

SOME EXPERIMENTAL STUDIES, SERVICES, AND PROPOSALS IN BUDDHIST EDUCATION AT UNIVERSITY LEVEL WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE WORK OF THE VIDYODAYA UNIVERSITY—REFLECTIONS OF AN ACADEMIC

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1. Introduction :

This article gives a brief account of some experimental studies, services and proposals of the Vidyodaya University in Buddhist Education at university level with special reference to the work initiated by its Department of Education.¹ Education is not limited here only to the time-bound and space-bound formal system of instruction. It is considered as a life-long (*yāva-jiva*) process taking place in the whole society at all times.² In fact, in a Buddhist perspective, it is a process that does not end even at death but continues till one attains the ultimate goal of Nibbana (*Yava-Nibbana*). Buddhist Education is taken in this context to mean the academic study of the theory and practice of education having two or more of the following conditions. EDUCATION (*a*) viewed from a Buddhist perspective, (*b*) based on Buddhist philosophy, (*c*) promoting Buddhist attitudes, values, and a way of life, (*d*) having Buddhism and Buddhist Culture as the core content of the curriculum, (*e*) imparted by Buddhists within educational institutions, or in social organization having predominantly a Buddhist environment and (*f*) mainly for the purpose of educating Buddhist children and/or Buddhist youths.

Department of Education of the Vidyodaya University had only a short span of life as an integral part of a Buddhist university from 1959 to 1966. It was a department of a secular university of Sri Lanka from 1966 to the end of 1974 and ceased to exist thereafter. (This was so even in the case of the Vidyalankara University). What little it did and particularly what it attempted to do, are now part of university history in Sri Lanka. Therefore the present Commemorative volume is an appropriate publication to contain a brief record of at least some aspects of such work. As most of these were initiated by the present writer, they have been pursued as far as possible in the ways mentioned here, even after Vidyodaya Department ceased to exist. Although they were initiated more than a decade ago, most of them do not appear to have lost their relevance even now. Therefore they may have more than a historical value at least to some interested readers.

Studies, Services, and proposals briefly discussed here are as follows :
(a) Popularization of the study of education (b) Study of Buddhist Education as an academic subject, (c) Application of Buddhist principles to development education, (d) Community education for universities, (e) Role of Buddhism in Education for peace and (f) University Education for Universities.

2. Popularization of the Study of Education

An inquiry made by the present writer during the Buddha Jayanti period (1956) to study the Buddhist canonical texts for the purpose of finding out an educational philosophy contained in the teachings of the Buddha, led to the M.A. thesis entitled "A THEORY OF EDUCATION BASED ON BUDDHIST PHILOSOPHY" submitted to the Peradeniya University of Ceylon in 1958. One main conclusion of that thesis may be given here by modifying that frequently quoted statement of Sir John Adams, who said that the teacher should know not only Latin but also John to teach John Latin well.³ The argument in this thesis emphasized the need for a knowledge of not only Latin, but also the nature of John, the nature of the teacher himself and the nature of the interpersonal relationships and the interactions taking place in the process of education operating in the whole society at all times. True education according to Buddhist philosophy of education must be based not on ignorance but on knowledge. However at this time in this country, education was a subject studied only in English by only about fifty students at the university level and no facilities were available at the universities to study it in the mother tongue at all. This was not a condition that could be justified educationally as logical or psychological when viewed from a Buddhist perspective. As such there was a clear need to be met in order to make the national education system a success.

With the opening of the two Buddhist universities, there were ample opportunities for innovations and experiments to meet this need in university education. Present writer, first through the Vidyalkara and later through the Vidyodaya University, took the initiative to introduce education as an academic subject of study for the general degree for the internal students as well as the external students. Philosophies and Principles of Education, Educational Psychology and History of Education with detailed schemes of work for study were issued as subject areas on which examinations would be held. Buddhist Philosophy and Principles of Education, Buddhist Educational Psychology and History of Buddhist Educational Traditions, were also included at the relevant points in the above schemes of work. This step opened up new opportunities for teachers, Buddhist monks, parents and community leaders, who were not included among the 10% or less English educated minority of the population, in the country, to read, think, and dis-

cuss education, in their own mother tongue and from a Buddhist perspective. A large number of students had selected Education as a subject for the degree and the demand for relevant knowledge was so great that a correspondence course had to be organized to meet the demand. Pirivenas* affiliated to the two Buddhist universities conducted classes, and weekend lectures also had to be given in centres outside Colombo, for those who followed the correspondence courses

