

Politics of Policy: Nation, Market, and Free Education in Sri Lanka

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Our objective in this paper is to begin a dialogue on the political nature of the current status of higher education and the proposed reforms of the Parliamentary Select Committee. We will do this as a historical and analytic study of the history of Higher Education and the current juncture. We need to place the current moment in its historical context. We look upon the early stages of the education, predicated on the principles of free education, as inclining toward nation-building, and the latter as both neo liberal and nationalist. We take nation building and nationalism as related processes but distinct in their historic specificity. This is not a binary, but an imbrication of the two in each other. Through this we can locate free education ideologically and look at how the current managerial/neoliberal turn affects the country's people and the politics at large. It is also very important to understand this moment, as education and higher education are on the cusp of change. What is the future of the university system in Sri Lanka is the broad question raised here. We will study the Kannangara report and other policy documents of early university education, and the historicity of the managerial/neo liberal turn, with specific focus on the policies of the post-2000 era to the present. We will also scrutinize the Parliamentary Select Committee's Report of 2023 which proposes sweeping changes in education. With the managerial/neoliberal turn in education, particularly higher education, we are entering an era in which the state university system is placed in a very precarious position. We need to engage with the policies that shape our reality in the universities and take control of some of the policies in order to shape our destinies toward a democratic future.

Keywords: Education, Kannangara Report, Nation, Nationalism, Neoliberalism, Policy