



**Dr. Arunasalam Somasunderampillai  
Memorial Oration - 2010**

**Private Higher Education Institutions  
and Private Universities : Issues and their  
relevance to Sri Lanka.**

Professor N. Balakrishnan,  
Former Dean, Faculty of Arts,  
University of Jaffna

4<sup>th</sup> August 2010





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## Message from the Vice-Chancellor

I am delighted to welcome all the participants to this valuable event.

We are gathered to cherish the memory of Dr. Somasundarampillai, the former long standing member of our University Council. His contribution to the good governance of our University is immense. An accountant by profession and also a socially engaged personality, he was respected by all. In recognition of his contribution, we conferred honorary doctoral degree.

We are proud to have Prof.N.Balakrishnan with us, one of the pioneers, who contributed a lot for development of our University especially to the Faculty of Arts to deliver the memorial oration. As Dean and former Rector of our Vavuniya Campus, we all experienced and learned his humanistic leadership. The academic and research interest of Prof.Bala extends beyond boundaries of disciplines and in line with present day interdisciplinary perspective.

Today's oration is focusing on an importance issue in the sphere of Higher Education in Sri Lanka. Whether the present advocacy for accommodating private institutions in meeting the higher demand for tertiary education will erode the benefits of our free educational system of equity? Today's oration will enlighten us on this current issue of education.

I extend my sincere thanks and wishes to Prof. Balakrishnan for his valuable thoughts for this memorable event and to the family members of Dr.Somasundarampillai for their assistance in this endeavour.

**Prof. N. Shanmugalingam**

Vice-Chancellor,  
University of Jaffna  
04.08.2010



*Vice -Chancellor, Former Colleagues, Distinguished Guests and Friends,*

I consider it an honour and a privilege to be invited to deliver the first memorial lecture in honour of Dr Arunasalam Somasundermpillai, Chartered Account and former member of the Governing Council of the University of Jaffna. I have known him for well our three decades in Point Pedro, his place of birth and residence, Thunnalai where he married (nee) Leela Kulaveerasingham and in Jaffna town where he set up his own and Audit firm administered the Merchant Finance Company and in the University of Jaffna.

The late Dr Arunasalam Somasunderampillai had his primary education at Thattatheru Methodist Mission School and his secondary education at Puloly Velautham School (later Velautham Mathiya Maha Vidyalayam) where his father was a teacher, and Hartley College, Point Pedro. After his Senior School Certificate Examination 1943 and too young to sit the University Entrance examination he proceeded to India - St Josheph's College at Thiruchirappalli. There he excelled in his studies and won the Gold medal for his performance at the Rt. Hon. Sirinivasa Sastri Gold medal oratorical contest. He also secured the Subba Rao Prize for Economics. Having successfully completed his collegiate studies he graduated from Madras University (1947).

Late Dr. Somasunderampillai belonged to a family of learned persons and professionals. His younger brother was an engineer by profession. His sister Mrs. M. Thiyagarajah was an alumna of Madras Presidency College and graduated from Madras University, specialized in Tamil.

Later she obtained her Ph. D in Tamil from the University of London and served on the academic staff in Colombo and Kelaniya universities. I had the good fortune of knowing his spouse well (nee Leela Kulaveerasingam). We were class mates in the University Entrance class at Hartley College and later were contemporaries at the University (Peradeniya). His youngest brother Dr. A. Sivapathasunderam was a leading Pediatrician, who unfortunately met his tragic death in the Jaffna hospital premises during the IPKF military operation.

After graduating from Madras University Dr. Somasuderampillaihe joined Hartley College as a teacher (1948). That was my first contact with him when I was a student at Hartley College. I have seen him cycling daily to Hartley. Being a keen tennis player he was often seen at the Hartley College Tennis Court. On many occasions he addressed the College assembly.

