

F-03 Managing higher education: evolution of indigenous systems in South-Asia

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Higher educational institutions arose with the emergence of advanced civilisations especially along river valleys. Some of the most reputed ancient institutions appeared along the Indo-Ganges Valley in South Asia. Here, as is true of medieval Europe, higher education was closely connected to and dependent on religious organisations. First, such institutions were the forest ashrams with wandering scholars. Later, clusters of single teacher institutions developed into university towns. The intervention of monarchs resulted in large institutions. Archaeological excavations conducted by Marshall, Wheeler and others, provided evidence attesting to the existence of institutions large enough to accommodate thousands of students.

Ancient Sri Lankan institutions were influenced by those of the Indian sub-continent. For institutional governance, academic and administrative councils were established. Democratic principles were adhered to, enabling the participation of teachers, students and community in institutional management. Corporate personality and endowments, including large land-grants, enabled institutional autonomy and academic freedom. Even though the Indian institutions disappeared with the Islamic invasions, Sri Lankan institutions not only continued but also influenced the education systems in South-East Asian countries.

The project employed a combination of historical and comparative methodologies. It involved critical evaluation of archaeological reports, autobiographies of travellers and translations of inscriptions and research publications. The study challenges the acknowledged Western view that "*university is a concept born in medieval Europe*" and suggests that the developments in higher education in ancient South Asia were similar to, or even more advanced than those which occurred in medieval Europe.