

# A Study On Evolution Of Pirivena As An Educational Institute From Past To The Present In The History Of Traditional Education In Sri Lanka

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**Abstract:** Pirivena education in Sri Lanka started from Kalapasada in Anuradhapura bears a long history over 2343 years. The main aim of this paper was to conduct a study on evolution of Pirivena as an educational institute from past to the present. The comparative historical method has been used as the research method and Suttapita, Vinayapitaka, 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. Evolution of the word “Pirivena”, organizational structure of the Pirivena and its function have provided some lessons to the present general education system in Sri Lanka.

**KEYWORDS:** educational institute, evolution of Pirivena, organizational structure, past to the present, traditional education, types of Pirivena

## **Aim**

The main of this paper was to conduct a study on the Pirivena education in Sri Lanka from its inception to the present under sub themes: evolution of “Pirivena” concept, organizational structure of pirivena education and functions of Pirivena education

## **Method**

The comparative historical method has been used as the research method of this paper. Suttapita, Vinayapitaka, 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.

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## **I. INTRODUCTION**

Pirivena education in Sri Lanka marks a big land mark in the educational history of Sri Lanka. There are large numbers of pirivenas functioned under number of kingdoms: Anuradhapura (337 BC-1055 AD), Polonnaruwa (1055 AD-1232), Dambadeniya (1220 AD-1293AD), Kurunegla (1293 AD-1341AD), Gampola (1341 AD-1408 AD) Kotte (1404 AD-1597 AD), Kandy (1469 AD-1815 AD) to present. During 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. 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.

## **II. LITERATURE REVIEW**

The Buddhist education has a long history dated back to the third century B.C. As shown in the history of Sri Lanka there were three main Buddhist educational centers disseminating knowledge on a wide variety of disciplines related to Buddhism. They are MahaVihara (3<sup>rd</sup> Century B.C), AbhayagiriVihara, (1st Century B.C.) and JethavanaVihara (3<sup>rd</sup> Century A.D) (Mendis et.al 2006). But, Kalapasada Pirivena built by King Devanampiyatissa in the 1st century is considered as the oldest Pirivena in Sri Lanka (Mahavamsa: 15). As Mahavamsa records MahaVihara is a creation of King Devanampiyatissa (Mahavamsa: 15). While the AbhayagiriVihara was constructed under the patronage of King Walagamba, JetavanVihara was constructed under the patronage of King Mahasen (Mahavamsa, 33:80, 84, 37: 32, 33). These institutions which laid the foundation for higher learning situations continued for many centuries in Anuradhapura till the 11th Century A.D. (Wijerathne, 2008). The MahaVihara and AbhayagiriVihara, commissioned through royal patronage from

around 300 BCE, were among the first educational institutions to adopt this system of education. In addition to these three Pirivenas (Piriven), *AlahanaPirivena* in *Polonnaruwa* is also considered as a traditional educational center under the Kingdom of Rajarata in *Polonnaruwa* period. The progress prevailed in the Pirivena education during the *Anuradhapura* and *Polonnaruwa* period continued until the Europeans: Portuguese, Dutch and English invaded Sri Lanka. Pirivena institutes from *Anuradhapura* to Kandy were created throughout the island during the rule of successive kings (Ibid). Invasion made by these nations which brought an immense disruption to our culture and economy, badly influenced the monastic education in Sri Lanka in the middle of the last millennium (Bandaranayake, 2006). Following the conversion of King *Dharmapala* (1551–97) to Christianity, the royal support for Buddhist education ceased. With the ensuing destruction of temples and Pirivena structures, together with the associated traditions, the Pirivena education system marked a rapid decline in Sri Lanka's coastal areas. Sri Lanka's Pirivena system of education pre-dates the 16th-century missionary education introduced by the colonial invaders by around 1,400 years (BISB, 2014). The organizational structure remained there was highly standardized and methodical, and was sought by visiting scholars from countries like Thailand, Cambodia, and Burma even as recently as the 15th century (Ibid). The resulting Pirivena education significantly assisted in the propagation of Buddhism not only locally, but also overseas (Ibid). *Sangharaja Welivita Saranankara* is respected as the pioneer of the renaissance of Pirivena education after Kandy era. Many of present Pirivenas are offshoots or established under the influence of Vidyodaya and Vidyalandara Pirivenas. However, the situation of Pirivena education today is not satisfactory (Ganarathana, (n.d.). No educational opportunities in Buddhist countries out of the traditional education they had in their countries (Abesinghe, 1999).

