

An Analytical Study on Curriculum and the Learning Teaching Process in Pirivena Education in Sri Lanka

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Abstract:

The main aim of this paper was to conduct an analytical study on curriculum and the learning teaching process in Pirivena education in Sri Lanka. The historical method has been used as the research method and Sutta Pitaka, Vinaya Pitaka, commentaries, chronicles, inscriptions, epistles and relevant Buddhist books have been used as primary sources to collect information. Research papers, articles and books written later periods regarding the monastery education and Pirivena education have been examined as the secondary sources to elaborate and analyze research findings. Pirivena education in Sri Lanka has been functioned under several approaches and levels from the past to the present. Curriculum and the learning teaching process in the present Pirivena is different when compared with the past since the objectives of the present Pirivena education have been changed. Curriculum, its function and teaching methods of traditional Buddhist education have provided some lessons to the present general education system in Sri Lanka.

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I. AIM

The main aim of this paper was to conduct a study on curriculum and the learning teaching process in Pirivena education in Sri Lanka from its inception to the present.

II. METHOD

The historical method has been used as the research method of this paper. Sutta Pitaka, Vinaya Pitaka, commentaries, chronicles, inscriptions, epistles and relevant Buddhist books have been used as primary sources to collect information. Research papers, articles and books written later periods regarding the curriculum and learning teaching process in monastery education have been examined as the secondary sources to elaborate and analyze research findings.

III. INTRODUCTION

History of Pirivena education runs back to the Kalapasada Pirivena in Anuradhapura. In this long journey, the traditional Buddhist education has evolved amidst rise and fall by adding meaningful perspectives to the general education system in Sri Lanka. Pirivena is the place where large amount of local and foreign Bhikkus resided for educational purposes with lay people under a complex academic environment where three types of curriculum functioned alike: formal, informal and non- formal. Curriculum and the learning teaching process are two important aspects of Pirivena education. This study on Pirivena education would provide benefits for number of parties: policy makers, curriculum developers, administrators, teacher educators in numerous ways for strengthening the present education system in Sri Lanka.

IV. LITERATURE REVIEW

Maha Vihara (3rd Century B.C), Abhayagiri Vihara, (1st Century B.C.) and Jethavana Vihara (3rd Century A.D) were three main Buddhist educational centers disseminating knowledge on a wide variety of disciplines related to Buddhism (Mendis, Ratnayake, Ratnayake, Bandaranayake & Gunasena, 2006). These institutions which laid the foundation for higher learning situations continued for many centuries in Anuradhapura till the 11th Century A.D. (Wijerathne, 2008). In addition to these three Pirivenas (Piriven), Alahana Pirivena in Polonnaruwa is also considered as traditional educational center under the Kingdom of Rajarata in Polonnaruwa period. The progress prevailed in the Pirivena education during Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa period continued until the Europeans: Portuguese, Dutch and English invaded Sri Lanka. Invasion made by these nations which brought an immense disruption to monastic education in Sri Lanka in the middle of the last millennium (Bandaranayake, 2006). The syllabi in traditional Buddhist education had been divided in to two: Suta and Sippa. The "Suta" part included such subjects as Languages, Religion, Philosophy, History, Economics, and Geography, while the "Sippa" included skills such as Agriculture, Astrology, and Carpentry. The curriculum and the text books of modern Pirivena have to be updated to suit to modern requirements and education methodology (Ghanarathane, n.d.).

V. CURRICULUM AND THE PIRIVENA EDUCATION

Pirivena was not an institution which provided only the formal curriculum it was an institute which strengthened the informal and non-formal curriculum too alike. In ancient Pirivena, it was the place where young and small monks were

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trained by masters to follow the rules and regulations promulgated in the Vinaya Pitaka of the Buddha's teaching (Anguttaranikayattakatha, 53p, Hansa, 175). Medium of instruction was the Island language. Arahant Mahinda preached Dhamma in Island language to king Devanampiyatissa and his followers: Bhikku, Bhikkuni, Upasaka and Upasika (Mahavamsa, 65). Translation of commentaries which were in Magadhi language to Sinhalese language during the Anuradhapura period provides an evidence to decide that the medium of instruction of these Piriven was Island language (Dampiyaatuvu Gatapadaya, 56). Learning of "Magadhi" as a subject in Pirivena education became prominent due to academic activities launched by Rev. Buddhaghosa.