He left Hartley College in (1954). He was destined for greater achievements and decided to follow a professional Accountancy course in Colombo. After successfully passing out as a Chartered Accountant he worked as Chief Accountant at Ceylon Printers (Ltd). He did not work in Colombo long and was compelled to look for other avenues to practice his profession. He set up his own office in Jaffna and practiced as a Tax and Audit Consultant and managed the Merchant Finance Ltd, which was largely his creation, as Managing Director. He also served as a Visiting Lecturer in Auditing in the Dept of Commerce and Management for many years in the University of Jaffna. It was during this time he was appointed a member of the



University of Jaffna Governing Council. He has had a unique record in this having served for almost 20 years. As a Council member I came into close contact with him in my official capacity as Dean / Arts. He served as a Council member during the time of the Vice Chancellors, Prof. S. Vithianathan, Prof. A. Thurairajah and Prof. P. Balasundrampillai. He did an excellent service as guide, mentor and critic as a Council member. Especially on matters relating to finance and accounts his expert advice and guidance were valued very much. As a man of principles, which he adhered rigidly he never compromised on what he thought was right. This applied to his work in the Council as well.

Dr. Somasundarampillai was the Charter President of the Lions Club of Point Pedro Zone Chairman of Lions club International. He was also a patron of many social religions and welfare societies. He spent a good part of his earnings for such worthy causes.

It is worthy of note that Dr. Somasundrampillai devoted part of his time to write two books one on Fisheries and other Animal Husbandry. **Ilankai Meen Valamum Payan padum**, and 'Sri Lanka Fisheries exploitation and Development' were published in 2000 and 2001 respectively. His book on 'Animal Husbandry in Tamil areas in Sri Lanka' and **Ilankai Tamil Pirathesankalil Kalnadai Apiviruthi** were planned to be published in Tamil and English.

As a fitting tribute, Jaffna University, considering his many achievements in his own profession; and outside this field as well as his contribution to university administration conferred on him the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, Honoris Causa (2004).

As he was involved in higher education in some ways the subject of today's lecture would have, I believe, interested him very much. I am much pleased to make this presentation honouring him in this seat of higher learning where he would have spent a good part of his valuable time for its well-being.

# INTRODUCTION

For several decades in the post-independence period Sri Lanka's educational scene has been dominated by a state funded and managed system at primary, secondary and tertiary levels. It has been observed that Sri Lanka was one of the first developing countries to provide free and universal health and educational services to its people. (World Bank, 2004). Together with education, health, subsidized food distribution and other welfare services formed the cornerstone of the 'welfare state' framework that evolved since the 1940s. Over the years such strong social welfare commitments became well entrenched in the country's fiscal system in the post independence period and in the later years this became a heavy burden on the Budget. The socio-political circumstances that evolved with and after Donoughmore reforms and the granting of universal adult franchise (1931) which shaped the pattern of electoral politics that developed in the subsequent decades can be seen as the major links in the political processes that gave a strong bias towards 'social wel'farist' approach in government policy. This presentation focuses on the main issues related to private higher educational institutions and private universities and their relevance to Sri Lankan context.

## **Liberalization and Free Market Policies**

The state funded and state managed education sector did not encourage in any significant way the opening up of alternative modes of service delivery in higher education. Even the system of private schools that operated for many decades came to an end with the government take-over of denominational schools in the country.

Liberalization and free market policies that came to be adopted after 1977 undoubtedly provided new directions in government economic policy; all the major political parties supported this change. In this economic environment ushered in by the new policy perspectives there took place a marked expansion in the activities of private / non government sector and some downsizing of public sector activities. This favorable environment opened up the economy in a significant way to foreign private capital and participation of foreign companies in the country's investment and production activities. Such an economic and political environment undoubtedly provided a favorable opportunity for the establishment of a number of International schools (secondary education) and private tertiary educational institutions in the country making a significant dent in the state controlled and state dominated system. It is important to note that many of these institutions had foreign participation / ownership in different forms.

### **Changing Patterns in tertiary Education**

It has been observed that developing countries in recent decades had witnessed a remarkable expansion in tertiary / higher education (refers to all forms of post secondary education). The following themes have been highlighted in a World Bank study based on country experiences (World Bank, 2002) : role of knowledge as a major determinant of economic development; increasing institutional differentiation in higher education; rise of market segment in tertiary education, both national and international; changing governance pattern; diminished direct role of government in funding and provision in higher education and emergence of new providers in tertiary education 'cross border' or 'franchise' institutions. The increasing

institutional differentiation that has taken place tended to undermine the dominance of traditional universities partly because of the emergence of private universities or 'private university level' institutions and many non university institutions, such as professional technical institutes, polytechnics, and offshore or distance learning centre's with foreign or cross border links. Sri Lankan experience in recent decades has reflected the above trends in a somewhat limited manner.