Number of students following courses in education went up from about fifty to more than about a thousand within the first year itself. New books on education in Sinhala were published⁴ and periodicals appeared in Sinhala with articles on current issues relating to education. Few translations of English text books on education also were undertaken by some publishers but that did not succeed because it was not easy to find good translators who knew education and the two languages equally well. Seminars, conferences and lectures on topics related to education were a common feature almost every weekend and holiday season. Education societies were formed and study of education became a widespread interest in the whole country. Lanka Progressive Education Society which was founded in 1955 and which took over the publication of the Sinhala journal called Gurukama on Education promoted the formation of such societies at the district levels.

By the time the new University Education Act (1966) came into effect, all the three universities had introduced the four year courses leading to the BEd. Degree and all had the post-graduate Diploma in Education. Both these were specially designed for teachers of secondary schools. As such, the then government decided that there was no need for offering courses in education for students reading for degrees other than the BEd. However, Vidyodaya Department of Education proposed a programme to extend the BEd. Degree and the Diploma, for persons other than those teaching in secondary schools.

Some such services for which special courses suggested at that stage were Adult Education, Primary Education, Pre-School Education, University Education, Special Education, Aesthetic Education, Religious Education, Health Education, and Community Education. BEd course in Special Education was, in fact, commenced by offering a course for graduates willing to teach visually handicapped children, so that similar courses could be offered for other fields later, year after year. An attempt was also made to admit a group of matured community leaders who had long experience in adult education to follow a course leading to BEd in Adult Education. It was no easy task to convince the university policy-makers to introduce such new

* Pirivenas were traditional seats of monastic Education.

courses. Several years after this the present writer was successful in getting a post-graduate Diploma course in Drama Education as the first step towards a programme of work in Aesthetic Education. However a similar proposal to have a Diploma in Adult Education could not be implemented in spite of several efforts made by the present writer before retirement. The need for popularizing the study of Education still remains in the country.

3. Study of Buddhist Education as an Academic Subject

The study referred to above which led to the M.A. Thesis on a Theory of Education based on Buddhist Philosophy, was done at a time when there was no such study known to have been made anywhere relating to Buddhism although several attempts had been made to formulate theories of education based on the philosophies of most other known religious and secular philosophers of the East and West. One could refer to books on education in any library but find not even a single reference to the Buddha as an educator or his teachings as having any educational relevance although in fact, Buddha, his teachings, and his successful followers (Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha) have been the basis of several peace-promoting successful educational traditions of the Asian countries like Sri Lanka, Thailand, Burma, Japan and Korea in the past. Students following education courses in universities, study all about Plato, Aristotle, Rousseau, Thomas Aquinas, Karl Marx, Gandhi, Jesus Christ, Dewey and several others but nothing about the educational ideas of Buddha or his followers.

Therefore, Buddhist Philosophy and Principles of Education, Buddhist Educational Psychology and History of Buddhist Educational Traditions were included at the appropriate points of the three courses on education for the first degree as an incentive to study them. Later they were included with more details as a special paper on Buddhist Education for students of the Department of Education, in lieu of the compulsory paper on Buddhist Culture for all Vidyodaya graduates. At a still later stage they were given as three special areas of study for the BEd Degree specially for those who had learnt Buddhism, Buddhist Culture and Pali or Sanskrit as the three special school subjects for teaching purposes. A Master's Degree Course, with Buddhist Education as one of the examination subjects, was also introduced when the students following the BEd course in Buddhist Education were completing their course.

