

Re-formation of Education in Conformity with Cultural Environments: A Study on Sri Lankan and Thai Systems

David T Gamage^{1*}, Jaratdao Suwarnabroma²

¹Faculty of Education & Arts, University of Newcastle, Australia

²Siam University, Thailand

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*For Correspondence

David T Gamage, Department of Education & Arts, University of Newcastle, Australia, Tel: 61 2 4921 5000

E-mail: david.gamage@newcastle.edu.au

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ABSTRACT

This paper is based on analyses of historical documents and scholarly reviews relating to Lanka and Thailand; focusing on how Buddhist teachings shaped the cultural traditions. Sri Lankan history begins in 543 BC, with the migration of Sinhala people from Northern India influenced by Hindi traditions. In 243 BC a Buddhist mission to Lanka resulted from a friendship between Indian and Lankan monarchs leading to Lankans embracing Buddhism. Thereafter, Buddhist teachings had a huge impact in shaping the education and culture whereby temples became centers of education and between 89-76 BC, Buddhist Doctrine commissioning into writing in Sinhala. This event improved the image of Lanka, amongst Buddhist countries greatly. Medieval-times became the Golden Age of education consolidating relations with China, Siam, Burma, Cambodia, and Laos. From 1505, Christian missionary campaigns adversely affected indigenous education; yet, a revival occurred since 1880. Currently, it has a Western model education system complemented by a pirivena system, integrated with Buddhist culture in harmony with Hinduism, Islam and Christianity. Thailand's developments goes back to pre-historic times resulting in several ethnic groups merging into one Thai nation. However, Thailand's documented history commences from 1220. Thai education was influenced by India, Burma and Lanka whereby education offered at temples/monasteries and households playing dominant roles through the Ayutthaya to Thonburi, and Bangkok periods. Unlike Lanka, Thailand could remain independent from Western colonial rule. But, missionary campaigns since 1868 to convert Thai people into Christianity resulted in the reformation of formal education with state intervention. Thereafter, she experienced three phases of reforms, education becoming both ecclesiastical and secular. Buddhist teachings are being provided at all levels of education as a way of living. Reforms of 1999 were implemented with Self-Governing Schools. Education systems of both countries were developed in conformity with the cultural environments enriched by religion and mutual interactions.

LANKAN EDUCATION FROM 543 BC AND ITS REFORMATION SINCE 243 BC

Sri Lanka was known by several names such as 'Lanka'; 'Sinhale'; 'Serendib'; 'Zeilan'; and 'Ceylon'. But, in 1972, along with the promulgation of a republican constitution, the original name was resumed with an honorific 'Sri' in front to call 'Sri Lanka'. From 543 BC, education commenced with the Brahmi and Hindi traditions. A re-formation of education occurred with the arrival of the Buddhist Mission headed by Arahata Mahinda sent by Indian Emperor Ashoka with the message that every person whether

a man or a woman has a right to be educated. Thus, Buddhist temples and monasteries became centers of education. It is from the Brahmi script that Sinhala alphabet has evolved. The inhabitants who were predominantly Buddhists held education in a high esteem. Teacher, student relations were very cordial in keeping with the principles enunciated by Buddha, the teachers were highly respected. The art of writing was much more laborious and artistic than today. Some children attended the village temple while others attended lay-teachers' houses for their elementary education. Most children did not proceed beyond elementary education and started learning some arts or crafts to prepare for life. Monasteries/pirivenas' provided higher education ^[1,2]. Perhaps, as the Buddhist monks and nuns were enjoined as lifelong learners they were responsible for the advancement of education ^[3].

On the advice of Arahata Mahinda, reigning monarch built two monasteries called 'Mahavihara' (Great Monastery) and Mihintale' along with dwellings for resident monks. Later, these institutions started interacting with similar institutions in the Indian sub-continent. Subsequently, some of these became reputed centers of higher learning not only for the monks but also for the royalty and the laymen. Although the historical documents authored by the monks have not included information relating to engineering, architecture and medicine; the arte-facts found in abundance amongst ancient ruins, reveal the heights to which these fields had been developed ^[4].

CONSTRUCTION & HYDRAULIC ENGINEERING DURING THE ANCIENT & MEDIEVAL PERIODS

During the Second Century BC, the King Dutugamunu had constructed a nine-storey Brazen Palace on 1600 granite-columns for Mahavihara along with Ruwanweli Dagaba. Referring to the high quality of ancient engineering works, Williams ^[5], has estimated that 500 brick-layers working British trade union time would have taken 14 years to build a monument similar to Ruwanweli. Abhayagiri which is 450 feet in height and another called Jetavanaramaya (both bigger than Ruwanweli) had been built in the 1st Century BC and 3rd Century AD respectively by his successors. Mahawatta ^[6] refers to 'Jethavanaramaya' as the largest and tallest brick monument in the world.