### **Private Enrollment in Higher Education**

It has been noted that many developed and developing countries have shifted from the traditional state funded higher education providing more space for private or non state actors in meeting the increasing demand for those who aspire for tertiary education. The increasing share of enrollment in private higher educational institutions has been a noteworthy development in the past three decades or more. The data from a World Bank publication bears this out (World Bank, 1994.) In a number of countries the majority of students are enrolled in private higher educational institutions. The percentage share of enrollment in private higher educational institutions including private universities (out of a total number of 40 countries for which data are given) had varied from less than 20% (20 countries), from 20% to 40% (10 countries) and 40% to 80% (10 countries). It is further noted in this context that state subsidies in some countries with very high ratios, such as Indonesia (65%) Japan (68%), Korea 68% and Philippines (80%) had contributed to the increasing share of enrollment in private sector higher educational institutions.

## **State Higher Education Sector**

There are several degree diploma awarding institutions in the higher education sector in the country. On top of the list come the 15 state universities, campuses affiliated to these universities and post graduate institutes attached to the universities. The state universities come within the purview of the university grants commission (UGC). There are in Sri Lanka a few universities (03) which do not come within the purview of the UGC. A number of degree awarding institutes affiliated to the universities (08) have been established in recent years to cater to needs of different disciplines and to provide additional opportunities in higher education. There are also (05) degree awarding institutes which are not affiliated to the universities. Not affiliated to the universities, there are also government institutes that offer higher diplomas / degrees. Professional institutes that provide for professional qualifications in the field of law, engineering, accountancy and chemistry (05) have gained prominence in recent years. In addition there are also a number of private educational institutes which offer courses for higher diplomas or degrees (including post graduate qualifications) of universities in the country and abroad (Consultants' Report: 2008)

## **Admission to State Funded Universities**

The state funded national / regional universities, coming within the purview of the UGC have a dominant presence in undergraduate education in the country. The Open University of Sri Lanka, the only university which follows a distance learning mode admits students on a different basis with multiple points of entry. Of the state funded universities, excluding the Open University, admitting students based on A/L examination each year, the seven well established universities

now account for 75% of the total undergraduate admission. The existing gaps in terms of academic resources and outputs between the already well established universities and the more recently set up universities in the country may take time to be bridged.

University education in the country faces many problems, but the most important among them are: restriction of numbers admitted due to limited capacity of the universities under present admission scheme; the number seeking admission to higher education increases rapidly and the pressure on state universities is high indeed; the ability of the university system to turn out graduates in fields more urgently needed (e. g, IT) is constrained by lack of resources as well as design of course structures which are rigid and not flexible enough; and many institutions are faced with difficulties in maintaining standards and quality in courses conducted and degrees awarded. What has been termed a 'supply driven' state university system has not shown sufficient capacity to match the changing demand based requirements of skills and competencies of the job markets. (Central Bank Annual Report, 2007)

### **Restricted Entry to State Universities and Alternative Outlets**

In this presentation our focus is on question of restricted entry for university admission and the space to be provided for private higher educational institutions or private universities so as to deal with part of the problem in university education. It is important to note that leaving out the Open University, the other (15) state universities are able to admit only less than 15% of the total number who qualify for admission and about 6% of the number actually sitting the A/L examination each year. It was found that during 2000 – 2006, the

percentage eligible for university admission increased from 45.6% in 2000 to 58.2% in 2006; correspondingly the number admitted as a percentage of eligible stood at 16% in 2000 and this was reduced to 13.9% in 2006. (Sri Lanka University Statistics, 2006); the gap between the two is shown to be widening in recent years and this has serious implications *vis-a-vis* student admissions to state universities.

There is another way in which this problem can be highlighted. The number not qualified, and number qualified but not selected to universities out of the total number of candidates sitting the A/L examination comes to around 185 000 each year (average number for three years from 2004 to 2006). This gives an indication of the magnitude of the problem. What do they do beyond this point? What opportunities are available to such a large numbers each year? Some of them may be preparing for A/L examination a second or third time; some of them may decide to enter the job market. Still others, who can afford financially, may seek admission to foreign universities. However, the bulk of them may go for various courses (certificate / diploma / degree courses) offered by several institutions, both public and private in the non - university tertiary sector. The development of non - university tertiary education sector is seen as an important alternative offering opportunities to pursue different forms of post-secondary education and training (National Education Commission, 2008). While the university tertiary sector operates through the universities and other public degree awarding institutes, non - university tertiary education sector consists of a variety of institutions, both government and non-government, engaged in offering middle level technical, skill, vocation oriented and professional courses leading to the award of certificates, diplomas and degrees. There are private higher educational institutions which prepare students for degrees of local