Similar courses were introduced at the Vidyalankara University too, and there was a general awareness in the country to promote the study of Buddhist educational resources that were successfully harnessed in the distant past but completely ignored in the recent past. When the proposal for establishing a new Faculty of Education was being considered, Vidyodaya had gained some

experience in conducting courses in Buddhist Education at least as pilot projects and a few books also published in Sinhala by some members of the academic staff of the two Buddhist Universities. National Seminars on Buddhist Philosophy of Education were held (18.09.65) and proposals even for an international seminar were considered.⁶ The first ever Asian Regional Seminar on Buddhist Higher Education based on an Asian survey on Buddhist Higher Education sponsored by the World Fellowship of Buddhists (WFB) was held in Bangkok.⁷ Vidyodaya played a leading role in all these.

Two practical projects emerged from the study of Buddhist Education, in addition to its theoretical aspects. One was the project to prepare Audio-Visual Instructional Aids for teaching Buddhism and Buddhist Culture at all levels. Several sets of colour slides with commentaries were produced as a result of this project ranging from the teaching of the life story of the Buddha at the Primary School, upto the teaching of the Visuddhi Magga (Path of Purity) at the university level, using the Stupa as the visual aid. The other was a project to organize a counselling and guidance service to all Vidyodaya students according to the Buddhist traditions, along with the available modern techniques. This was called an UPADHYAYA service as referred to in the Buddhist educational traditions quite familiar to Buddhist monks even now.

Department of Education volunteered to organize the work with one lecturer specially selected and trained for that purpose who would get the fullest co-operation of all other members of the department. The proposal was to assign about ten students to each lecturer/professor for each year to look after their personality development problems, in addition to their studies. The department of education was prepared to be in charge of those students who may be considered as most difficult and troublesome cases according to their past records. Before the scheme was implemented, university policy-making changed hands with the change of University Act in 1966. Perhaps taking advantage of this position, the lecturer appointed for that purpose also never returned to the university after going abroad for training.

When the Vidyodaya Department of Education was transferred to Colombo for creating a Faculty of Education, present writer as the Professor and Head of the Department of Humanities Education introduced Buddhist Education also to the department. A special programme for a four year course in Buddhist Education leading to BEd Degree was introduced in collaboration with the Faculty of Arts. This was done in addition to the programme of work for Diploma students teaching Buddhism in schools. Before the present writer retired from the University, one year post-graduate

course leading to a Diploma in Buddhist Education and from that to a two year course leading to a Master's Degree in Buddhist Education, was also introduced and approved by the Faculty, Senate, and Council.

The interest created in the country to study Buddhist Education as an academic discipline at the university level, appears to be there still although with little or no special incentives worth mentioning. Some of the post-graduate research studies made in universities to meet examination requirements for M.A, MEd, and PhD, may be considered as an indication of the continuing interest in the subject among some individuals. Lack of opportunities and facilities to follow courses in Buddhist Education in Universities and the absence of any research centre for pursuing further studies in this field may be clear indications of a neglect on the part of the academic community and the University authorities as a whole.

Nevertheless teaching of Buddhism remains to be a compulsory school subject for all Buddhist children in government schools. All Sunday Buddhist school children are provided with free books by the state even now. Education Reforms Committee as well as the Special Committee on Religious Education appointed by the government have clearly indicated the pressing need for providing facilities and incentives at university level to study Buddhist Education particularly at post-graduate level to promote research and experimentation on the subject so that problems relating to the teaching of Buddhism in schools could be understood and solved systematically as is done in the case of all other teaching subjects. Therefore why and how Buddhist Education should be pursued as an academic discipline in our universities, has been discussed by the present writer on several occasions elsewhere.

4. Application of Buddhist Principles to Development Education

Some of the fundamental Buddhist concepts like the Middle Path (Majjima Pati Pada), the four Sublime States (Brahma Viharas), and the four principles of social integration (Sangaha Vattu) were applied with appropriate modifications to motivation in social action by the Sarvodaya movement as an experiment during the late sixties and early seventies when the present writer was guiding its educational services. At one stage the Sarvodaya leader and several other active Sarvodaya workers were students of the Vidyodaya University, following courses in education. Several lecturers and students of the department of education were quite closely associated with the Sarvodaya movement particularly because of its development education aspects and the study-service projects for youths. This close relationship helped us a great deal to try out the field experiments in applying the Buddhist principles referred to above, for development education. Lecturers and students could see to

themselves how the school children, village youths, rural adults, community leaders and Buddhist monks could be successfully motivated to development services by applying Buddhist principles in an appropriate manner interpreting them in a meaningful way to meet the contemporary needs.