Williams also asserts that beyond the Egyptian great pyramid of Cheops; he had not seen anything to compare with the three dagabas at the ancient capital - Anuradhapura, ^[5]. By the 3rdC, these had become reputed centers of education and had 2000; 3000; and 5000 resident scholars as reported in Fa-Hsien's travels ^[7]. These are the Asian forerunners of the medieval universities of Europe ^[8-11]. During the reign of Vattagamani Abhaya 89-76 B.C., the Buddhist Canon Law consisting of 592,000 stanzas, transmitted orally, had been commissioned to writing for the first time at Aluvihara at Matale and became the orthodox version of Theravada Doctrine. This added to the prestige of Lanka within the Buddhist world. It was to make copies of some of these scriptures that the Chinese scholar Fa-Hsien visited Lanka in 411 AD and stayed for two years ^[8,12]. Williams also asserts that the ruins of Polonnaruwa were discovered in 1820 by an English army officer, where large central buildings provide proof of the splendor and dignity of the capital while archaeological excavations suggest that it had been enormous, similar to the modern City of London.

Vijayabahu, who assumed the throne in 1070, made Polonnaruwa his capital. It was during his reign that Lanka had first political contact with Burma, then known as Ramanna ^[13-15]. The zenith of glory of Polonnaruwa was achieved during Parakramabahu the Great (1153- 1186) who established relations with Burma and Thailand (Siam). His long reign had marked a giant step in good governance and revival of literary activities. He had built eight monasteries and 75 pirivenas, libraries and hospitals. The inner precinct of the city was surrounded by three moats and four fortified walls, the first of which was 12ft thick ^[16,17]. The seven story king's palace could be seen even today with up to three storeys of ruins along with 10 feet thick exterior walls to prevent the excessive heat entering the palace. Vijayabahu and Parakramabahu had restored monasteries destroyed by the invading Cholas, apart from building new ones, leading to a reawakening of religious and intellectual activities promoting learning and scholarship. The King himself being a scholar had produced a translation of Pali Dhammasangani ^[18,19].

An Indian historian named Law, has described Parakramabahu's reign 1153-1186 as the most important period of political and educational development as he had constructed beautiful monasteries, libraries, gardens and reservoirs. During his reign a systematic compilation of sub commentaries had taken place. A large number of literary works had been composed in Sinhala, Pali and Sanskrit followed by a great revival of literary activities. The Royal Charter known as Polonnaru Katikawata (found in a rock inscription) for the unification and guidance of monks had improved the prestige of Lanka amongst Buddhist countries ^[18,20,21]. At the time, there had been a well-developed higher education system with corporate institutions. It is interesting to note that it was in 1158, Italian Emperor Barbarossa granted the First Imperial Charter to the Italian scholars leading to the establishment of University of Bologna ^[21].

Nicholas, an irrigation expert ^[22] asserts that King Parakramabahu had constructed and restored 163 major reservoirs including 'Sea of Parakrama'. The Sea of Parakrama is the largest reservoir in the country with an 8 1/2 miles long bund, rising up-to 40 feet in height which is a living engineering marvel of ancient Lanka ^[23]. Brohier ^[24] a British colonial service surveyor who had mapped out and studied thousands of reservoirs providing irrigated water has commended the work of Sri Lankan hydraulic engineers during the ancient and medieval times. His calculations reveals that Parakrama-Samudra's bund contained 4.5 million

cubic-yards of earthwork which would have taken 12 years for 1000 men working a 24 hour-day to complete. Law ^[25] asserted that the immense prosperity and internal tranquility had given rise to an illustrious band of scholars, who made this epoch the Golden Age of Lankan literature.

EVOLUTION OF THE THAI SYSTEM OF EDUCATION

Origin of Thailand goes back to pre-historic times where there were a number of ethnic groups inhabiting the land. Later these groups have merged together to form the Thai nation. The country was also called 'Siam' from 1856 and regained its original name as Thailand in 1939. There appears to be no documented records until the early 13th Century. However, many artefacts such as stone tools, pottery and metallic tools belonging to before and after Agricultural age and metallic age have been discovered and are preserved in the museums ^[25]. The origin of the education system can be traced back to 1220 AD when Sukhothai was Thailand's capital. Office of the National Education Council ^[25-28] asserts that the developmental process can be discussed under four main periods: 1) Traditional education, 2) Foundation of the formal education, 3) Modernized education for national development, and 4) The new era of national education.

