

Exactly 40 years ago on a day like today (8 May), I was over the moon enjoying the very first day of my entrance to the University of Ceylon Peradeniya. I still remember the day of my arrival with my parents at Peradeniya Sarasavi Uyana Railway Station, a reminiscent construction by colonial rule in Sri Lanka.

No words can express the radiance of the blooming May flowers and beauty of birdsong that portrayed a symbol of warm welcome to the new entrants. All the beginners who arrived in numbers were received by the seniors with warm cordiality. It was obligatory for freshmen to be clad in white during the first two or three weeks and opted to use our own choice of dress later.

The academic course of study for a Bachelor's degree was successfully completed in a period of three years or four years at the University. I am proud to accentuate that all my batch mates have reached the zenith of their glory in professional career. They shine at the apex of their career as justices, lawyers, senior government officials, diplomats, executives in finance and administration and reputed politicians in the local and international arena. This is the gift of erudite talents presented by the world-recognised University of Peradeniya.

60th anniversary

It is significant that this year becomes highly remarkable due to the 60th anniversary of the University of Peradeniya, which was ceremonially opened by Queen Elizabeth II on 20 of April 1954 on her visit to Sri Lanka.

Under the Ceylon University Ordinance No. 20 of 1942, the University of Ceylon was established on 1 July 1942, by amalgamating University College and Ceylon Medical College. The motto of this University of Ceylon was 'Knowledge is the Eye Unto All' (Sarvasva Locanam Sasthram in Sanskrit). However, there is nice story behind the establishment of University of Ceylon.

In the early 1900s proposals were forwarded on the location of the proposed University of Ceylon. In response to these proposed projects, Governor Hugh Clifford, who realised the essential need of a University, appointed a Committee chaired by Justice M.T. Akbar in 1926 to

submit its recommendations to the Government in an attempt to meet the necessity of a college for higher studies. It was proposed to build a university with residential facilities located outside Colombo city.



Subsequently another Committee was appointed under the Chairmanship of Sir Walter Buchanan to consider the most favourable location with a salubrious atmosphere. The recommendation of this Committee was to establish the University in Aruppola, Dumbara in Mahanuwara District. As a result of lengthy discussions over the issue, the Government finally acquired about 700 hectares of land for construction of the proposed first university and its park.

The land acquired for the university was a huge tea estate later utilised as a cantonment for troops of the World War II. The writer recollects the military office coloured in green situated opposite the Art Gallery being used by the Department of Political Science and Economics and Department of Philosophy of the Art faculty.

Charming location

The location of the university is extremely charming. It is surrounded by the lovely Hanthane Mountain, Mahaveli River and Kandy-Colombo Road. The world famous Botanical Gardens, another fascinating attraction among tourists and locals alike, is also situated opposite the University site.

The Engineering Faculty and Akbar Hall built closer to Peradeniya Railway Station could be reached across the Akbar Bridge, a portrayal of expertise demonstrated by the engineers led by Prof. A. Thurariraja with advanced technique of construction. The famous Yaka Palama and Sarasaviya Railway Station on Kandy-Galaha Road running through the university strengthen this site with inexpressible beauty to the university. The university premises are unequivocally of natural beauty, with a variety of trees, blooming flowers and radiant breeze.

P.M. Senaratna in his book 'Sir John Kothalawala & The Premier Stakes' in 1952 emphasises the significance of the huge role played by Sir John Kothalawala to establish the University of Peradeniya in getting necessary funds passed by the Government. According to Senaviratne, while Wijewardana use his persuasive influence and effort to obtain the services of the world-renowned town-planner Sir Patric Abercrombie, Sir John Kothalawala insisted that Peradeniya was the best suitable location for the projected university.