Maha Vihara, Abhayagiri Vihara and Jethavana Vihara functioned as three separate schools in the history of Pirivena education in Sri Lanka. Mahavihara Pirivena taught only the Theravada tradition at the very beginning. They rejected some subjects: Sanskrit, Dramas, Poems and Wars in Bharatha having considered them as subjects that should not be followed by a Buddhist monk since the learning experiences gather from those subjects do not support in reaching ultimate goal prescribed in Buddhism (Epigraphia Indica, Vol. I, 85p). According to the epistle Hansa, the chief incumbent of the Padmavathi pirivena rejected learning of 18 Puranas because of the reason mentioned above. But this traditional curriculum followed in Maha Vihara was changed into mixed mode with the introduction of Mahayana tradition by Bhikkus in Abhayagiri vihara and Jethavana Vihara. Mahayana Buddhism practiced by Abhayagiri tradition and Jethavana tradition became a part of the curriculum in Maha Vihara tradition too. Similarly, Abhayagiri and Jethavana Bhikkus too started studying the teachings in Theravada Buddhism with the passage of time for their existence. Sanskrit became a major subject in Abhayagiri School and Jethavana School since the teachings of Mahayana Buddhism prevailed in Sanskrit language. It is mentioned that Bhikkus in Abhayairivihara studied medical science, astronomy, astrology and other philosophical tradition emerged in India time to time. During the reign of King Walagamba, Abhayagiri Bhikkus have studied the doctrine of Vajjiputtaka (Nikaya Sangrahaya, 10-11pp). Latter part of the Anuradhapura period, teaching of Abhidhamma became prominent in the syllabi they taught. Teachers who taught Abhidhamma were paid a big salary (Vibhangattakatha, 347). Not only in Anuradhapura period but also in other periods too Abhidhamma was a part of the curriculum in pirivena education (Gira, 219). Sutta Pitaka (Gira, 220) Atthakatha and Teeka (Hansa, 174, Gira, 221), Grammar (Hansa, 174) Heranasika (Hansa, 172), Sikavalanda Vinisa (Hansa, 173), Nishrayadhrma (Hansa, 175), Chandas, Alankara and logic (Hansa, 181), Medical (Gira, 223), Astrology (Gira, 224) Tamil (Gira, 227) Poem & Drama (paravi, 208) were other subjects taught in the syllabi of the ancient Pirivenas. Classes have been conducted three times per day: morning, afternoon and evening.

At present, Major subjects learnt by the young and small monks who reside in Mulika Pirivena together with senior and erudite monks are Pali, Sanskrit, Sinhala, English, Tipitaka studies and Mathematics. In addition to these major subjects, History, Health Science, Geography, Sociology,

Fundamental Science, and Tamil are taught in Mulika Pirivena. The Maha Pirivena offers higher level of education with advanced knowledge allowing students to enter a variety of subjects including Philosophy, History of Religions, Linguistics, Ayurveda, and Astrology (<http://www.education.gov.lk/pirivena/English/index.php>). In addition to these subjects students in Maha Pirivena follow Sinhala, Pali, Sanskrit, Buddhism, Buddhist Civilization, and History as subjects which are taught in Advanced Level classes in the school system where general education is functioned. Classes for the examinations held by the Oriental Studies Society or by the Department of Examinations or by any University recognized by the Board shall be conducted in a Pirivena Vidyayathana (Pirivena Education: Act No.64 of 1979). Syllabi of Pirivena have been changed with the passage of time from spiritually to worldly. According to scholars, the curriculum and the text books of modern Pirivena have to be updated to suit to modern requirements and education methodology (Ghanarathane, n.d.).

The writer of epistle Hansa introduces Padmavathie Pirivena in Keragala as a heaven (Hansa, 157). Though there was an exaggeration to a certain extent it implies that the Keragala Padmavathie pirivena was an attractive place. According to this explanation, it can be decided that the informal curriculum of this Pirivena was very strong. The purpose of this well organized informal curriculum was to teach the order of life for both Bhikkus and lay people who studied there. Even the child in present school learns how to maintain the order in life through the informal curriculum of the school he/she learns. As the writer of epistle Gira (208) explains, the novice in Vijayaba Pirivena at Totagamuva are sympathetic. Animals who are roaming in the Arama premises receive and enjoy their love and affection because of soft skills they practice. Conference (Samanthapasadika, 50p), debate (Deganikayattakatha, 406p), festivals (Mahavamsa, 38:58, 59) picnics (Seehalavaththupakaranaya) held and organized in ancient monastery and Pirivenas testify that the non-formal curriculum of these institutes were well organized and productive.