During the period of traditional education from 1220-1868, there was no formal education, as it is perceived in the contemporary world. Perhaps, influenced by the religious contacts with India, Burma and Lanka, Education was offered in the Buddhist temples/monasteries/households and the King's palace. Children were offered non-formal learning in agricultural and social skills in the context of social norms of extended families ^[28]. For boys the temples provided a broader framework of socialization and intellectual quality, valued by the society. The aims of the monastic education were essentially ethical and religious, with literacy as a preparation for the monastic life. Education later became both ecclesiastical and secular. It was organized in the temples for commoners and individual scholars' houses for princes, princesses and the children of nobility. The monasteries continued to play a dominant role in Thai education through the Ayutthaya period up to Thonburi and early Bangkok periods ^[26].

In those days, the monastic schools as well as community schools were preparing pupils for life in the society at large ^[29]. Similar to Sri Lanka, it is difficult to extract information on Thai education without an inquiry into Buddhism. The girls were not given any formal education at that time. In ordinary households girls were taught the art of handicraft, weaving, sewing, cooking and helping their mothers and relatives. In royal circles, the Inner Palace became a school for women and girls, of the nobility. Daughters of nobility were sent to live in the palace to gain education in crafts and etiquette.

Currently, Buddhist teachings are provided in schools, other institutions and universities as a way of living. Thailand also places emphasis on celebrating important Buddhist events, such as Vesak-Day and Magha-Puja Day by declaring such important days as public holidays and encouraging Buddhists to have family activities. There are many projects relating to Buddhist way of life organized by the Department of Religious Affairs, of the Ministry of Culture to support Buddhism in ways such as:

- Temple-Based Management, where a temple is used as a base for community to network their knowledge and practice;
- Sunday Buddhist Education Centers, where temples offer classes in Buddhism;
- Citizens' Handbook on Buddhist Family Activities;
- Ethic Games;
- Virtual Buddha World – Thailand;
- Buddhist stories and Dharma Short Films;
- Cyber Meditation in Virtual Buddha World; and
- Prayer Handbook ^[30].

DEVELOPMENTS WITHIN SRI LANKA FROM 1236-1796

Even though the religion had to share the political instability, there were many achievements in literature resulting from a revival of secular scholarship. This literary revival was achieved during the reigns of Dambadeniya and Kurunegala monarchs, with literary works of a historical and legendary nature based on popular objects of veneration such as the Tooth Relic and Sacred Bo-Tree ^[31]. Gampola period had marked a departure with 'Sandesa Kavyas' similar to Kalidasa's highly acclaimed Meghaduta (Cloud-Messenger) composed following the South Indian tradition. During Parakramabahu VI of Kotte who ruled the whole country, there was a great advancement of literary and religious activities. Totagamuwe Sri Rahula, who was a specialist in six languages; Ven. Vidagama Maitreya; and Ven. Keragala Vanaratana had given learning and culture a great impetus after several centuries.

The Portuguese who landed in the Island in 1505 were able to get a foot-hold in the affairs of the island when King Dharmapala of Kotte donated his kingdom to King Henry of Portugal in 1558. Thus, by 1620s, the Portuguese became the masters of the coastal-belt by leaving only the kingdom at Kandy along with the Eastern-coast. In 1567, Portuguese banned Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam and resorted to preaching and teaching with state patronage to missionary schools ^[31]. With the

establishment of the Portuguese rule in the coastal belt, the Kandyan kingdom became the only link between the monarchy and Buddhism. In 1637, the Dutch succeeded Portuguese and persecuted Catholics, Buddhists and Hindus to spread Protestantism. Religion was promoted through education with a school at every church. The temple properties were confiscated and given to churches. In this context, Buddhism found a comfortable home at Kandy, where it flourished in the 17th and 18th Centuries under the watchful eyes of the monarchs^[32]. At a time when Buddhism was declining, the formation of the 'Brotherhood of the Pious', by Rev. Valivitiye Saranankara in the 18th Century, made a remarkable effort to revive it with the assistance of King Narendrasinghe. A monastic college was established and it became the Centre of learning in the kingdom. In 1753, a group of Thai monks arrived during the reign of Kirti Sri Rajasinghe. These Thai monks re-established Higher Ordination and were instrumental in helping the re-assertion of the primacy of Buddhist symbols and practices over those of Hinduism. A new sect of Sangha called 'Siam Sect' was also established^[15,33].

