

LANKASIAN YOUTH IN SEARCH OF DHAMMA TRUTH

By Professor L. G. Hewage

Lankasia here means Asia with special emphasis on Lanka (or Ceylon), because all my observations may be conditioned to a great extent by what I have experienced in Ceylon. Within the last few years I have been visiting several "Buddhist Countries" of this region (which I call Lankasia,) in order to find out the traditional, actual and the potential roles of Buddhist education in these countries. By Buddhist Education I mean education based on and including the teachings of Buddha and the culture resulting therefrom. I tried to find out answers to several questions relating to Buddhist Education in this sense. Within the time and facilities available to me, I gathered a great deal of relevant information particularly in regard to the education of youth in Lankasia. What follows is a brief summary of my findings.

Wherever I went, I found a keen interest on the part of the youth pursuing higher studies, to know the actual teachings of Buddha and his followers. The countries I visited are: India, Singapore, Malaysia, Penang, Thailand, Philippines, Hong Kong, and Japan. Regarding the conditions in Laos, Cambodia, Indonesia, Vietnam, Pakistan and Burma too, I have obtained some relevant information from indirect sources. Ceylon is also included in my observations, as pointed out earlier. All these experiences have made me to come to the following conclusions.

All these youths in general and quite true to the characteristic nature of their developmental stage, are in search of the truth, the truth that appeals to their rational attitude of mind and the truth that will meet their intellectual demands and the spiritual needs. Most of them have only heard that the teachings of Buddha contained some truth if not the whole truth. Others who claim to have the whole truth or the only truth (some economic and others spiritual), appear to be actively and effectively engaged in propagating their own brands of the truth in their own way. Most of them have realized that they have failed hopelessly to meet the pressing needs of the Lankasian youth and are therefore adopting even sub-human or inhuman methods as desperate attempts to justify their existence.

However, on the part of the Buddhist Educators of Lankasia, there appears to be a lack of interest, motivation, and understanding in regard to this field of activity, barring of course, a handful of devoted educators who are an insignificant helpless minority with little or no direct influence on the

educational thinking of Lankasia. Very few, if at all, appear to have even recognized the significance of studying Buddhism and Buddhist culture in relation to education. Therefore even in the institutions where Buddhist studies are pursued, no effort appears to be made to understand and interpret the teachings of Buddha in relation to the education problems of the contemporary society. An appreciable number of the policy makers and executive officers of the educational set up in the countries of Lankasia do not appear to know Education and Buddhism both. Neither are some of them aware of this deplorable condition because they are not often exposed to growing new knowledge related to these fields.

The new growing scientific knowledge that the youths of Lankasia have acquired through the mass media and as a result of the educational explosion at University level appear to have equipped them with an appropriate outlook or attitude to respond quite favourably and perhaps enthusiastically too, to the true teachings of Buddha, provided of course that they are imparted and interpreted in the modern scientific idiom and in relation to the contemporary concepts of man and his environment. Unfortunately the little interest and knowledge available are in the hands of an insignificant minority while those who matter most in Lankasian education, either do not know these teachings or do not wish to make them known to the growing generation. The reasons for this unsatisfactory condition could be found even by a preliminary study limited to the peripheral level of the problem. Perhaps even the chaotic conflicting conditions that lead to most of the youth unrest in Lankasia too may be ultimately related to the defective content, method and organization of the university education system in most of the Lankasian countries. No serious no worthy attempt appears to have been made to harness the unexplored traditional cultural resources of Lankasia in reorganizing the education systems of the region. Consequences are already harmful enough to the individual and the society both; and the future appears to be even worse, unless immediate steps are taken to reverse or at least arrest this dangerous trend of spiritual ignorance.

Remedies appear to be yet within the reach of the educators and the statesmen of the region, provided they are prepared to face the facts of life with courage and, without running away from all that is unpalatable but true, particularly when they are related to the problems of education. It is high time for us all to realize the fact that the cultural, heritage of Lankasia is not worth only for the purpose of protecting and popularizing as tourist attractions, capable of earning foreign exchange for the countries where they happen to be situated today. Whatever is left from this cultural heritage will have to be studied as the external manifestation of the internal growth and development of an appreciable proportion of the human race in its great struggle to evolve ways and means of

successful and satisfying community living in peace, without involving in suicidal warfare.

It is this inner hidden meaning of the cultural heritage that is ever relevant to us, and doubly relevant to the youths who are in search of truth to understand their problems. They are the legitimate and fortunate heirs to this rich peace-promoting cultural heritage; but rather strangely and unfortunately, the "legitimate" educators of Lankasia do not appear to have recognized their grave responsibility of imparting this knowledge in the appropriate way at the appropriate stage of their development. Although the problem at this stage may appear to be limited to Lankasia alone, the consequences of neglecting it and postponing its solution will eventually be global or universal in magnitude. How and what aspects of the teachings of Buddha should be studied, interpreted, and propagated, are the immediate educational needs of Lankasia, if the already chaotic conditions of the youth unrest are at least partly to be removed.

All of us who are wisely, dispassionately and sincerely concerned about the future of mankind, should recognize and encourage the services attempted to be rendered in this field by the institutions like Sri Lankaramaya of Singapore, Buddhist Missionary Society of Kuala Lumpur, Kodo Kyodan of Japan, and W.F. B. Regional Centres of Bangkok, Tokyo, Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, Hong Kong, Manila, and Penang, to mention only a few personally known to me outside Ceylon. Lanka (or Ceylon) of course, does perhaps more than her share in several related fields, although much more could be done with resources at her disposal, if anticipated revival after the report of the second Committee of Inquiry just appointed, by the All Ceylon Buddhist Congress, proves to be at least as successful as the first, if not more. Let us hope that such inquiries reveal the true nature of the educational conditions of our youth in search of truth. Let us also hope that at least as a result of such inquiries, our youths of Lankasia are given their legitimate right of studying the truth as found in the teaching of Buddha, whose influence brought peace to all parts of Lankasia in the past when his words were heard and respected. The Vesak day every year brings this message to the whole world cautioning us to the dangers of ignoring the truth, leading to peace which may be rightly called DHAMMA.

