

A COMPARATIVE STUDY ON THE MORAL PERSPECTIVE OF THE EDUCATION SYSTEM PRESCRIBED BY PLATO AND THE PIRIVENA SYSTEM OF EDUCATION IN SRI LANKA

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Introduction

One of the significant features of the “new” education was the development of educational theories. Plato was the earliest important Greek philosopher and educationist in the history of western education. Several research topics have discussed the Platonic system and its influence on the modern theories of education in the western world. The best -known aspect of Plato’s educational thought is his portrayal of the ideal society in the *Republic* in which the goal is to produce citizens who are capable of playing their part in the civic community. Plato sets out the outline and the curriculum of an educational system in the *Republic* and believed that education is not simply a narrow vocational training but a moral formation of the man.

The system of education in Sri Lanka has its own historical development. The concept of education was first found in the education of the monks in monasteries with the introduction of Buddhism to the country after the arrival of Ven. Mahinha Thero. Education was imparted solely by monasteries. With the establishment of the *Pirivena*, the foundation was laid for the development of a Sri Lankan education system.

This study discusses two education systems developed in ancient Greece and in Sri Lanka. This paper undertakes a comparative study on moral perspective of the system of education prescribed by Plato in his dialogues and the *Pirivena* system of education in Sri Lanka before the colonial period. The object of this study is to examine the resemblances through the moral perspectives of the respective education systems.

Methodology

This investigation is mainly based on library research. Plato’s *Republic* is the primary source used in this study. The Pirivena Education Act of 1979, inscriptions, interviews and field visits to selected *Privena* institutions helped to obtain information regarding the *Pirivena* system

of education in Sri Lanka. Both Plato's education system and the *Pirivena* system of education were studied separately to analyze the information gathered from the research.

Results and Discussion

The findings of the study indicated that both systems of education are based on an ethical foundation where ethics and virtues are not only significant for the mental, social, economic development and moral leadership of individuals but also in forming a virtuous society. Plato's education system developed in ancient Greece and the *Pirivena* system of education in ancient Sri Lanka emphasize on the importance of moral education of pupils. In both education systems young children were given an ethical education to create a morally empowered nation.

In the Platonic education system all three classes of people were given a moral education through the curriculum in order to create good citizens in the future. Moral education aimed at producing a virtuous society. Bravery, moderation, justice and temperance are among the virtues that Plato wished to inculcate into his students through his system of education. Plato gives special attention to the moral and ethical education of the citizens in his ideal state and his education system includes the study of social and political conditions of morality.

In *Pirivena* education, both lay pupils and the *bhikkhus* received moral education through the Buddhist ethics. The objectives of moral education in *Pirivena* education included the mental, social, economic and character, development of the lay people which is promoted through Buddhism. The building of a virtuous society depended on the moral goodness of the people. Therefore, moral education is necessary to inculcate harmony in the society by preserving the traditional values.

Both the Platonic education system and *Pirivena* education aim to and depend on discipline. Plato intends to produce a nation of disciplined citizen. Therefore, discipline is a required quality not only for the individualistic development but also for social and economic development of the state. Self-discipline is necessary for each individual engaged in fulfilling different tasks or services in accordance with the social structure of the ideal state.

In the Pirivena education system, discipline is important for the *bhikkhus* and for lay pupils. Discipline is more important for meditation as it involves the body and mind and it is a method of taking control of the mind. Hence, discipline is necessary for the *bhikkhus* to study the profound teaching of Buddhism. The discipline of all citizens is also important to maintain peace and harmony of the state. Therefore, in both education systems discipline plays a specific role in moral education.

Another significant objective of both education systems is the moral leadership. In the Platonic education system, the production of an intelligent, philosophical, governing class becomes the ultimate aim. However, in *Pirivena* education the development of moral leadership was considered more important. The prevalence and prosperity of any state depends on the conduct and administration of a good leader. Furthermore, the educated monks became the educators of the society and their main function was to guide the citizens to lead a better and virtuous life. Therefore, in both education systems the development of moral leadership is important.

Conclusion

The systems of education proposed by Plato and that practiced in Sri Lankan *Pirivenas* embrace many ideas and principles that are no less valuable because they are old. Despite the different socio-cultural and socio-political scenarios and the time frame within which these education systems operated and developed, both systems noted the importance of giving moral education and good ethical training to their pupils.

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