BRITISH RULE IN CEYLON AND PROBLEMS WITHIN THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

In 1796, the coastal belt of Lanka ruled and named by the Dutch as 'Zeilan' was surrendered to the British and for them Zeilan became Ceylon. In 1802, the British Governor ordered all Protestants, Mudaliyars and Headmen to send their children to the Parish schools with no recognition to Buddhist and Hindu schools^[34]. In 1815, as the last king of Kandy became a terror, the Chieftains captured and handed over him to the British Governor on condition that Buddhism is inviolable along with the signing of the Kandyan Convention of 1815. Accordingly, British agreed to maintain and protect Buddhist religious rites, clergy and places of worship. Governor encouraged Christian missions to promote education and Christianity. All Parish schools were required to teach Sinhalese and Tamil whereas Colombo Academy provided English education up-to secondary level to prepare lower level employees to colonial administration. Several private English schools too were^[34].

John Davy who was the medical officer to the British Army from 1815 to 1820 asserted that Sinhala was much admired by the people. It was carefully and generally studied in the interior. Reading and writing were almost as general as in England amongst the males. Every priest with Higher Ordination was acquainted with Pali and Sanskrit in addition to 'Sinhala'. Writing was neat and books were formed with Talipot or Palm leaves and were bounded by boards. Ceylonese books were durable and pretty numerous; subjects of writing were theology, poetry, history, medicine and astrology. The books were composed both in prose and verse^[21,35]. In 1829, the Colonial Government appointed the Colebrook Commission of Inquiry. The Report appreciated the efforts of Christian Missionaries and private schools for providing education at no cost to government and recommended the closure of government schools and was not interested in indigenous languages. It recommended a Schools Commission for the government schools which were small in number and poorly managed due to lack of resources. The Commission totally ignored the ancient indigenous education maintained by the Buddhist clergy. The Government implemented all its recommendations except establishing a university college.

In 1865, the Schools Commission was replaced by a department headed by a director of Public Instructions for the purpose of extending primary education in Sinhala and Tamil^[36]. 1870-1878 was a period of transition from religious to a secular education. By 1880, the transition was complete and the 1880 legislation sought to withdraw grants-in-aid from schools which failed to comply with the requirements of secular education. During the coffee crisis from 1879-1887, some government schools were handed over for the management by the private sector. However, the period 1896-1900 marked a period of harmony and cooperation^[37]. During the 19th Century a partnership evolved between the missionaries and private providers with the government sector. The Census Report 1901, expressed grave concerns revealing that out of a total of 867,103 children, 650,000 did not attend schools due to lack of facilities. Hence, during early 20th Century, an agitation for universal compulsory education was launched by many organizations. In 1905, a Government Commission was critical on the inefficiency of the education system. In 1919, the Governor ordered that except in schools with a majority of students of a particular denomination, others are replaced with government schools.

By the mid-19th Century, due to pressure from the Anglican Church, the colonial administration severed its connection with Buddhism. This loss of state support led to another period of decline of the Buddhist educational institutions. In 1862, there was an attempt to confiscate Buddhist temple/monastery lands for the coffee plantation in Kandy. This was prevented only with the intervention of Colonel H.S. Olcott who was an American philanthropist, by getting the matter raised in the British House of Commons. Yet in 1865, many temple lands were confiscated by rejecting claims of the temples^[33]. Nineteenth Century became the heyday of missionary education while the opposition to the conversion of indigenous people to Christianity was growing. The Panadura Debate of 1873, in which Rev. Migettuwatte Gunananda's triumph over Christian debaters gave a fillip to the revival of Buddhism. Once the newspaper reports of the Debate reached USA, Colonel Olcott and Madame Blavatsky became interested in Buddhism and started supporting Buddhist movement. In 1875, he established the Buddhist Theosophical Society in New York on the motto 'The Best Religion is nothing but the truth'. One of the main objectives of the society was the promotion of Buddhist education.

In 1880, Col Olcott and Madam Blavatsky arrived in Ceylon and became Buddhists. He established the Buddhist Theosophical Society (BTS) in Colombo. In 1886, Anagarika Dharmapala became the BTS Secretary and through his wisdom and Olcott's support, Buddhist schools were established. These included Ananda, Nalanda, Dharmapala, Dharmaraja, Mahinda for boys and

Visakha, Mahamaya and Sangamitta for girls, in different parts of the country which are leading colleges in the modern times^[38]. During this period, the two centers of Oriental learning known as Vidodaya and Vidyalankara Pirivenas founded with the initiatives of Buddhist clergy in 1873 and 1876, were developing as centers of higher learning. These two actively participated in promoting the Buddhist system of education and Buddhism. In 1918, Anagarika Dharmapala got Vesak Full-Moon-Day declared as a public holiday^[21,31]. At this time, even Tamils and Muslims were concerned with the impact of Christianity on Hindu and Islamic education^[39].