With the help of the Sarvodaya movement a series of weekend seminars was organized for Buddhist monks on their effective leadership role in community development in the past as was clearly seen from our cultural heritage and as supported by our Buddhist literary sources. At these seminars the Buddhist principles referred to above were interpreted in terms of the development needs of the contemporary society. The main purpose of these seminars was to motivate the monks to provide the leadership to the rural people to understand their problems and find solutions to them. Analysis of the problems, finding the conditions that create these problems, possibility of removing these conditions and the ways and means of removing these conditions to solve the problems, were the four steps followed. This was done by relating it to the formula of the four Noble Truths and the Law of Dependent Origination in Buddhism. These Buddhist principles in relation to development services and, the perceptible outcome of the seminars, were so convincing that, they were later accepted as the philosophical basis of the Sarvodaya movement, and still later by the National Heritage movement which assisted the Buddhist monks to revive their traditional leadership role in integrated rural development with adequate emphasis on the religio-cultural aspects of development.

As a direct outcome of this seminar, some of the Buddhist monks of the Kurunegala district, had taken the initiative to organize a work-camp to desilt several small tanks for the purpose of providing adequate water supply for paddy cultivation, most of which had been given up for several years due to lack of adequate rain water. This had been a collective decision of the community leaders of all villages of the surrounding area as a result of several discussions that the Buddhist monks had organized in their temples. Their plan had worked so effectively and efficiently that when we visited the work-site where some of our students also participated, we were all surprised to see the enthusiastic reponse of the people.

A visiting professor from a Canadian University who was with us in the Faculty at that time, also visited the place to see the outcome of our seminar. He was so impressed with the way how adults, youths, children, men, women, government officials of different status, and people of all political parties, making a contribution in their own way, to make the project a success, and how the Buddhist monks were playing their leadership role with the temple as the centre of activity, that he himself participated in the work camp. At the usual family gathering which was held after lunch interval, in the few com-

ments this professor made, he summarised his impressions by saying that, as a visiting professor he came to study Buddhist Education particularly in medieval Sri Lanka, and in addition to that knowledge gained from books and discussions, he had seen Buddhist Education in Social Action here and now as appropriate for modern times in Sri Lanka.⁹ However it was not possible to continue these study-service projects, as university activities, at that time, because funds were not available in the regular budget for such purposes.

Meanwhile an attempt was made to focus the attention of rural development workers in other developing countries of Asia like Thailand, Malaysia, India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Philippines etc. on the need for relating the religio-cultural resources of their respective countries to development as was done in the past. How to bring them closer together, exchange their views, share their experiences and discuss their problems in relation to the role of religion and culture in development, were questions that had to be answered by those interested. An exploratory meeting was held in Bangkok in March 1973 at which Vidyodaya was represented by the present writer as one of the participants.¹⁰ This led to the formation of an organization called the Asian Cultural Forum on Development (ACFOD) for the purpose of harnessing religious and cultural resources to development based on the experience of Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims and Christians, of Sri Lanka, Thailand, India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Philippines and Singapore, etc. This provided an opportunity for some of our university graduates to visit other Asian countries with other religious and cultural traditions. Development workers from other Asian countries also had the opportunity to visit our country and see how religion and culture were harnessed to development, particularly, in the past as clearly seen from our cultural heritage. They could also see Sarvodaya and National Heritage as two attempts to harness them to meet the contemporary needs.

5. Community Education For Universities

Present writer as a member of the UNESCO National Commission proposed a pilot project to be implemented at Vidyodaya by the Department of Education for which a special service called the UNESCO-VIDYODAYA Community Education Service was established. This was one of the three Youth and Adult Education projects for which UNESCO National Commission voted a sum of money for initial expenses for the three Universities, Vidyodaya, Vidyalankara and Peradeniya in 1966.

