have been invited by the organizers of the 1995 Annual ASAIHL Seminar to deliver an address at this distinguished gathering.

The theme of this Seminar, that is, Higher Education for All, is of particular interest to me. Although I am not an educationalist by training or by profession, yet on several occasions I have professed my personal interest and concern in education in its broader connotation. Since education enters the life of everyone of us, we should pool our ideas and efforts to ensure its quality and relevance.

When we speak about Higher Education for All, the term “for all” appears to focus on the quantitative aspect – whether it be the rather long-term prospect of ensuring that every person receives higher education, or whether it be the more feasible prospect of making higher education accessible to all by providing equal opportunities to receive high education, through various modes of delivery and over various flexible spans of time. The factors contributing to achieving these aims are amply covered by the topical papers to be presented and discussed in this Seminar in the next few days. I have therefore opted to focus the attention of this audience on two questions which have been of great concern to me, and these are: firstly, what kind of higher education should be accessible to all who venture into higher education? And secondly, what kind of higher education for what kind of society? I would like to share with you my own thoughts and concerns, hoping that through our co-operative endeavour we will arrive at some practical strategies for the benefit of our future generations. It is never too early to debate and act on educational reform and renewal, since in education, the future is now. There is no end to the need for reform in education, since to-day’s future will most likely not be tomorrow’s.

The last decades have witnessed an astonishing growth and reform in higher education. Yet higher education is facing a crisis both in terms of quantity and quality. The current national and international efforts to focus world attention on Basic Education for All means that eventually there will be more students wishing to go on to secondary education, and sooner or later the pressure will be on higher education. According to UNESCO’s global

projections, the growth of the number of students in higher education will accelerate – from 65 million in 1991 to 79 million in the year 2000, 97 million in 2015 and 100 million in 2025. The projected enrolment in higher education in the developing countries also shows a strong increase – from 30 million in 1991

to 40 million in the year 2000, 50 million in 2015 and 54 million by 2025. To cope with this quantitative aspect, let alone quality and relevance, the higher education system itself must be innovative in its search for strategies and actions with an eye on both the near and distant future in which the young intellectuals will live a meaningful life.

Traditionally, education has been viewed in the context of social, economic and cultural development of a nation. However, in recent times, with the aspiration towards a “learning society”, education is in itself a contribution to the development of a society. Thus, independent of the earlier definition, opportunities have to be provided to individuals to extend their learning, if necessary, purely in terms of their own personal interests.

Higher education, whether it be confined to a selected few, or whether it be for all, should be given and received with a definite purpose, which entails careful planning in setting goals and objectives. Generally speaking, much educational planning has not given adequate weightage to educational goals, or the set goals are not taken into full account in evaluating the process that produces the products of higher education, or in evaluating the products of higher education. The planning also frequently appears to focus mainly on projecting the present trends into the future time-frame, and tends to give more attention to inadequacies and shortfalls of the past, rather than exploring the needs of the future. In other words, it is current crisis-oriented, or focused on finishing the unfinished tasks. In recent years, some efforts have been made to involve non-educationalists in forecasting future requirements and future goals and aims. The translation of goals into strategies and contents is also a most vital undertaking.

Like many countries in the region, Thailand, too, has defined its goals for the education system, the most recent being the Royal Command Announcement of 10 June 1992. In this Announcement, it is stated that the goals of education emphasize balanced and harmonious development in the individual in four aspects, namely, wisdom, spiritual development, physical development, and social development.

Taking two of these goals as examples, under “Wisdom”, the description states:

“WISDOM. An educated person should attain wisdom: the ability to understand causality; to differentiate between virtue and vice, right and wrong, and good and malicious deeds on the basis of truth, to intelligently solve problems; to recognize and understand rapid and various changes; to be creative and possess an inquiring mind to keep up with technological

progress; to appreciate Thai wisdom and culture; and to wisely choose modern knowledge and exogenous culture for adoption by Thai society”. And under “Social Development”, the description states: “SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT. An educated person should possess proper social behaviours at work and in the family, organizations and society; to extend help unselfishly; to possess

communication skills and ability; to use proper Thai as well as foreign languages for communication purposes; to preserve the Thai national identity and culture; to recognize and observe one's own and others' rights and freedom under the democratic form of government with the King as Head of State; to be able to utilize and conserve natural resources and to create a proper environment; and to contribute towards enhancing an appropriate role of the nation in the world community".

Since these are national goals, it is pertinent to ask: in what way are these being manifested in higher education so that the young intellectuals of the nation may be helped to develop them? In what way are the various learning areas and faculties in higher education, the Departments of Chemistry or Mathematics, or History or Languages, or Engineering or Medicine, and indeed every one of them, assisting in helping the young intellectuals to develop in respect of such goals? If little conscious effort has been focused on this issue to date, should it not become a priority concern in designing learning strategies and sequences in all areas of higher education?