CORRECTIVE MEASURES TO EDUCATION SYSTEM AFTER INDEPENDENCE

The British education system had many short-comings. Several English educationists - Walter Sendall and J.J.R. Bridge who were key colonial officials pointed out that it trained colony's young men and women to look down with contempt on the traditional culture and to be hangers on 'at offices' looking for jobs. 1947 Education Ordinance made provision for instruction to pupils in their respective faiths at government schools to meet the criticisms. Accordingly, most schools entered the free education system, resulting in: 1) Non-fee-levying government schools, 2) Non-fee-levying denominational schools, and 3) Fee-levying private schools. The schools in category 1 were solely financed by the state; schools in category 2 received a grants-in-aid plus teachers' salaries whereas schools in category 3 involved no cost to the state. Hence, public opinion was mounting against the dual control of education as the government had to spend for both categories of schools. In 1954, the All Ceylon Buddhist Congress established a Commission of Inquiry and it recommended that the state should take the full responsibility and control of education. This report became a powerful instrument for public agitation highlighting injustices done to Buddhists and indigenous system during 310 years of Portuguese and Dutch rules within the coastal areas and within the whole country by British since 1815^[40].

In 1960, during Mrs. Sirimavo Bandaranayake's Premiership the government enacted the Assisted Schools and Training Colleges (Special Provisions) Act. In terms of the Act, all grant-in-aid schools including Buddhist schools and their assets were vested in the Government for the administration of schools. Reforms were implemented under then Minister of Education Al Haj Badi-ud-din Mahmud^[40]. In 1961, a National Education Commission (NEC) was appointed for establishing a Unified System of Education affecting quantitative and qualitative changes^[41]. In 1972, with the formation of a Republic under the leadership of the world's first Woman Prime Minister Mrs. Sirimavo Bandaranaike, the new Constitution resumed the country's original- name 'Lanka' with an honorific term 'Sri' in front.

The election of a conservative government in 1977 resulted in drastic changes to the constitutional framework whereby elected Prime-Minister became an Executive President in 1978. It was during this period that the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) started its violent campaign for a separate state. In 1987, 13th Amendment to the Constitution was introduced as a solution to the ethnic problem at the behest of the Indian Government for the decentralization and devolution of authority to provinces. But, the LTTE rejected this offer of goodwill by assassinating the Indian Prime-Minister - Rajiv Gandhi and a Sri Lankan President - R. Premadasa. However, in 1988, Provincial Councils were established with a Ministerial Council headed by a Chief Minister for each province and a provincial Education Minister and a Director. In 1993, Divisional Education Offices were established and in 1995, these were transformed into Zonal Educational Offices headed by Zonal Directors.

A Youth Commission and a National Education Commission (NEC) were appointed in 1989 and 1991 respectively to address issues confronting the youths and the issues of quality and contents to re-structure the education system. The NEC proposed a set of national goals to match the educationally relevant national objectives to address the problems confronting the country^[42]. Based on these the reforms in the general education were introduced and implemented at primary and secondary levels from 1999. A Task Force divided reforms into five major areas such as: I) Educational Opportunity; II) Improving Quality of Education; III) Developing Practical and Technical Skills; IV) Education and Training of Teachers; and V) Management and Resources Provisions. In 2000, English medium was introduced at GCE/AL Science extending to other streams later. From 2002, English medium was re-introduced to Grade 6 emphasizing the significance of acquiring English proficiency, as the major link language to the world.

In November 2005, Mahinda Rajapaksa was elected as the Executive President with a mandate to implement the policies embodied in a document called Mahinda Vision. At the time, the country was ruled as two separate entities due to LTTE's violent terrorist campaign and a Cease-Fire Agreement (CFA) brokered by Norway in 2001. However, there were thousands of CFA violations leading to the killing of politicians, security forces personnel and innocent civilians by the LTTE resulting in over 70,000 deaths since 1978. At this time the entire South of the country was gripped with a fear psycho as suicide bombers targeted trains, buses, public buildings, markets and schools. In respect of national education, he pledged to continue free education from kindergarten through to university while developing science and technology to a higher standard. When repeated invitations to LTTE for negotiations failed, the war between the LTTE and government security forces broke-out resulting from the closure of Mavil-Aru Reservoir by LTTE^[43]. Thus, on 19th May 2009, the President realized his vision of a free, sovereign Sri Lanka by achieving a remarkable victory and uniting the whole country after 30 years. The security forces also rescued around 280,000 Tamil civilians trapped in the war zone held as a human shield by the LTTE. This event has dawned a new era enabling the developments in educational, social and economic spheres much faster while preserving the national heritage and culture^[44,45].