The Piriven education has positively influenced in both higher education and general education system which cover primary and secondary education in Sri Lanka. To some scholars, the Pirivena system of education, has served as a model for modern education (Buddhistdoor International Sean Mós, 2014). Giving university status to Vidyodaya and Vidyalankara Pirivenas of Colombo in accordance with the act, in 1959 proves how the present university system was nourished by the ancient Pirivena education in Sri Lanka (Ibid). Ananda College and Nalanda College in Colombo, Dharmapala Vidyalaya in Pannipitiya, Dharamaraja College in Kandy, Mahinda College in Galle, Sangamitta Balika Vidyalaya in Galle illustrate how the Buddhist education has influenced the general education system in Sri Lanka. Musaeus Vidyalaya in Colombo testifies the influence of Buddhist education towards private school system in Sri Lanka.

The ancient Pirivena education which developed over two thousand three hundred years has contributed remarkably for the formation of the formal, informal and non-formal curriculum of the general education in Sri Lanka from its beginning to the present. Academic content of some subjects

taught in present school system have been prepared according to lessons taken from the traditional Buddhist education. To Nawastheen (2019), the curriculum in the school system has been influenced by the Buddhist thoughts and practices. Sinhala Language, fundamentals of Buddhist Literature (Punch, 2001) Pali and Sanskrit (Fernando, Senadheera, Senarathne, Soyza, (2010) were included to curriculum with the influence of traditional Buddhist education in Sri Lanka.

VI. LEARNING TEACHING PROCESS IN PIRIVEN EDUCATION

Listening (Suti, Anussava) was a mean of knowledge at the beginning of the monastery education which bears a long history dated back to the Vedic period (Shruti). Those who practised this tradition were known traditionalists (Jayathileke, 1963). Even in the Buddhist learning teaching process listening (Suta) was a primary learning method (M III, 7). But, students were motivated to inquire the accuracy of the learning experiences they collected by listening since the knowledge gain through listening is not correct at all the time. The learner may have heard what he learnt correctly or may not have heard it correctly. The truth of Anussava would have well-remembered it (sussutam pi hoti or ill-remembered it (dussutampi). The truth of Anussava would be true (tathā pi hoti) or it would be false (annathā) (M II). At the beginning of the traditional education literacy of the ordinary people was very low. Therefore, they had used to listen to more knowledgeable others and claim knowledge. Buthsarana in Polonnaruwa period and Jataka story book written during the period of Parakramabahu IV in Kurunegala were used for claiming knowledge by listening to someone.

“Rote learning” (Rote memory) which is considered as memorization of the learning experience based on the repetition is a regular learning method came into practice in the ancient pirivena education. Here, the learner has to constantly keep repeating learning experience he wants to learn. In brief, it is expected to keep in touch with learning experience through rote learning without forgetting it. Where there is rote memory no “extinction”. In pirivena education small monks are encouraged to gather in “Banamadu” (which is used for preaching Dhamma for a large amount of devotees at a time”) in the evening to recall by speaking out what they have learned previously. This method what was called in vermicular or Island language “Vanapothkireema” was a part of the routine in pirivena education.

Learning “by heart” was another main learning and teaching method practiced in the Pirivena education from its inception. Here, the learner was expected to learn something so well so that it could be recited without a much effort. Nampotha, Magulakuna, Buddhagajjaya, Ganadevihella, Vadankavipotha, Sakaskadaya, Namashtashatakaya and Prathyashathakaya, grammar in Sinhala, Pali and Sanskrit were books which promoted learning by heart in pirivena education.

“Learning by heart” and “learning by rote” are two different methods used in ancient traditional Buddhist education. In learning by heart, the learner learns one selected learning outcome or several specific learning outcomes relevant to one object so well that it can be recited later. But in rote

learning, the learner recalls and repeats one or more learning experiences. The nature of one’s memory is, extinction of the learning experience later due to lack of recalling or remembering (Clifford, Richard, John & John, (2010). But, rote learning would help the learner to remain the learnt experience without disappearing because of repetition. The ancient Bhanka traditions (words on mouth) were able to save and transmit Buddhist teachings even under a huge famine for future generations due to rote learning (rote memory).

However, these teaching methods have paved a way for creating an oral tradition in the history of Buddhist education from beginning to the present. Both teachers and students have strived for protecting the relevant learning teaching material having sacrificed their lives (Wickramanayake, 1999) by practising rote memory and learning by heart. It is mentioned about sixty Bhikkus who protected “Tripitaka” After the famine “Baminitiya” occurred during the reign of king Walagamba (Anguttaranikayaattakatha, 52p). Epistles Hansa and Gira written in Kotte periods illustrate how ancient people used rote learning and learning by heart in the childhood education and the lifelong education in order to retain what they learned (Hansa, 174, Gira, 118).