A related question is whether higher education institutions themselves should manifest in their "way of life" these same goals, not only because these goals are nationally important, but also to create an atmosphere and an environment in which the goals are practised in real life.

To take one goal, social development; the extension services of the Faculties of Agriculture in many countries reach out, with their academic and developmental resources, to the masses of the nation. What would corresponding extension services be for the Faculties of Law and Humanities, or Fine Arts? Is this an important dimension in higher education?

Educational reform and renewal, at any level, must be conceived in the perspectives of multi-dimensional, multi-variable and long-term developments in society. Education, and more so higher education, should not merely respond to society's needs; it should also be an effective change agent in re-shaping the present, generating new possibilities, and strengthening capacities to make choices as to what kind of "preferred" future we want, out of a number of possible futures.

In order to form an idea of the kind of society that would likely to be equipped to face the challenges of the future, I venture to predict a future global scenario, in full realization that predictions, and more so predictions of human activities, can never be absolutely accurate. However, a broad charting of future paths may be useful in preparing for eventualities whenever they occur.

This century has witnessed exceptional human achievements in knowledge, as well as amazing discoveries on how to discover knowledge. At the same time the shifting of social, cultural and political imperatives, coupled with cumulative growing problems as a result of contemporary technologizing civilization, has posed a heavy burden on mankind. The knowledge explosion, the development quest, the emerging interdependent world, the problems of population and

environment, and the crisis of human values are relentlessly increasing their demands for societies to be active participants in the choosing and fashioning of the future. Unless and until we equip ourselves in advance to cope with the rapid socio-economic and technological advancements, as also the realities of different rates of advancements, for example those of science and technology versus those of socio-cultural developments, we may find ourselves lagging behind, marginalized, and passively letting circumstances overwhelm us.

What, then, could ensure our survival in the future? Knowledge alone will not suffice, and this is expressed in a Thai saying, "Steeped in knowledge, but unable to save oneself". Technical skills acquired to-day may become obsolete in a few years' time, due to the rapid scientific and technological advances.

In the vastly changing scenarios of the world, several factors seem to point at a trend towards shifting more and more responsibility onto the shoulder of the individual. The impact of the "mass" concept seems to be less significant. For example, adverse conditions in many countries continue to worsen the impact of unemployment on individuals, making it imperative for each man and woman to have to vie for jobs by showing characteristics such as initiative, creativity, leadership and adaptability. Likewise, increasing self-employment especially assisted by modern electronic technology asserts great demands on the part of individuals. In business companies, top-down management is giving way to increased involvement of all workers, even at the decision making level, in order to make full use of new ideas, creativity, and commitment of large numbers of individuals to meet the exigencies of the market. Even the media is being demassified, as evidenced by the major mass newspapers and magazines losing ground to smaller and mini-magazines catering to special interest groups, with individual writers and reporters initiating new approaches and communication styles to attract individual readers who can now afford to be more selective in their choice of reading materials. Another obvious example of this "individual trend" is the advances made in the electronic media, which will continue unabated, making it necessary for each of us to learn and be familiar with, say, bank electronic networks, self-service supermarkets, computer link-up for home-based duties, computer-assisted means to cater to individual specifications.

Taking these trends into account, it may well be that future generations of society will have to develop proficiencies that may be called "enterprise proficiencies", the term "enterprise" here having the broader connotation and not merely confined to entrepreneurship or money-making activities. Personal qualities and abilities such as initiative, creativity, risk taking, self-confidence, team spirit, leadership, which enable the individual to be better at thinking, analysing, solving problems, taking action and corrective measures, are not subject areas to be taught in schools or universities, but can be captured through the learning process. University students, being at a mature age for divergent thinking and intellectual independence, are in a position to develop these proficiencies which ultimately will improve their quality of life and ensure their place in an enterprising society which is constantly seeking new ways to improve the future of mankind.

The trends as presented so far offer challenging conditions in which higher education has to rethink its role and mission, particularly in view of the fact that higher education is in the very forefront of the intellectual growth of a nation. The wards of higher education are the young intellectuals of a nation. The growing interdependence of the world and the will to preserve national identity and heritage require concerted action to make education assume greater responsibility towards sustainable human development. In this context, higher education is undoubtedly in the best position to develop a quality workforce and a cadre of future decision makers with the needed proficiencies to survive in a complex and rapidly changing society.