However, on a careful reflection of the historical developments since 1815, evidence and statistics suggest that after the

Rebellion of 1818 against the British, colonial rulers had followed a policy of divide and rule by bestowing a privileged position to the minority to dominate over the majority. Thus, at the time of 1948 Independence, inequality within public service, higher education, and professions had a wide margin when compared to the population ratios. Yet, it appears to be a grave mistake to dishonour the agreement by the political leaders for making both Sinhala and Tamil, official languages. The declaration of Sinhala as the only official language in 1956 aroused the suspicion, drifting the two communities apart. The effective implementation of language policy could help eliminate a major point of frustration amongst the Tamil minority. It was in such a context that in 2005 the government made it compulsory to teach Tamil to Sinhala and Sinhala to Tamil children at schools with English as a link-language. Currently, the education system is being developed to meet the demands of an increasing population. As a response to the competition to enter popular schools in cities, 1000 secondary schools with facilities for science, technology, commerce and art streams catering to the needs of secondary students are being developed. While the admissions to universities are being increased, a significant number of colleges in technology too have been established to meet the demand from those who leave schools after year 10 and 12. In addition to free education from Kindergarten through to university, thousands of scholarships are being granted to needy students to pay for their board and lodging.

DEVELOPMENTS WITHIN THAI EDUCATION SYSTEM SINCE 1868

In 1868, when formal education was being introduced, religious tolerance practiced in terms of Buddhist culture enabled the missionaries to appeal to Thai people extensively. The missionary impact on Thai education increased enormously in the late 19th Century, which encouraged the monarchy to establish and develop a state education system. This had an influence on King Chulalongkorn's determination to launch the first phase of educational reforms in Thailand. Thus, the first public school for commoners was established in 1884, followed by the opening of a large number of public schools for ordinary citizens in Bangkok and other parts of the country. The National Education Plan of 1898 took place as the first organized development in education [27-29]. In 1902, a Royal Decree proclaimed that the government would provide education for all citizens throughout the kingdom and this phase of development during the reign of Chulalanorn or Rama continued until 1910, followed by further expansion and development of the system later [46]. During the early 1930s the Thai education system was modernized with the revision of educational policies and plans. In 1932 a National Scheme of Education was promulgated extending compulsory education from five to six years. The 1936 National Scheme divided the education system into general and vocational streams and reduced the compulsory education to four years. Higher education was promoted, while adult education as well as special education was initiated.

In 1951, the new National education Scheme was promulgated, declaring that educational development was the prime concern of the government. The reorganization of government administrative systems at national, regional and local levels took place in 1952 resulting in the establishment of many new educational units. One of the newly established key institutions was the National Education Council (NEC). In 1959, it was renamed as the Office of the National Education Commission (ONEC). In 1960, another scheme of Education was promulgated providing for a long-term policy framework. Accordingly, the First National Education Development Plan from 1961-1966 was formulated [27-29,47]. In 1932 with the transforming of absolute monarchy to a constitutional monarchy, the military power was growing. During the military leader Thanom's dictatorial rule, Thailand was strictly controlled, even banning a gathering of more than five people. This resulted in student activism from the early 1970s leading to the formation of the National Student Centre (NSC) resulting in a series of events [48].

STUDENT RIOTS LEADING TO REFORMS IN GOVT. STRUCTURES IN EDUCATION

By October 1973, there were demands for changes to the bureaucratic administrative structures in education. In the process of second set of educational reforms, educational policies were introduced to increase rural access to schooling, improve the administrative system, and strengthen curricula and the learning processes. At this stage, quality of education became one of the priorities; university students too became actively involved in demanding reforms [27,29]. As a result, on 6th October, the ruling junta of military leaders arrested the student leader and 10 student activists for distributing leaflets demanding a new constitution and new administrative structures for education. Three days later, around 2000 students gathered at Thammasat University for a rally to attack the government. At this stage the government offered to release the students on bail but students demanded unconditional release. By 13th, demonstrations had dramatically escalated with close to 100,000 students packing Rajdamnern Avenue from one end to the other, carrying Thai flag and pictures of their Majesties the King and the Queen. On 14th the government announced the unconditional release of students promising a new constitution within a year but demonstrations escalated and confrontations between the demonstrators and police and military resulted in the deaths of hundreds of students and people. Thousands of civilians joined the students and some key buildings were set on fire. At this stage, the three Army generals met the king and agreed to tender their resignations. This opened the door for the second phase of reforms. By late evening, the king announced the appointment of a university academic as the Prime Minister of an interim government in a transition to a genuine democracy. On 15th, it was revealed that the three generals had gone into exile. With this news, the demonstrators changed their mood and got together and cleared the mess created by riots.

