2.57 Temple and Pirivena Library Collection in Polonnaruwa District: an Assessment

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ABSTRACT

The study focuses on the collections of library materials in Temple and Pirivena libraries in the Polonnaruwa District.

Words "Temple", Monastery" and "Pirivena" are near synonyms. After the arrival of Arhat Mahinda to Sri Lanka in 3rd century B.C., temples and monasteries devoted to religious activities, including Bhikkhu education had flourished throughout the country. In these institutes education was given to laymen also. In spite of successive foreign invasions the country was able to maintain a strong tradition of temple and pirivena libraries for the purpose of educating people. Polonnaruwa had been the second capital in Sri Lanka where a large number of libraries were built by kings Parakramabahu the Great and Vijayabahu the Great. Although these ancient libraries are in ruins at present, there are many temple and pirivena libraries in the area.

A quantitative survey was done to gather data on the theme. The survey covered the aspects such as the size of the collection, collection development policy, types of materials in the collections, subject categories, organization and location, physical conditions of the collections, sources of funding, users and their information needs, and accessibility to collections. Questionnaires and personal observations were the basic data gathering instruments.

Data analysis revealed that in most of the libraries the collections are inadequate to fulfill the user needs. Printed materials in the collections found to be outdated. Ola manuscripts in some of the collections were not properly maintained. In general the collections were not properly organized and cared for. As a result the physical conditions of the materials were very poor. In certain libraries the collections were not accessible. Lack of funding and well trained librarians as well as non existence of collection development policies seemed to be the fundamental reasons for the overall unsatisfactory status of affair.

Need for more funding, trained library personnel, provision of electronic sources including Internet, increasing accessibility are among the suggestions for the development of existing collections of these libraries.