An enterprising society must search for positive ways to cope with the dichotomies in the world to-day, that is to say, for example, international co-operation versus international competition; economic development versus social development; industrial progress versus environmental sustainability. These dichotomies must be recognized as realities of life, existing side by side in this world of ours, and efforts must be made to make one complementary to the other, instead of trying to focus attention on one at the expense of the other. One of the roles of higher education is to help future generations to accommodate these dichotomies constructively. Even higher education itself is faced with dichotomies of its own, such as increasing participation while trying to avoid surpluses of graduates; achieving high quality fundamental research while having to respond to the current needs of industry and community.

Now that we have identified and predicted some of the trends and challenges of the future scenario, it is for us all, and educationalists in particular, to gear higher education towards the desired goal. Certainly higher education cannot be considered in isolation from the entire education system. Society building must start with the young child. But it is specially the graduate who is at the terminal level of formal education who must be equipped with intellectual tools and characteristics to learn how to learn that is, lifelong education must be one of the set objectives. An enterprising individual should, after leaving the portals of a school or a university, possess a certain mind set and be able to seek further sources of knowledge and information to improve his or her existence, and not remain stagnant and be a prey to obsolescence. A young intellectual must learn how to develop penetrating mindfulness, critical thinking, discover causality; how to solve problems, recognize patterns in the observed data; identify and define them, consider alternative solutions, select the most feasible solution; develop proficiencies for real-life problem solving,

plan and monitor actions, and evaluate result for future planning cycles. No doubt those who are in or exposed to Buddhist traditions of mental development will recognize that aspects like critical thinking, penetrating mindfulness, dependent origination, now considered highly modern “pedagogy”, had been integral to Buddhism for over 2,500 years. It may well be appropriate to ask whether it is the duty of higher education to enlighten the young intellectuals of parallelisms between the ancient and the modern such as those which exist in our cultures. In so doing, the young intellectuals may be helped to place their modern learning in the stream of cultural consciousness. Similar parallelisms

between the ancient and the modern surely exist in other religious and cultural frameworks as well.

How can learners in a higher education institution be facilitated to be enterprising? The key word here is “to facilitate”, which provides opportunities for the development of divergent thinking on the part of the learners themselves. In a formal type of higher education institution, the academic staff should no longer be only “lecturing” to students; rather, they should encourage in the young mind the habit of learning to learn and learning to do, preferably using real-life situations in the learning process. The staff is in fact the role model in acting as facilitator, so that the young intellectuals can gain self-reliance and self-confidence to face the vicissitudes of life on their own later on.

In the era of globalization, higher education should also give full attention to enhanced internationalization, in its content and in its functions. A nation can no longer afford to remain in isolation, and the young must benefit in their formative years from an education system that enables them to come into contact, either directly or indirectly, with the world at large. In this context, the study of international languages and world history will be an asset in promoting inter-cultural understanding and mutual respect among nations. The study of a second language should start as early as possible, and should continue throughout the school and college years. A good command of at least one international language would ensure that a nation is not in a disadvantaged position in international dealings and contacts. Moreover, the knowledge of an international language, and English in particular, provides greater opportunities for acquiring first-hand and latest information on new discoveries, new ideas and latest research findings which may be beneficial for one’s own use and reference. It enables a person to have instant access to an international network of information, thanks to the electronic media and the information super-highways which ensure information flow throughout every corner of the globe.

The internationalization of higher education can also be effected through staff and student mobility. This should be promoted as a two-way traffic, in the sense that every country has something to give and something to receive, as equal partners, and not merely from South to North, as is regrettably still the case in many developing countries. Scholarships, fellowships and exchange programmes should benefit participants on both sides. In this regard, it may be mentioned that the dilemma of the “brain drain” is not exclusively caused by professional mobility, but also by other factors such as lack of opportunities for professional growth in one’s own country, or by political, economic and social issues in one’s homeland. Having made the point about “internationalization”, it is perhaps appropriate to recall, in this context, one of the goals of education stated in Thailand’s National Scheme of Education of 1992, that is “wisdom”, and I quote: “to appreciate Thai wisdom and culture, and to wisely choose modern knowledge and exogeneous culture for adoption by Thai society”. Such goal is undoubtedly of value to all countries in the region. The question is: Who would facilitate the development of these proficiencies of wisdom in the young intellectuals? And in what way?

Against the rising tide of dehumanizing forces, it is imperative that people must preserve and strengthen personal cultural and social values. Apart from those nurtured by the home, values are developed in the young mind by the educational environment. In the development of a whole personality, knowledge and skills must be processed through moral and ethical sensibility, cultural understanding, humaneness and compassion. An enterprising society must be a caring society – a society which sets certain moral and ethical standards for its members, giving a sense of dignity in showing respect and responsibility for others, and working towards the common good of a nation, and of mankind. Higher education is at the frontier of knowledge, and is the producer of young intellectuals of a nation and its future decision makers; hence it is in the best position to respond to the intellectual aspiration of the individuals to learn, as well as to contribute towards the creation of an enterprising society.