The first part of the project was implemented during the August-September 1966 in a village down South in the Galle District. A Socio-economic survey was conducted by a group of Vidyodaya students in collaboration with the local schools and the Rural Development Society of the area. A group of

school leavers of the village who had never had any opportunity to study any science in any of the four schools of the area, were given a well-planned socially relevant course in general science of approximately 150 hours, with only one third of it given as formal class room teaching while the balance was done as field work by visits to factories and work-sites or by studying the natural resources of the village environment. In addition to the socio-economic survey, every student who participated, had an opportunity to do some youth and adult education service in the village during the period. A full report of the whole experience was discussed, criticised, and evaluated at a seminar held for the purpose after the vacation. The group consisted of students who followed subjects in Humanities, and Social Sciences with Education, while a few students from the Faculty of Science also volunteered to participate in the teaching of general science under the guidance of the lecturers in charge. This initiated the programme planned for three years.

Within the course of the year during the weekends, youth and adult education courses in General Science, Sociology, Psychology, Buddhist Culture, Family Health, Child Care, Nutrition and Literacy were conducted by some students of the Department of Education on their own initiative, forming themselves into small groups for that purpose under the leadership of more matured students following the post-graduate Diploma course in Education. As such there was an ongoing process of feed-back, evaluation and reformulation of courses based on the experience gained by the students and reported by them at the monthly meetings of the group. Vacation courses were planned based on these experiences.

During the holidays, groups of students with this experience gained and this interest developed, went out to different parts of the country to spend one or two weeks in selected villages to try out a programme of community education, and prepare a report of their field work for discussion in a seminar to be organized by the Education Society. UNESCO-VIDYODAYA Community Education Service provided some funds as a subsidy for expenses incurred in travelling and subsistence of these students. One such project was carried out as a follow-up from the first one referred to above, in some villages on the two banks of the river Ginganga where the main obstacle for development was found to be the frequent floods, according to the findings of the first survey. Geography Department and Economics Department also participated in this project by permitting their students to join the others of the Department of Education. Some students of the Sinhala Department cooperated by staging their play "Sakkaya Ditthi", in one of the villages when the study was in progress. This also went a long way in establishing close relations between the students and community leaders. The findings of this survey were presented at a seminar within the campus first and later outside in the area concerned. The awareness created and the interest generated about the

Ginganga floods led to private member's motion in Parliament which ultimately solved the problem to a great extent. Some of the lecturers and students who participated in the study are now experts on river floods and related problems.

Two schemes were formulated based on the experience gained by the implementation of this community education service for three years. One was an introductory course in Community Education (a) for all teacher-trainees, (b) for all university students willing to participate in community education services, as an extra-curricular activity on a voluntary basis and (c) for those who were following job-oriented courses in development studies. In fact this course was given to the first group of students who followed the development studies course at Vidyodaya as an experiment.

The other was a scheme for a Peoples University Movement to be implemented by the National Committee of the World University Service (WUS) in Sri Lanka. WUS at its fiftieth anniversary General Conference held in Madras accepted this project for funding, although it could not be implemented due to the conditions obtaining in the country at that time (1971). Thereafter the proposal was put up to the UNESCO National Commission with the report of the work already done, and the suggestion was made to implement it to mark the twenty fifth anniversary of UNESCO in 1971. Due to the reasons mentioned above, this suggestion was also not implemented.

6. Role of Buddhism in Education for Peace

“Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed”. This was accepted as the opening statement of the preamble to the UNESCO Constitution by its founders because it was a world organization founded for the purpose of promoting world peace through international intellectual co-operation in the fields of Education, Science, Culture and Communication. The Middle Path found in Buddhism as clearly seen from its past historical records, the contents of the Buddhist teachings as given in the Pali canonical texts, and the reports of those who apply the Middle Path to their day to day life in the contemporary society, provide convincing evidence that the study, interpretation, application, and propagation of the Middle Path in the teachings of the Buddha in relation to UNESCO activities, will be a substantial contribution that Buddhist scholars can make for this process of building defences of peace in the minds of men.