The changes affected after the October 1973 revolt were so dramatic it moved the country towards genuine reforms with the promulgation of the 1997 constitution and educational reforms [48,49]. Mainly due to the Asian Financial Crisis of the late 1990s'

the third phase of Thai educational reforms were introduced in October 1997. Once the new constitution was promulgated, it set out the key guidelines relating to education for the revitalisation of the national economy by developing the country's human resources. For this purpose, one of the main objectives of the guidelines was to reform the administrative structures for better and efficient coordination of the relevant organizations while empowering the people to contribute in solving educational issues and problems through participation in institutional or school based management ^[50].

By 1997, the enrolment rate in Thai six-year primary education for 6-11 year olds was 90.7%. In 2001, it was projected that 99.6% of the 6-11 would have access to education. The assessment of primary student's knowledge in Thai Language, English, Mathematics, Social Studies, Science, Work-Oriented Education, and Physical Education revealed that the quality of primary education was satisfactory. The numbers in Grade VI with good and fair performance were around 18-20% and 62.44% respectively. The percentage of students who had to improve their performance was about 12-17%, particularly in English. However, there were differences in educational quality amongst all educational regions including Bangkok. There were wide differences in proficiency levels in Thai, English, Mathematics, Physical Education and Management ^[51,52].

The world Buddhist University (WBU) was established in 1998 based on a resolution by the General Conference of the World Fellowship of Buddhists' held in NSW in Australia from Oct/Nov. The WBU was developed through a system of partnership networks. This ensures that Buddhist scholars and institutions are engaged in research, training, spiritual practice, education and the dissemination of the Dhamma to work together, making positive contributions for happiness among living beings for world peace ^[53]. The key feature of the logo of the WBU is the wheel of Dharma. All the programs and activities of the WBU represent a new turning of the wheel in today's world. The WBU has a similar role with the United Nations University. The University Centre serves as its headquarters located in Thailand as the main coordinating center. In its organizational and administrative structure, it comprises of the following four institutes:

- The Institute of Research and Development
- The Institute of Training and Curriculum Development
- The Institute of Spiritual Practice and
- The Institute of Educational System Based on Buddhism.

The four institutes are associated with the existing universities, Training institutes and Buddhist associations. All these elements are required to interact on a networking principle. The WBU operates in many different countries. It serves as an Institution of Buddhist Scholars engaged in research, post-graduate training, spiritual practice and Buddhist studies through the academic networking system.

DEMOCRATISATION WITH DEVOLUTION OF AUTHORITY TO INSTITUTIONAL LEVELS

The National Education Act (NEA) of 1999 was promulgated on 14th August, providing for a far-reaching process of school reforms. This 'Education Reforms Act', was intended to lift the quality of education and training in Thailand after the Asian Financial Crisis that adversely affected all sectors of the economy. The main objectives were to achieve internal efficiencies and expedite the process of democratization within the Thai society. Key elements of the 1999 reforms included:

- The right for all individuals to receive free basic education provided by the government for 12 years;
- Nine years of compulsory education, requiring all children aged 7-16 years to enrol in basic education;
- Decentralization of educational administration and management;
- An Educational quality assurance system to ensure improvements of educational standards at all levels;
- More stringent requirements for licensing of teachers and administrators; and
- The creation of an integrated Ministry of Education, Religion and Culture by 2002 ^[54].

In terms NEA, the Ministry of Education (MOE) is responsible for promoting and overseeing all levels and types of education, religious affairs, art, culture and sports as well as monitoring, inspection and evaluation of educational provisions. The administration and management at central level is entrusted to five main bodies: 1) Office of the Permanent Secretary; 2) Secretariat of the Education Council; 3) Office of the Basic Education; 4) Office of Higher Education Commission; and 5) Office of the Vocational Education Commission.

Accordingly, educational service areas too have been established under the jurisdiction of the Basic Education Commission in response to the decentralization of power and authority. Based on approximately 200 educational institutions and a population of 300,000-500,000, the country was divided into 175 educational service areas within the 76 provinces. Of these, 172 areas are in the provinces while three are in Bangkok. Excluding Bangkok Metropolis, Thailand has 75 other provinces, administered by appointed governors and is sub-divided into districts, sub-districts or 'Tumbon' (groups of villages) and villages. But, Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA), divided into 50 districts, is administered by an elected governor.

Educational administration and management at educational institutional levels could be divided into two categories: 1) Institutions at Basic Education or lower than university first degree level; and 2) Institutions at university degree level. The newly established MOE decentralized power and authority relating to educational administration and management on academic matters, budgets, personnel and general affairs administration; directly to educational institutions. In each institution providing basic education or lower-than degree level has a board comprising 7-15 members who are the representatives of parents, teachers, community organizations, local administrative organizations, alumni and scholars ^[55]. Following the principle of devolution of authority and responsibilities to the educational institutions, the school based management (SBM) has been implemented. Accordingly, all schools are required to take greater responsibility in performing their duties relating to academic matters, budget, personnel and general administration with the participation of local school communities deviating from vesting authority in the heads of schools.