universities. Attention is also focused on a number of private higher educational institutions established since 1980s engaged in what is termed 'cross border' higher education. They are mostly 'franchise institutions' that operate on behalf of foreign universities and students are awarded foreign degrees, mostly UK, Australian and American. This is a new development for Sri Lanka, but in many other countries cross border undergraduate education has found increasing acceptance; foreign degrees are obtained locally at a relatively lower cost than what studying and receiving foreign degrees abroad could cost. It is of interest note that "nearly one-fifth of 80,000 foreign students enrolled in Australian universities are studying at offshore campuses located mainly in Singapore and Malaysia (World Bank, 2002). Monash University ranked 6<sup>th</sup> among Australian universities, is a leading example of having offshore campuses in Malaysia and other places.

### **Private Higher Educational Institutions\***

There are no reliable and authentic information about private higher educational institutions (PHEIs) in Sri Lanka at present regarding student enrollment, type of courses offered, their quality, fees charged and the rating or recognition of some of the foreign accredited / affiliated institutions.

Even though there are a number of such PHEIs most of them concentrate on a limited range of disciplines such as Information Technology Accountancy, Management / Business Studies and English Language Competencies. Among the variety of PHEI's that operate significance is also attached to those tertiary level institutions that conduct of various professional examinations, both foreign (e. g CIMA) and local [e. g Institute Chartered Accountancy of Sri Lanka (ICASL)].

PHEIs that prepare students for diplomas / degrees of local universities and those PHEIs preparing students for foreign university degrees may be, for convenience, called 'university-level' institutions. There is some of justification for differentiating them from the others. There are no formal private universities as such in Sri Lanka as yet but a few in the above categories may have the potential to develop into private universities provided appropriate legislation is framed and necessary support given. The potential is great especially for those PHEI's with foreign university affiliations.

### **'University Level' Institutions**

Of the PHEI's which, we have for convenience, called 'university level' institutions, quite a number are affiliated to foreign universities in UK, Australia, and USA, mostly the first two. Information available for 2008 indicated that private 'University level' institutions are having affiliations and collaborative arrangements with 10 UK universities, 07 Australian universities and 03 American universities. This may have increased in the past two years, because of strong competition among these institutions to attract more students; and in this respect foreign university affiliation has been an important factor.

### **Foreign University affiliations**

Foreign university affiliations with well-known Universities and accredited higher educational institutions abroad now provide an attractive outlet for Sri Lankan students who had been left out of the local university system to pursue higher education and obtain foreign university degrees locally. English education, foreign university degrees as well as employment prospects associated with them here as well as abroad explain much of the developments in recent years

outside the university system, that accounted for the emergence of a small but significant demand driven sector in the country's tertiary education sector. This brings us to the question of providing space for private universities in the higher education sector. This still remains a contentious issue and ideological and political constraints appear to be formidable.

### **Arguments for and Against Private Universities**

In Sri Lanka a privately funded fee levying higher education sector has evolved during the last two or three decades-the process has come to stay and the trend appears irreversible. Private funded and fee levying higher education institutions can open up avenues to those-if they can afford the cost - who are denied opportunities in the state funded universities. There is no legal barrier to the setting up of such PHEI's. However, the question of private universities *per se* raises contentious issues in the Sri Lankan context. Favorably viewed, private universities can bring in non - state providers into the higher education sector and thereby additional resources; this can provide an alternative to the question of restricted entry to state universities. State universities can increase the intake to some extent without lowering or drastically changing present admission requirements. But there are limits to this on account of budgetary constraints. Not only private universities can enhance resources but also improve quality in higher education. Faced with such competition from non-state providers state universities may be encouraged to introduce much needed reforms in curriculum and encouraged to provide more efficient service delivery, making better use of available resources. Another advantage is that private universities can provide a greater institutional diversity in the higher educational sector, which has remained almost a state monopoly.