This assumption, when placed before the Venerable Mahatheras who made Vidyodaya policy decisions, was very enthusiastically accepted. Thereafter every encouragement was given by the university to pursue our proposals to promote that service. Concept of Middle Path as found in Buddhism and its relevance to education for peace even in the contemporary society were studies having a continuing interest among the students and lecturers following

courses in Buddhist Education. This was also a concept extensively discussed in the M.A. thesis referred to above. As an extension service, the present writer on the request of some members of the foreign diplomatic services organized the Middle Path International, which helped them to hold discussions and seminars on selected themes relating to the Middle Path in Buddhism and Buddhist Culture in Sri Lanka. This continued as a regular service for three years from 1961 and almost all Buddhist scholars in the universities were given an opportunity to lead discussions on their favourite themes for the benefit of foreign participants. The main focus of all these discussions was the role of Buddhism in promoting world peace.

This experience led to a proposal made to the fifteenth general conference of UNESCO through the National Commission of Sri Lanka, requesting its Director General to initiate a programme to study the past and the potential role of the Middle Path found in the teachings of the Buddha, for promoting Peace.¹² This was accepted in principle and later implemented in a modified form by limiting it to Buddhist Art and resulting in the publication of a book on the Image of the Buddha.¹³ Another proposal was made first to the eighth and later to the ninth General Conference (1969) of the World Fellowship of Buddhists (WFB) to be submitted to UNESCO, requesting it to admit WFB as a competent NGO to express a Buddhist point of view on behalf of World Buddhists in UNESCO deliberations. This was accepted and WFB is still the only World Buddhist Organization having that status and performing that function on behalf of the World Buddhists in assisting the peace-promoting activities of UNESCO.¹⁴

A book entitled METTA (Loving Kindness) presenting the four Sublime States as a Buddhist method of building defences of peace in the minds of men, was published to mark the International Education Year.¹⁵ A National seminar on Buddhist Education for Peace was inaugurated and a National Education Council was founded at Matale-Aluvihare when the All Ceylon Buddhist Congress Annual Sessions were held there. Another publication entitled BINESCO presenting the Buddhist approach to UNESCO Objectives, was issued to mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of UNESCO.¹⁶ In response to a request made by the World Council of Churches, a paper was presented on the Middle Path Approach to the problem of evolving a World Community at a multi-lateral dialogue held in Colombo and reported to its Nairobi Assembly to which the writer was invited as a guest.¹⁷ Same Middle Path Approach was emphasized in a key-note paper presented to the first Asian Conference on Religion and Peace held in Singapore and another with special emphasis on education at the ACRP II held in New Delhi.¹⁸ At a symposium held in Lisbon, (1977) a paper presenting the Middle Path based on Buddhism in creating a New World Order, was given, based on the experience referred to above.¹⁹ A resolution was sponsored by the writer at the twelfth General

Conference of the WFB held in Tokyo (1978) requesting UNESCO to initiate a programme of work and to appoint an International Commission to study the Role of Religion in promoting World Peace in the past and at present and make recommendations for the future if found favourable after an international study by a commission.²⁰ This was unanimously adopted and submitted to the UNESCO General Conference and the same resolution with appropriate amendments was adopted at a seminar of the third Assembly of the World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP) held in Princeton, New Jersey (1979) as suggested by the present writer in his background paper to the conference on the role of religion in Education for peace.²¹

Another suggestion was made in the background paper submitted by the writer to the ACRP-I (Singapore) referred to above to consider the possibility of establishing an Asian Centre for Religious Education. As this was accepted by the conference in principle, it was reconsidered by the Board of Directors and implemented subsequently by the ACRP Secretariat to operate from Sri Lanka. It is called an Asian Centre for Religious and Educational Studies (ACRES) and is planning to conduct a survey to study the past and present relationship between religion and education in Asian countries. The report of this survey will form the basis of further activities of this Centre, the main purpose of which is to find ways and means of making the role of religion in education for peace more effective than it is.

The extent of university participation and involvement in UNESCO activities was found to be quite inadequate according to a study made for that purpose by the Department of Education. Therefore two proposals were made to improve the situation. One was the formation of a UNESCO club for the university and the other was a university course on Our Cultural Heritage which should include a section of UNESCO activities on culture. First one was a success only for a few years but did not continue long, because societies and clubs with no direct political or vocational attraction had very little survival value at that time in universities. The second one also was implemented at Vidyodaya only and later given up due to it being replaced by another on Culture proposed by a special committee of the Senate House, which had no reference at all to UNESCO work.

