

A Philosophical Study of Shin Maha Ratthasara's Method of Learning

Aye Aye Thein*

Abstract

This research is to analyze of Shin Maha Ratthasara's eight learning concepts (Su, Ci, Pu, Ba, Vi, Li, Si, Da) and then how to relevantly apply these concepts in the learning process of today Myanmar education? The tentative solution is that it is still relevantly apply to Myanmar education today. This research contributes to recognize one of Myanmar educational method for Myanmar Society.

Key words: Su, Ci, Pu, Ba, Vi, Li, Si, Da, Learning method, Philosophy of education.

Introduction

Meaning of education

"The origin of the word 'Education' is directly derived from the Latin term 'Educare'. Educare means 'to educate', 'to bring up', 'to raise'"¹

"Education is something men argue about. Often it is praised; more often it is blamed for what happens to men and nations. The words 'ought' and 'must' pervade educational discussions giving them an imperative and urgent mood. One feels that something can and should be done-presumably something different from what is being done. In such a situation there is always the disturbing possibility that the words being used in the argument may not denote the same activities nor convey the same meanings to the disputants. The most familiar meaning of the term 'education' identifies it with the process of instruction and training that goes on in an institution of learning in a school..."²

"John Dewey, the great philosopher and educationist of America defines, education: "since growth is the characteristic of life, education is all one with growing, it has no end beyond itself." Experience is the result of mutual interaction between the organism and the environment. Development is effected by learning. The entire process of growth and development which is caused by learning from experience is called education..."³

We can speak of various kinds of education. These are "Milieu education", "Informal education" and "Formal education."

Milieu education

There is the kind of learning that takes place almost automatically. Thus, we have learned apparently without any design on anyone's part to walk on sidewalks; to eat certain foods and to avoid others; to live in houses, etc. These are customary ways of doing things in a particular culture. At one time there may have been a reason for doing them this way rather than that, and there still may be. If economic conditions were appropriate, we would, no doubt, learn to relish rats and grubs.

A society will deliberately try to insure the younger generations' conformity to these folkways and mores, but since the process can be trusted to go on more or less automatically as a by-product of ordinary living, the deliberative element is not always apparent. We may call this milieu education or education by social contagion.

¹ Seetharamu, A.S., "Philosophy of Education", 4.

² Harry S. Broudy, "Building a Philosophy of Education", 3-4

³ Seetharamu, A.S., "Philosophy of Education", 4-8

* Lecturer, Department of Philosophy, Dagon University

Informal education

Other learnings are produced with conscious intent, but the producers are interested primarily in activities other than instruction. They may impart knowledge or information (instruction) or they may on occasion exercise the pupil in the formation of a habit (training) but this is not their sole or even their chief business this is informal education. When it is said that education does not stop with schooling and that schooling is after the least important part of education, the intent is to emphasize the importance of informal education.

Formal education

Finally, there is formal education in which the intention is to teach or train or both, is clear and where an institution is designated to devote itself primarily to this task. Schools from the kindergarten through the university are institutions devoted to formal education. Education is the process or product of a deliberate attempt to fashion experience by the direction and control of learning. Formal education refers to the process as it is carried on in schools.

On this definition it would be inaccurate to speak of an “educative environment” unless one meant that the environment was trying directly or indirectly to teach something to someone. To say that one learns from the environment would be true but not enlightening because there is nothing else from which one can learn....”⁴

Definition of the term philosophy

“What is a philosophy”? The word comes from two Greek words meaning “love of wisdom”. In practical terms, philosophy is the belief system that a person develops concerning existence, reality in the world, truth and knowledge, logic or thought processes, and aesthetics and ethical values. A philosophy answers such questions as "What is real"? How do we gain knowledge of what is true? What is our view of the world? Are humans basically good or evil? How do we learn? What are the principles of correct thinking? What ethical values should guide us in our actions? Of what does beauty consist? Philosophy, then, is a person's fundamental belief system, on which he or she bases the answers to life's (and education's) most perplexing questions....”⁵

Defining Philosophy of Education

Philosophy of education is the critical attention on the educational problems, concepts, methods and theories by the application of philosophical ideas.

Shin Maha Ratthasara's Method of Learning

“In earlier times, education was primarily a means for survival. Children were taught the necessary skills for living. Gradually, however, people came to use education for a variety of purposes. Today, education may be used not only for purposes of survival but also for better use of leisure time and refinements in social and cultural life.”⁶

“Myanmar has been a highly civilized nation for over two thousand years, and since those early days, it has been well aware of the role of human resource development. Since education has been given top priority from the time of king Anawaratha during the Bagan era, conditions in Myanmar are favourable for the development of education. Monastic education plays an important role in promoting basic literacy....”⁷ [Ancient Myanmar education has always been closely related to religion.]

⁴ Harry S. Broudy, “Building a Philosophy of Education”, 4-8

⁵ Robert F. Hessong and Thomas H. Weeks, “Introduction to the Foundations of Education”, 230

⁶ Howard Ozmon and Samuel M. Craver, “Philosophical Foundation of Education”, in Introduction

⁷ Myanmar Education Updates., 7.

“Thereavada Buddhism had been introduced and had been enjoying widespread acceptance since the olden times, Bagan period. The spread of Buddha’s teachings brought about educational endeavours for Myanmar people by encouraging and undertaking teaching, learning and study....”⁸ “The strength of the Myanmar National Education System was the result of the willing efforts put forth by Buddhist Sangha who, took the responsibility for secular education generation after generation by offering classes at their monasteries”⁹ “Through the dynasties (Bagan to Konboun) monasteries offered religious education in the form of tri-pitaka studies on suttas, vinaya and abhidhamma, as well as literature and ‘the arts’ which included linguistic skills, and academic disciplines....”¹⁰ “Their monasteries were respectively termed Arannavasi monasteries and Gamavasi monasteries also known as Pwe Kyaung....”¹¹ “Some of the Pwe Kyaung monasteries offer courses of such breadth and depth in so many areas that they were in fact Myanmar Universities of old.