Having experienced a long standing tradition of state provision, sponsorship and support in many of the social welfare services including education, the idea of private universities is not only new but not readily received-even though in the health sector already there are many well established private medical institutions. Opposition to the establishment of private universities is to some extent ideological, coming from radical student groups and politically oriented sections. It may be of interest to note that according to press reports the new Minister of Higher Education has stated recently that private universities will be allowed to be established in the country. Already "the university's Student Federation" has protested and demonstrated against what has been termed, mistakenly, privatization of higher education. Criticisms leveled against private universities are also concerned with the questions of cost, affordability and access. It has been argued that private universities serve largely students from in upper class and wealthy background. This view is still shared by many in the country. It is argued that high cost involved in many of the private PHEI's with foreign university affiliations for receiving foreign university degree may be in the region of 1.5 million (SL) rupees to 2.5 million per student for a three year foreign university degree. This, only students from well to do homes can afford. Many deserving students, denied admission to state universities may not be able to afford the high cost of education in PHEI's with foreign university affiliation or private universities. Cost and affordability are also tied up with the question of access and equity which are issues of social concern that cannot be overlooked in the larger context.

### **Affordability, Access & Equity**

State funded free higher education gives wider access-notwithstanding the restricted entry on admission and therefore is

rated very well on the grounds of both access and equity. This is not the case with PHEI's and private universities in which cost can be high and they are governed by the principle of 'ability or willingness to pay'; this means that only those who have the potential means will be able to pay for such service delivery. Many capable students are denied the opportunity of studying in PHEI's or private universities, even though academically they may be deserving cases. Access and equity are ensured when educational opportunities are spread out equitably among different groups socially or spatially. There is no doubt that state system may score well on such criteria, but the private higher educational institutions or private universities cannot be expected to perform well in terms of these criteria.

### **PHEI's and statutory arrangements**

Many of the PHEI's operating with affiliation and / or collaboration of foreign universities are registered as Board of investment (BOI) projects and they are engaged in the 'business of education'; some of them are registered as business concerns under Companies Act and still there are others set up as educational institutions. Government policy in the past has never been explicit on private universities. The higher educational institutions now in operation set up under different statutory / legal arrangements did not come within the educational purview of any higher level government or semi - governmental agency. Government preferred to maintain the *status - quo* in allowing private higher educational institutions to continue as in the past.

### **Regulatory Framework for PHEI's**

No new policy initiatives had been thought of on the need for a regulatory framework and setting up of an appropriate mechanism to

oversee the activities of this new segment that has emerged in which there are a sizeable number of students (estimated to be 30-35 thousand) pursuing higher education. Some of the PHEI's having affiliations with reputed foreign universities may be better placed with regard course structure, redesign of courses, receipt of course materials and examinations and degree awarded. But others may not be academically sound. If a regulatory mechanism is put in place to oversee the work of private HEI's it may be able to play a useful role in regard to design of course structure, uniformity in course design, quality of teaching, and academic standards. In such core areas a regulatory framework may be necessary. While the private HEI's are free to evolve and administer their academic or course programmes, permitting necessary flexibility and diversity, some degree of regulation or control may be made a mandatory requirement so that uniformity in courses quality and standards can be ensured (it is necessary to note that state universities are grappling with such problems in the current context.) Further, higher educational institutions are accountable to students, staff, parents and other stakeholders. With the operation of a number of non state higher education institutions their accountability aspect in relation to funding activities, academic activities and performance should be subject to review and scrutiny by an independent body, which is lacking at the moment. In other words, they should be brought into the mainstream of higher education so that their activities are made matters of public concern.

### **Internal Governance and management**

The traditional state universities in Sri Lanka-the non-market segment - do not speedily respond to changing academic requirements, or they respond rather slowly. In contrast the private higher educational institutions show a high degree of responsiveness and adaptability to

meet changing academic needs as they fall within the market segment. This is especially so with private higher educational institutions affiliated to foreign universities, which are required to keep pace with changes that take place in the parent universities situated overseas. However the franchise institutions operating on behalf of parent universities do not have a sound institutional framework. Not much information is available about their governance and management structures. Further, though there are quite a number of such institutions engaged in educational service delivery, there appears to be very little interaction among themselves on matters of common interest; there is no interaction at all between them and other higher educational institutions outside. With about nearly two decades of service delivery by PHEI's they do not even have a common forum to promote their interests. Other than the brochures and publicity hand-outs given and the information contained therein, some of their core activities to many outside still remain a 'closed book'. Nevertheless there is no doubt that the higher educational institutions in the non state sector continue to remain an attractive outlet to those who wish to pursue tertiary level education. This itself is enough justification for some kind of regulatory framework.