7. University Education for Universities²²

The leading Buddhist monks who were holding key positions in the university were amenable to reason and were often prepared to encourage innovative proposals in university education if they were presented in a convincing manner, apparently because their thinking was not much conditioned or prejudiced by the existing university tradition of the West. Moreover, their knowledge of Buddhism appear to encourage critical thinking and analytical reasoning based on the "Yonisomanasikara" principle of trying

to see how present conditions came to be what they are. That was not the attitude of most of the more experienced university professors and lecturers who were trained in the Western University tradition, particularly if they were not specially trained in University Education. They were reluctant to encourage any innovations that deviated from the Western tradition which was for them the model, particularly because they were not adequately equipped with the relevant knowledge to change that tradition and create new traditions in its place to meet the changing needs. Even when funds could be obtained for innovations, it was not easy to get the approval of the university authorities like the Faculty, Senate, and Council for new projects. Before approving a new project most of them wanted to know where in the Western countries such a thing was done. This trend has been recognised even in a recent publication of UNESCO²³. The main reason for this obstacle appeared to be a communication gap between those who were aware of the new trends of thinking in the field of university education and those who were not so well informed of such new trends. One can be an expert in Botany, or Zoology, or Physics, or Chemistry, or Geography or History or any other university field of study but that does not necessarily mean that such expertise leads to adequate up-to-date knowledge on university education, which also has its own specialised fields of knowledge. Psychology of youth behaviour, interpersonal relationships, social interactions, teaching-learning processes, leadership role and group dynamics, teaching techniques, aims and objectives of university education, curriculum principles, etc. are only some such specialised areas of study having a great deal of new accumulated knowledge within the last few decades. This does not mean that those who had not studied education were not prepared to try out innovations in university education. Some times even its opposite was true. What it means is that an academic knowledge of university education narrows the communication gap between the two groups who know and who do not know the subject. Something had to be done about this.

Present writer used his sabbatical leave to visit some of the Universities of Asian countries like Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore, Indonesia, Philippines, Hong Kong, Japan, India, to study this problem there, and collected relevant information about other Asian countries from UNESCO Institutes in Bangkok, Singapore, Tokyo and Manila. The findings may be summarised as follows; in regard to this problem as revealed from the information gathered by interviewing knowledgeable persons.

(a) Most of those who take vital policy decisions and guide the implementation of university policies, have little or no access to relevant up-to-date knowledge on university education, although in the case of a few exceptions, some casual reading has led to little knowledge which too appears to be not

very helpful when working with others with no knowledge at all. Most if not all these policy-makers are no doubt specialists in their own fields of knowledge.

(b) Faculties or Departments of Education in universities have little or no impact on the whole university in this respect, apparently because of professional jealousies which generally do not encourage members of one department or faculty, to follow courses offered by others. But for this unhealthy isolation and separation, there is the possibility of organizing courses on university education by the department of education for the benefit of the whole academic community. Unfortunately, departments of education, in most of these universities, apparently due to this isolation, are not quite enthusiastic about new knowledge in the relevant fields of knowledge relating to university education. This leads to a vicious circle of increasing ignorance rather than increasing knowledge among the university community, about the university education itself, while they are quite enthusiastic about other fields of knowledge.

(c) Among the senior professors and lecturers, there appears to be at least a few who are quite keen about increasing their knowledge relating to youth problems, aims and objectives of university education, role of guidance and counselling, scientific techniques of communicating knowledge, group dynamics and leadership role, and personality development, etc. Among the young generation of university teachers, a large majority appear to be conscious of the need for following special courses on university education as an essential part of their training if they are given the necessary facilities.

(d) No one denies the fact that a university lecturer, professor, or dean or registrar or even student leader would be more effective, more reasonable and wiser, in his perspectives, attitudes, and decisions if he or she has followed a course in university education than if he or she has not done so.

Based on these findings and our own direct experience in the universities here, we made a proposal to the authorities to explore the possibilities of providing a special course of studies on university education (a) to all new recruits to the universities as lecturers before they are given permanent appointments and (b) to all others of the university staff who are willing to follow such a course. The proposal was accepted by policy-makers as a desirable step to be taken provided the members of the academic community of the universities approve of it. With some details it was circulated among the academic staff for their comments and observations. As the response was not quite satisfactory, we were informed that the proposal had to be reluctantly given up.