In Pandita Section (Section on the Discerning) of Loka Niti, the 18 disciplines (Attharasa Sippa) that make up the bulk of learning throughout the ages in Myanmar are Listed: general knowledge, Law, mathematics, working with tools, the art of living, propitiatory practices, music, manual dexterity, archery, medicine, archaic usage, wit and humour, astrology, use of stratagem and deceit, prosody and versification, diplomacy, spells and chants, and grammar....”¹² [During the Era of Myanmar Kings, there have been Myanmar religious and lay scholars. They are Nyaungbintha U Ponnya (1190-1263 M.E), Shin Maha Ratthasara (830-892 ME), Atula Sayadaw Khin Gyi Phyaw (1086-1124 ME), Taungphila Sayadaw (940-1013 M.E), Royal Editor U Pyinna (circa 1125 circa 1185 M.E), and Message Writer U Shin Galay (1186-1269 M.E). Their educational thoughts, verses and admonitions have affected education to the present time. Among Myanmar monastic education systems Learning method of Shin Maha Ratthasara was significant].

“Shin Maha Rattasara (830-892 Myanmar Era), a prominent scholar and member of the Sangha in the Innwa period compiled a large number of Literary works....”¹³ [Naypyidaw Sayadaw Shin Maha Ratthasara and Taungtwin Sayadaw Shin Maha Silavumsa were contemporary scholars, and their competitive works have had as an ideal of classical Myanmar Literature. Shin Maha Ratthasara wrote about sixteen verses, among which Su Ci Pu Ba admonition is particularly well known for Myanmar educational literature].

“The Su Ci Pu Ba admonitions are actually known as ‘Counsel to Learners’....”¹⁴ [In his ‘Counsel to Learner, expressed as follow;

“Su Ci Pu Ba, Vi Li Si Da
Eight mnemonics for everyday practice
Learners should digest
All treatises that comes to his attention
Never skipping
Like a cat devouring a prawn.”¹⁵

Counsels to learners, Shin Maha Ratthasara (830-892 M.E)

⁸ ဦးသန်းဦး။ “မြန်မာ့ပညာရေးအယူအဆ”၊ ပညာတန်ဆောင်အထူးအစဉ်၊ ၄။

⁹ ယင်း၊ ၅။

¹⁰ ယင်း၊ ၇။

¹¹ ယင်း။

¹² ယင်း။

¹³ ယင်း၊ ၄၀။

¹⁴ ယင်း။

¹⁵ ယင်း၊ ၃၉။

[Su Ci Pu Ba admonitions is the fundamental principles of learning which may be termed in other words eight learning concepts or Learning method]. “The eight concepts of Learning are the abbreviation of eight pali words....”¹⁶

Eight Learning Concept of Shin Maha Ratthasara

သု	Su	Suneyya	သုဏေယျ	Listening/Taking Knowledge
စိ	Ci	Cinteyya	စိန္တေယျ	Reflective Thinking/Critical Thinking
ပု	Pu	Puccheyya	ပုစ္ဆေယျ	Asking Questions/Problem Solving
ဘာ	Ba	Baseyya	ဘာသေယျ	Discussion/Communicative
ဝိ	Vi	Vicareyya	ဝိစာရေယျ	Investigation/Analytic thinking and Synthesis thinking
လိ	Li	Likheyya	လိခေယျ	Taking Notes/Taking Information
သိ	Si	Sikkheyya	သိက္ခေယျ	Practice/Taking for skill
ဓာ	Da	Dareyya	ဓာရေယျ	Learning by Heart/Retaining of more Lasting knowledge

[The first one of Shin Maha Ratthasara’s eight learning concepts is the Listening or Learning (Suneyya). It means that the young learners learn such as literatures, old traditions, technique of speech and writing. In other word, the learners must aware no exception much knowledge. They should gain as much factual knowledge about any field as they can. Hence, from the philosophy of educational point of view, we may say that Shin Maha Ratthasara’s learning method is knowledge centered method.

In the shin Maha Ratthasara’s method, the reflective or critical thinking (Cinteyya), asking questions (or) problem solving (Puccheyya), discussion (or) communicative thinking (Baseyya), and investigation (Vicareyya) are another concepts. According to Shin Maha Ratthasara, the learner acquires not only an acquaintance with knowledge but also the disposition to think about them critically, dialectically, analytically. It means that he placed great emphasis on active learner in the learning process. So for him, learner is not a passive receiver of knowledge but an active participant in problem solving. Shin Maha Ratthasara believes in learning or studying that based on the learner’s effort through eight concepts. Thus, Shin Maha Ratthasara’s method of learning is not **“teacher authority centered or teacher based but learner-centered method.”**

Shin Maha Ratthasara believes that the learner should do taking notes or taking information (Likheyya), practice (or) taking for skill (Sikkheyya), and learning by heart (or) retaining of more lasting knowledge (Dareyya).

These last three concepts should do the learner in the systematic learning of knowledge. So, we should assume that Shin Maha Ratthasara’s learning method is not only counsels to learner, but also one of Myanmar education methods from the view of philosophy of education].

Conclusion

The aim of this research is to analyze whether Shin Maha Ratthasara’s method is relevant to Myanmar education today. It could be concluded that Shin Maha Ratthasara’s method relevantly apply not only by learners of his age but also today learners and scholars. All of his concepts may be regarded as necessarily foundation for doing any active education. Thus, his method of education is one that may also be regarded as timeless norms of education through all ages.

¹⁶ ယင်း၊ ၄၁။

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