In November 2008, an International Buddhist Conference was held in Colombo, Sri Lanka on the theme 'The Timeless Message of the Samma Sambuddha' ^[56]. The conference was attended by 185 representatives from 24 countries comprising of: Australia, Bangladesh, Belgium, Bhutan, Brazil, Cambodia, China, England, France, India, Italy, Japan, Laos, Malaysia, Nepal, Netherlands, Pakistan, Russia, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Sweden, Thailand, USA, and Vietnam. The conference resolved to propagate 1) Buddhist Teaching as a Basis of an Universal Ethical System; 2) Promoting Social Harmony and Universal Peace Through a Buddhist Value System; 3) Buddhist Approach to Economic and Social Development; 4) Environment and Buddhism; 5) Buddhist Principles Pertaining to International Understanding of Friendship and Co-existence; and 6) Preservation and Fostering of the Buddhist Heritage.

The promotion of Science and Technology, Mathematics and Language Education has long been the cherished goal of the Royal Thai Government through the establishment of the Institute for Promotion of Science and Technology (IPST) in 1972. At country level, the national Information and Technology Policy (NITP, 2010) has been established to promote science and technology for human resources development and the improvement of law and order. Higher education scholarships for masters and doctoral degrees, and academic training are being provided to qualified teachers with special abilities. English Language Development Centre promotes training for proficiency in English. However, with emphasis on the Buddhist principle of the "Middle Path" and the accumulated experience in rural development in economy, they are cautioned against negligence by encouraging moderation and pointing out reasonableness and self-immunity as guiding principles of planning, implementation and decision-making processes by ONEC ^[57].

A number of private and state agencies are involved in the promotion of international education services. The Office of the Private Education Commission (OPEC), the Office of the Higher Education Commission (OHEC), the Department of Export Promotion, and International Schools Association of Thailand are actively engaged in this area. As an active member of the 11 nation ASEAN, Thailand currently hosts the Secretariat and three of the South East Asian Ministers for Education Organisation (SEAMEO) and the regional Centre for Archaeology and Fine Arts. In her efforts through international cooperation, exchanges and educational reforms, Thailand shows her dedication to important issues of equity and quality in education, reforms in learning, life-long education for the purpose of improving the overall achievements in education ^[57].

CONCLUSION

Resulting from the introduction of Buddhism to Sri Lanka, country's monarchy, culture and way of living got imbedded with Buddhist culture and she became a leading influence on Buddhist countries in South-East Asian region as well as India and China. Whenever, the monarch was not strong to protect the country, South Indian invasions occurred and these affected the development of Buddhism and places of worship as they plundered these for treasure. Golden Age of Buddhist education and literary revival was the Polonnaruwa period when Parakramabahu the Great ruled the country. At this period many important books on Buddhist literature were produced by reputed scholars in Sinhala, Pali and Sanskrit. During the Dambadeniya and Kotte periods too, there were literary revivals producing many important books. During this period Sandesha-kavyas too were produced, based on Indian Meghaduta. With the commencement of Portuguese and Dutch rules; Kandyan kingdom became a land-locked one and in 1815 the whole country came under the British. Since then, Buddhism and indigenous education experienced a period of decline when the colonial rulers banned these. However, in the early 20th Century a revival began and after the Independence in 1948, these developments improved in a gradual process. Since 1972, with the nationalisation of denominational schools much more progress was achieved promoting both Western and indigenous models of education within the spheres of primary, secondary and higher education.

The traditional education system in Thailand began in the Thirteenth Century was influenced by the Buddhist culture as well as with connections established with Buddhist countries such as Sri Lanka and Myanmar. Originally, education started at Buddhist temples, monasteries and households as well as in royal palaces. However, from 1868, because of the high degree of tolerance practiced in Buddhist doctrine; missionaries began an aggressive campaign, partly through creating educational opportunities to convert people to Christianity. This prompted the Royal Thai Government to lay the foundation for a formal Thai education system in 1884. In 1902, a Proclamation announced that the Kingdom would provide formal education to all citizens. The newly established government's education system was heavily influenced by the Buddhist culture, as was required by the Ministry of

Religious Affairs and Culture. The major reforms towards modernisation occurred as a result of a high powered commission report in 1997. Based on its recommendations, coordination and unification of the Thai education system including decentralisation and devolution of school management was laid out in the National Education Act of 1999. The School Based Management (SBM) that is being implemented in Thailand was influenced by the Victorian system in Australia. However, community participation in management is also a principle embodied in the Buddhist principles. There are many similarities and few differences between Sri Lankan and Thai education systems.

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