## **Conclusion**

Developing economies like Sri Lanka have now been increasingly drawn into the process of globalization and knowledge-based economy. In this rapidly changing context higher education sector has a vital role to play. State universities as well non-state providers including private universities together will have to face the new challenges. The state higher education sector in the Sri Lanka context has its own regulatory framework which has to become more adaptable to suit new requirements. How the non state providers in

our context can be integrated in the mainstream without undermining their status and independence is the challenging task before the country's policy makers.

### Notes and References

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World Bank: Higher education-The Lessons of experiences, 1994, Washington D.C.

Consultants'Report: Developing Strategies for Better Higher Education in Sri Lanka, Policy and Strategy Development unit, Ministry of Higher education (unpublished).

The writer served as a member in one of the expert groups on 'Governance Management' and prepared a report, from which some of the materials drawn are used in today's presentation.

Central Bank Annual Report (Box 8) 2007.

Sri Lanka University Statistics, University Grants Commission, 2006.

National Education Commission, National Policy Framework on Higher Education - University and non University Higher Education, 2009.

World Bank, Ibid, 2002.

\*Names of some of the PHEI's established since the 1980s indicating the main disciplines in which they concentrate as well as their names of 'validating partners' are given below, based on information



gathered in 2009.

### **IDM group of companies**

Computer Studies, ICT Education. Foreign university affiliation London Metropolitan University and Charles Sturt University.

### **Institute of Technological studies**

Computer science, Business Studies and English Language-Skills. Foreign affiliation. Troy University in Alabama; allows 'credit-transfer' arrangements to this American University or any other University in the US enabling students to complete degree abroad.

### **Informatics Institute of Technology (later changed to Informatics Institute of Computer Studies)**

Computer studies Information systems. Foreign affiliation- Manchester Metropolitan University; Westminster University.

### **Australian College of Business Technology (ACBT)**

Information Technology, Business studies and English Language Testing system (IELTS). Foreign affiliation - Edith Cowan University.

### **American College of Higher Education**

Several disciplines are offered for majoring programmers including Computing Information systems, Computer science, Engineering. Anthropology, International Business and Mass Communication. Transfer of students to north American Universities permitted. Affiliated to Broward Community College, USA; Excelsior - College a member of the University of State of New York, USA.

### **British College of Applied Studies**

Quantity surveying; International Management. Foreign affiliation - University of Wolverhampton, UK.

### **International College of Business Technology (ICBT)**

Ceylnco Consolidated, Computing, International Business Management and Quantity Surveying. Foreign affiliation - Sunderland university, UK and Sikkim Manipal University, India (including post graduate programmes).

### **Asian Pacific Institute of Information Technology (APIIT)**

Computing, Business Administration and Business Information Technology.

As explained in the main text, there are three important aspects to be noted: private institutions investing in tertiary education leading to diploma / degree and postgraduate degrees; emphasis on IT and Business Studies related programs; and affiliation and collaboration with foreign Universities.





Prof. N. Balakrishnan graduated with honours in Economics from the University of Ceylon at Peradeniya. He joined the academic staff of the Economics Department of the University of Peradeniya in 1960 and this was the beginning of what later blossomed into a fruitful and active academic career in the University system. He did his Postgraduate studies in the University of Leeds, England, specialized in 'Development Economics' which was much in focus in the academic world at the time – and obtained his MPhil degree.

Prof. Balakrishnan joined the University of Jaffna in the 70s after having served for eighteen years at the University of Peradeniya. He served another two decades in the University of Jaffna where he made a significant contribution towards undergraduate teaching, research and university administration. He functioned as the Head of the Department and the Department of Commerce and Management. He was the Dean of the Faculty of Arts from 1984 – 1991. He played an active and useful role as a Senate and Council member and served in several official committees. His role as a University Administrator was noteworthy in the strengthening and building up of the Faculty of Arts. He was made as Associate Professor in Economics in 1987.

Prof. Balakrishnan was appointed the first Rector of the new Campus in Vavuniya in 1997 and contributed to lay the foundation for future development of the Campus. He also served as a member of the University Grants Commission for nearly three years. Prof. Balakrishnan has made a notable contribution to the academic well-being of the University Community as a leading academic and successful University administrator. He retired from the University System in 2001 after having completed four decades of unbroken and commendable service.