With the writing of Tripitaka on books in Aluvihara temple at Matale for the purpose of preserving and transmitting the extensive huge literature for the next generation endowed two common learning and teaching methods: reading and writing, to the traditional Buddhist education in Sri Lanka (Mahavamsa, 33, 03-104). Due to these two teaching methods there were numerous books written by local and foreign Bhikkus in the educational history of Sri Lanka from time to time Anuradhapura period to the present. Introduction of Jataka Story Book, Nampota, Magullakuna, Ganadevihella, Vadan Kavipotha, Sangaraja Saduhu Cariyava, Namashta Shatakaya and Pratyashathakaya to syllabi of pirivena education could remain “reading” as a learning method in pirivena education.

Story telling is one of the methods which can be used in moral education to cultivate socially and globally accepted values in the learner (Yokmn & Simpson, n.d.). This method has been used even the Buddha (Sutta Pitaka M: I, 308) and the teachers who followed the Buddha Gira, 114). Rasavahini, Jataka Story Book, Vyasakaraya and Hitopadesha are several common examples for teaching values through story telling in ancient Buddhist education. Most of the times, teachers used this method to provide best examples to students from the history. Question and answer method (M: III, 2) and lecture method (M: III, 256) are another two common teaching methods applied in teaching learning methods (Visuddhimagga, 479).

When the traditional education system is studied it is visible that model learning (Bandura, 1977) is not something introduced by western psychologists. It can be seen even in traditional Buddhist education too (Gira, 115). Discussion method added a meaningful context to the traditional Buddhist education from the time of the Buddha (MN: I). This method helps both the teacher and the student to understand intellectual capacity of each other (AN: II). There are some occasions where the discussion method used in Sri Lankan traditional Buddhist education too (Deeganikayattakatha: 406p). Debate is another learning

method practiced in the ancient education. Samanthapasadika Atthakatha mentions about a debate conducted between Mahavira and Abhayagiri Bhikkus (Samanthapasadika Atthakatha: 337).

The present education promotes the practical education in order to find solutions to problems faced by students in their day today lives through the learning experiences the claim. These practical education situations are visible in the traditional Buddhist education as illustrated in epistles (Gira, 221, Hansa, 172).

Teachers in ancient Pirivena who practised these teaching methods were exemplary characters with sound knowledge (Seehalavaththuppakaranaya, 78) and attitudes (Samathapasadika, 390p). Among the teachers some were specialists in languages (Salalihini, 111). Some were experts in Tripitaka (Hansa, 172). Some other Bhikkus were clever in fiction including Candas and Alankara (Gira, 227). And also there were both Bhikkus and lay teachers who were expert in writing books and writing on palm leaves (Mahvamsa 33: 3-104). Some teachers were master in meditation (Visuddhimagga, 71). Some teachers were psychologists (Anguttaranikayatthakatha, 26).

Teaching methods practiced in ancient Pirivena have contributed remarkably for the development of the general education system in Sri Lanka. Rote learning and learning by heart are not rejected by both the learner and the teacher even today in eastern and western educational contexts. Creation of practical learning situations which promotes child centered learning is not a newly implemented method by modern educationists. As we witnessed in the above discussion application of practical learning situations could be seen in ancient Buddhist education too. Lecture method and the discussion method are experienced in big classes in present classroom situations too. Storytelling is one of the methods used in value education even in both eastern and western approaches. Traditional Buddhist education is a pioneer contributor in model learning. Listening (Suti, Anussava, Shruti) method presented by the Buddha with a new approach is practiced the present teachers without allowing it be ruined. Reading and writing methods put into practiced after the period of king Walagamba, have become two distinct learning teaching methods even at present.

VII. CONCLUSIONS

The word “pirivena” was used to introduce the place where large amount of local and foreign Bhikkus resided for educational purposes with lay people under a complex academic environment where three types of curriculum functioned alike: formal, informal and non- formal. Then, the monastery, Arama, Vihara remained as a place free from formal education and these Bhikkus practice knowledge, attitudes and skills they needed for completion of the Bhikkhuhood. Priority was given for a spiritual curriculum in the ancient pirivena education. But, with the passage of time, this spiritual nature of the curriculum gradually changed in to worldly curriculum since the objectives were changed. Some scholars argue that curriculum in present pirivena should be changed according to the modern requirements. Numbers of teaching methods were practiced. The ancient Bhanka tradition (words on mouth) was able to save and transmit

Buddhist teachings even under a huge famine to future generations due to teaching methods: learning by heart rote learning (rote memory). Teachers were expert. This traditional Buddhist education has influence in many ways for the higher education and the general education system in Sri Lanka.

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