

Early roots of Sri Lankan education system: with special reference to 4th - 20th centuries

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The first recorded seat of learning in Sri Lankan history is Pandulagama where the prince Pandukabhaya was educated by a wealthy learned Brahmin named Pandula in Vedic Literature. Introduction of Buddhism to Sri Lanka during the reign of king Devanampiyathissa was the turning point of Sri Lankan history of education and soon after the establishment of Buddhist Order the great Buddhist learning centre named Mahavihara came into being. New Pirivenas built in the early part of Anuradhapura period. This system of education continued up to Kotte period. The Kotte period is considered as the zenith of Pirivena education. A long list of great scholars who were educated in these educational institutions is given in Nikaya Snagaha, a Sinhala chronicle. The kings of Sri Lanka extended their patronage to these Pirivenas. They also were educated in these institutions.

Education was subjected to various changes under the western administration and a new system of institutions appeared under Missionaries. The both school system and Pirivena System are functioning simultaneously. The purpose of this study is to look into the evolutionary process of education in Sri Lanka. The objectives of this study are; finding out the courses and forces that are effected on educational development and decline, identification of the good qualities in the early system of education to implement in modern context to promote the social values and norms, and identification of good features in early system of education which can be applied to succeed the present education system.

This study will be limited to the religious and secular education which were prevailing in the early period and the curriculum which were followed in each particular period in educational institutions and the contribution of scholars to the art of writing. This study covers the period from 4th century B.C. to the 20th century.

Methodology of the study is constituted with historical and comparative methods. Basically, all relevant data were collected through the available literature and the literature survey through using university libraries.

Evolution of early Sri Lankan Education went along with social needs passing various kinds of barriers to the present day. Learned Buddhist monks and respective kings have made their contribution in to a great extent for the development process of Sri Lankan education system. On the other hand, some foreign invaders have tried to destroy the continuation of the traditional education system. Meanwhile, it has influenced by the Western scholars during the colonial administration. However with various down falls and declines, the educational system has reached to a satisfactory level up to now.

Key words: Education, Buddhist monasteries, Western administration, Pirivenas, Sri Lanka

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