

Session 11: Closing Plenary

Title: Universities and Society: a View for Tomorrow (**KS - [click here to full text?](#)**)

Speaker: Ms Oottupurakkal Velukkutty Usha, Director of Publishing, Mahatma Gandhi University at Kottayam, Kerala

Chair: Baroness Warwick, Chief Executive, Universities UK

Co-Chair: Professor Stephanos Stephanides, Associate Professor in English Literature, University of Cyprus

Rapporteur: Dr Jonathan Jenkins, ACU

Introduction

Professor Stephanides introduced the speaker, who was to deliver this plenary in her first ever journey outside India. He described her work as a Commonwealth writer and poet, work written in the Malayalam language, outside the culture and circle of Delhi; and he asked her, from the perspective of the South of India, to express her views on the role of universities in societies facing the challenges of social change and globalisation.

Plenary Address

The speaker opened by saying how greatly honoured she felt, for herself and her country, in being asked to give the closing address at this conference.

She described how different languages could contribute to literature and how Malayalam had been brought to Kerala, the door to trade in India. Then, in speaking of her “view for tomorrow” she outlined how the university in India had evolved. Following western models in the pursuit of intellectual promise and higher learning, and putting trust in the over-confidence of science, she felt that objective rationality had been lost. The human pool, she said, was culturally deprived and society was fragmented. The individual was isolated, cut off from communication.

Giving example of the oral tradition and revival of Sanskrit Hinduism, she suggested that much Indian culture had been lost or destroyed by Christian impact. However, the movement of people and ideas, the post-colonial globalisation, could also be argued to have a potentially liberating effect, providing that intellectual property did not belong to ‘the company’. Inviting executive heads to introduce world history to their curriculum and to ‘flower the human spirit’ she concluded that objective learning and education could only be achieved through inner awareness and a heightened consciousness.

Response to the address

The Chair responded to the speaker by acknowledging the importance of the development of the person and the roots of culture in addition to the bigger picture and practical challenges identified during the conference. New partnerships would, of course, involve vital personal interaction.

Baroness Warwick applauded ACU for its work in promoting higher education as a public service with benefits to both society and the individual. She felt confident that, after this conference on 'New Configurations', ACU would continue to find a common direction for its diverse members through its work on 'Engagement as a Core Value'; and she called for contributions to this project from all members. The outcomes of the Engagement project would feed into, and underpin, the ACU General Conference to be held in Belfast in 2003 on the theme of 'Universities Engaging with their Communities'.

The Chair concluded by thanking the speaker for bringing the debate back to the context of the individual.