Therefore situation remains as it was more than half a century ago when Sir John Adams said that a teacher must know not only Latin but also John to teach John Latin well. In spite of several attempts made even by UNESCO²⁴ to promote new thinking in education at university level, most of the growing knowledge on Higher Education does not have direct access to or direct impact on, most of the Asian universities even now.²⁵

Generally no one is satisfied with the advice of building contractors before taking vital decisions regarding a major engineering project however much they may be experienced in their specialized work in implementing such engineering projects. Instead one would consult qualified and experienced engineers who know all about physical structures involved in construction work before taking such vital decisions. Unfortunately when we take vital decisions relating to social, psychological and educational “engineering” projects for producing our future leaders, and implement such projects, we do not yet appear to follow the same rational policy, despite the fact that they need the guidance of qualified and experienced persons who know at least something about social, psychological and educational structures involved in the teaching-learning processes resulting from different types of social interactions. Nor are our university policy-makers seriously concerned about the knowledge, attitudes, and skills, relevant to those human engineering processes.

8. Concluding Remarks

What is discussed here in brief does not give an indication of all that the Vidyodaya Department of Education did and tried to do within its short span of life. However they do indicate the trend of thinking that guided the policy of the department. By the time the department was removed to Colombo, a project proposal had been approved and even money was voted for an Instructional Aids Centre which was planned to serve, a large number of schools in the area around the campus. Another proposal was to establish a translation centre which could prepare Sinhala adaptations of standard English text books on subjects relating to education for publication so that every member of the academic community could be given an opportunity and an incentive to produce some useful reading material for the students every year. Another service suggested for this centre was the production and publication of programmed material as text books for which a model was published by the present writer himself.

A proposal with a detailed programme was put up to admit a group of Science students annually from among those rejected by the faculties of Science, Medicine and Engineering when they had not reached the required standard in all the four science subjects. Those who had reached a high standard in two science subjects and a reasonable standard in the third subject could be selected to follow the course leading to the BEd, so that they could

be trained to teach at least two science subjects at the highest level and the third subject at a lower level in schools. They could even be allowed to select the third subject from humanities or social sciences. This could not be implemented because the Faculty of Science could not be convinced to share their part of the responsibility because the degree proposed to be awarded was a BEd. We had also evolved a general science course to be followed by all teacher trainees in addition to the compulsory courses in English and Buddhist Education, or Buddhist Culture. Most of these proposals appear to be still relevant and may be implemented if considered desirable.

Same thing can be said even about the other projects discussed above. For instance, the need for popularization of the study of education remains to be the same if not more now than what it was then. No one appears to be concerned about the study of Buddhist Education now and even a recent attempt to introduce a post-graduate course of studies in Buddhist Education in the Buddhist University at Anuradhapura, has been rejected on the advice of lay Buddhist scholars with a good knowledge of Pali blindly following the Western university tradition although, the Mahatheras in charge were quite keen about trying it out at least as an experiment, apparently because they were conditioned less by the Western tradition.

Interest in harnessing the religio-cultural resources to development is more widespread and worldwide today than it was a decade ago but that initial interest in Sri Lanka appears to be now on the decrease. Our universities do not appear to be conscious of their social responsibilities as they were about a decade ago, and community education does not appear to be their concern at all now. Lack of university interest and knowledgeability about the work of UNESCO, has not changed from what it was and the university role in promoting world peace, is not even talked of now. Role of Buddhism and Buddhist Culture in UNESCO activities does not appear to be the concern of any university now. If our universities in Sri Lanka encourage the study of Buddhism and Education together as tried out at Vidyodaya, the impact expected of such exposure may be judged from some of those who have had that experience at Vidyodaya.

A project proposal with adequate details, prepared by the present writer, for an Institute of Buddhist Education (not Buddhist Studies) preferably in the name of late Dr. G. P. Malalasekare, was accepted first by the WFB and then by the ACBC and submitted to university authorities when there was one Vice Chancellor for all universities of Sri Lanka. That still appears to be the next step in the right direction if the study of Buddhist Education referred to in this discussion, is to be a success in the future.

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