### **Introduction to Pirivena**

Pirivena education, monastery education, *Arama* education, *Pansala* education (Temple Education), and *Vihara* Education are common terms used by most of the local and foreign authors to interpret the traditional Buddhist education from the past. But, there are some scholars who believed that the term "Pirivena" implies a different meaning when compared with other terms: *Arama*, *Pasala* and *Vihara* (Lankananda, 1990). Hence, before commencing to study on the "Pirivena Education", it is academically worth to have little discussion on these terms; monastery, *Arama*, temple, *Vihara* and Pirivena to conclude whether these terms are used to reveal the same or different connotations. A tiny cottage or a small house thatched with grass etc. is called *Pansala* (*Dampiyaatuvagatapadaya*, 133 & *Poojavalaya*, 19). The term *Arama*, *Ashrama* and Temple are used to imply the place where Bhikkus live (*Dharmapradeepikava*, 192). *Arama*, *Asapuva*, *Sanghavasa* is the place where Bhikkus or hermits live (*Kathikavath Sangara*, 21). *Vihara* seems based on the meaning dwelling, dealing place, specifically of a monkish community (*Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Grammar and Dictionary*, Vol, ii). *Vihara* is a larger building or housing Bhikkus, as organized monastery (SN I, *Vamsaththappakasini* I, *Vissuddhimagga*, 292, *Milindapanna*, 212). *SuttaNipata*, (220) defines *Vihara* as a remote shelter for a monk. According to Horner (1938), *Arama* is not a park but a monastery. Mookerjee (n.d. ) argues that *Arama* and *Vihara* are synonymous. In Pali, however, the word "*Arama*" has been used largely in connection with a residence for monks; hence it signifies a monastery. As shown in *Cullavaggapali*, *Arama* is a Buddhist convent (*Vihara*), rest home, for quiet people built not far from the town and not too near, convent for going and for coming, easily accessible for all who wish to visit by day not to crowded by not might not exposed not too much noise and alarm (*Cullavagga* Vi 1,8.3.10). As Law (1958) argues, *Arama*, *Vihara*, and *Sangarama* gives an idea of a hermitage or monastery. Pirivena is derived from the Pali word for 'living quarters', referring to how these institutions were aimed at teaching priests and monks (*Visuddhimagga*, 327). The term implies that the living quarters are "large-scale." *Dhamma* and *Sippa* (*Shastra*) were taught to Bhikkus in ancient pirivena (Ibid, 327). In some sources the Pirivena is the place constructed in front of the temple covered by a wall or the land located between the wall and the temple (*CullaniddesaPali* iii, 154 & *SaraththaDeepani*). The word "Pirivena" is found in *Mahavaggapali* too (*Mahavagga*: IV). According to some explanations, Pirivena is a separate apartment or a cell of a monastery in which young and small monks were dwelling from the Buddha's time together with senior and erudite monks to study and practice the teachings of the Buddha (<http://www.education.gov.lk/pirivena/English/index.php>). Travel records of Faxian (337 – c. 422) (also known as Fa-hien, Fa-hsien) reveals that there were 5000 Bhikkus in Abhaygiri Pirivena and 3000 Bhikkus in Mahavihara Pirivena (*Vimalabuddi*, 1960). These Pirivenas are mostly unique to the island but similar to the universities found in mainland India. When the monastery education turns into a complex organizational body, the traditional educational institutions of Buddhist monks have been known as the Pirivena (Pirivena Education: Act No.64 of 1979). The traditional Buddhist education known as "monastery education" at the early period of Anuradhapura was called "Pirivena education" at its later part (Pirivena Education: Act No.64 of 1979). A Pirivena (plural: Piriven) are monastic colleges for the education of monks in Sri Lanka (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pirivena>). According to definitions and research findings discussed above it is clear that temple, *Arama*, *Pansala*, *Ashrama* and Pirivena were the terms used at the early period of the Buddhist

education to imply a place where Bhikkus live. In another word, all these words have given the same meaning. With the passage of the time, monasteries which plenty of Bhikkus lived and academic interest was very sound may have considered as “Piriven” or “Pirivenas”. Hence it can be concluded that the 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. Provision of basic knowledge, attitudes and skills to novice and children or persons those who wish to robe remain with the *Arama, Vihara, Pansala* and monastery as “monastery education” furthermore. And also *Arama, Vihara, Pansala* and monastery continued the task of communicating knowledge on *Dhamma* to lay people.

Development of “*AshtaMulayatana*” is also can be considered as an extension of this pirivena education. Pirivenas established in later period belonged to these *AshtaMulayatana* i.e. *VijayabaPirivena* in Kotte located at *Thotagamuva* descends from *Uttaramula* and *IrugalKulathilakaPirivena* descends from *Galathurumula*.

Aims of Pirivena Education according to the Pirivena education act:No.64 of 1979

(a) to foster an interest among Bhikkhus in the protection and progress of the threefold *Sasana* namely, *Pariyatti, Patipaththi* and *Pativedha*;

(b) to foster discipline, knowledge in the *Tripitaka* and devotion to *Dhamma* among Bhikkhus in order to maintain the order of Bhikkhus descending from the lineage of *Sariputra* and *MoggallanaMahaTheras*;

(c) to give a training in practical knowledge, necessary for the *DhammaDutha* activities in Sri Lanka and abroad and in other services appropriate to Bhikkhus; and

(d) to provide facilities for Bhikkhus to acquire a thorough knowledge in various subjects and languages including Buddhist Philosophy, Buddhist Culture, Buddhist History, Sinhala, Pali and Sanskrit

### **Types of present piriven in Sri Lanka**

The Pirivena education in Sri Lanka is conducted in three levels: *MulikaPirivena* (primary), *Mahapirivena* and *VidyayathanaPirivena*. A *MulikaPirivena* shall be a residential educational institution providing classes for Bhikkhus from grade 1 to 5. Male lay pupils are also allowed to attend classes. End of the five years period these students sit the *MulikaPiriven* Final Examination which is similar to Ordinary Level Examination. Both the Ordinary Level Examination and *MulikaPirivenFinal Examination* are conducted by the Department of Examinations in Sri Lanka. The student who completes the primary education enters the *MahaPirivena* where normal higher education is given in order to help Bhikku and lay students to enter to the tertiary education including universities and Colleges of Education after the Advanced Level Examination. According to Pirivena Education act a Bhikkhu who has passed the examination held at the end of the course of studies in a *MulikaPirivena* or any other examination of a similar standard recognized by the Board may be admitted to a *MahaPirivena*. Male lay pupils who complete the examinations referred to in the preceding provisions of the Pirivena act may be admitted to a *MahaPirivena*. There are some *MahaPirivenas* (*Mahapiriven*) where students are prepared for oriental examinations in order to strengthen the monastery education to protect three fold *Sasana: Paryapthi* (learning), *prathipaththi* (practice) and *Prathivedha* (realization) without promoting general education system in Sri Lanka. The third type of Pirivena is *VidyayathanaPirivena*. This level of pirivena offers the highest level of education and it similar to the university-level in western discourse; in fact, two major universities in Colombo, the University of Kelaniya and University of Sri Jayewardenepura, are actually *PirivenVidyayathana* renamed (*Ganarathana, n.d.*). 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 *PirivenaVidyayathanaya* (*Pirivena Education, Act No.64 of 1979*). A *MulikaPirivena* and a *MahaPirivena* may be held within the same premises and under the same management. A *PirivenaVidyayathanashall* not be held within the premises of a *MulikaPirivena* or a *MahaPirivena* or under the same management as a *MulikaPirivena* or a *MahaPirivena* (*Pirivena Education: Act No.64 of 1979*).

### **Organizational Structure of the present Pirivena**

In the past, Pirivena was a self-managed institution, however, after the colonial era; it has become a part of the government education which functions under the Ministry of Education in Sri Lanka. The Director-General shall be responsible for the administration of the pirivena system all over the Island. Every Pirivena shall have a Manager appointed by the Director-General. Where a pirivena is a *MulikaPirivena* or a *MahaPirivena* or a *PirivenVidyayathana*, the *Viharadhpathi* of the temple to which the land on which the

pirivena is situated shall be appointed as the Manager of that Pirivena if the *Viharadhipathi* consents to that appointment. Every pirivena is administered by a principal. The principal is a Bhikkhu who has received *Upasampada* not less than five years prior to the date of appointment. And also that Bhikkhu should have completed the relevant educational qualification which is accepted by the act. Today there are 753 government approved Pirivenas (Piriven) in Sri Lanka where over 6000 teachers and nearly 60000 students are engaged in teaching and learning. A person shall not be eligible for appointment as a teacher of a Pirivena unless he is a Bhikkhu. However, where a Bhikkhu is not available for appointment as a teacher in respect of such subjects as may be specified by the Director-General, a qualified layman may be appointed as a teacher of a Pirivena. The grants payable from State funds to any Pirivena registered or deemed to be registered under this Act in respect of maintenance, salaries of teachers and library. However, pirivenas lost their independence as a traditional institute and happened to imitate school system for which wages are paid for teaching and administered by lay officers. There are some evidences which show that the ancient Pirivena teachers were paid (Ez. Vol.1 45,46pp). Officers who administered the ancient Pirivena were called "Pirivenladdan". Once, the Pirivena education was the most organized and well functioned academic system in Sri Lanka. But, the situation today is not satisfactory (Ganarathana, n.d.).

### III. CONCLUSIONS

Pirivena education in Sri Lanka started from *Kalapasada* in Anuradhapura bears a long history over 2343 years. Later, MahaVihara, Abhayagiri and Jethavan monasteries functioned as schools which nourished two traditions: Theravada and Mahayna. In this long journey, once, the traditional Pirivena education came in to its peak in development where the royal patronage received. When Piriven or Bhikkus were not treated by the kings, traditional Buddhist education too was collapsed. At the beginning, the place where Bhikkus lived was known as *Aarma*, *Vihara*, *Pansala* (temple) and *Pirivena*. But, in the latter part of the Anuradhapura period, 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 curricula 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 Bhikkuhood. Presently, the Pirivena education is conducted in three levels: *Mulika*, *Secondary* and *Vidyayathana* under the administration of the Ministry of Education, Sri Lanka. Presently, the students in *Mulikapirivena* are prepared for *MulikaPiriven* Final Examination which is similar to Ordinary Level Examination. In *Mahapirivena*, students are prepared for both Advanced level examination and Oriental examination conducted by the Department of Examinations in Sri Lanka. *Vidyayathanapirivena* offers the highest level of education and it similar to the university-level in western discourse. The director general is the main administrator and each Pirivena has a manager and a principal. Teachers are paid by the government. In addition, other approved payments are given.

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