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Understanding the education system in the Kotte period of Sri Lanka through the form of poetry known as *Sandesha Kavya* of that era

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Abstract

The era of the Sinhalese Kingdom of Kotte (1412 – 1597 A.D.), named after its capital, Kotte, is considered the golden era of literary and educational activities in historical Sri Lanka. The royal patronage, scholarly Buddhist monks and their monastic or *pirivena* education system with diverse subjects and curricula were known to be behind the success of literary and educational activities in the Kotte period. Although Buddhist monasteries (*pirivenas*) were the known educational institutes that prevailed in historical Sri Lanka, there has been a lacuna in identifying the specific education system and curricula in those places of education. This study was an attempt to shed some light on the educational system of that era through the form of poetry called *Sandesha Kavya* of that era, literary works intertwined with *pirivena* education, and the scholarly monks associated with those institutes. A *Sandesha Kavya* of ancient Sri Lanka was a lengthy collection of poems written in the form of a message supposedly carried by a bird as a messenger. In addition to a message, a *Sandesha Kavya* would include descriptions of the places the messenger bird supposedly travels through. One would have an insight into the culture and human behavior of those times through a *Sandesha Kavya*. Mainly based on *Gira Sandeshaya* (the message carried by a parrot) and *Hansa Sandeshaya* (the message carried by a swan), this study concluded that the education activities in the Kotte era were at an outstanding level in terms of teaching and learning, especially in the Buddhist monasteries named Vijayaba *Pirivena* and Padmavati *Pirivena* in Totagamuwa and Keregala respectively. Based on the available literary evidence narrated in the *Sandesha* poems, this study found that the educational and literary activities in the Kotte era were in a level higher than in other kingdoms of ancient Sri Lanka. Also, the royal patronage received from King Parakramabahu VI and the works and poetry of scholarly monks Totagamuwe Sri Rahula Thero and Wanaratana Thero contributed remarkably to the education and literary activities during the Kotte period.

Keywords: *Sandesha Kavya*, Kotte Period, Vijayaba *Pirivena*, Totagamuwe Sri Rahula Thero, Keragala Padmavati *Pirivena*, Wanarathana Thero, *Gira Sandeshaya*, *Hansa Sandeshaya*

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Introduction

Sri Lanka has a long history of education and literary tradition. The origins of contemporary literary activities in Sri Lanka were influenced by the introduction of Buddhism around 300 B.C. (Hevawasam, 1969). The earliest formal education system in Sri Lanka was considered the system that prevailed in Buddhist monasteries, which were called *pirivenas* and *Mulayatanyas*. During the Anuradhapura period (circa 250 B.C. to 1017 A.D.), three primary centers of learning, namely Mahavihara, Abhayagiriya, and Jetavanaramaya, played a significant role in nourishing monastic learning and scholarship among Buddhist monks (Pannasekera, 1969; Adikari, 2006). The *Mahawamsa* and *Chulawamsa*, two significant and prominent historical chronicles, provide some insight into the existence and educational activities that functioned under monastic institutions in ancient Sri Lanka.

According to Pannasekera (1969), the term '*pirivena*' is defined as a 'dwelling place for monks'. During the initial stages, *pirivenas* were mainly open for the Buddhist monks to study the *Vinaya* (Code of rules for the conduct of monks and nuns) and *Dhamma* (The Doctrine of the Buddha). Therefore, the curricula were mainly limited to *Tripitaka*, *Pela* and *Atuvas*. *Pirivena* became a formal education establishment around the 4th century after King Buddhadasa (336-365 A.D.) built the famous Mayurapada *Pirivena* within the precincts of the Mahaviharaya in Anuradhapura (Adikari, 2006).

Vidyalankara (2014) explained that the early monastic education institutes that functioned during the period of Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa disappeared gradually, and the modern *pirivena* systems principally initiated during the periods of Dambadeniya, Kurunegala and Gampola kingdoms of Sri Lanka. The *pirivena* system flourished in the Kingdom of Kotte, which was considered the country's golden era of literature activities.

The Kingdom of Kotte, renowned as one of the most illustrious dynasties in the history of ancient Sri Lanka, emerged as a prominent center of cultural and intellectual development, succeeding the Kingdom of Kurunegala (Ilangasingha, 1972).

The ruling power of ancient Sri Lanka transferred to the Kingdom of Kotte during the last quarter of the 14th century. Power struggles and political volatility were the main reasons for this change (Somaratne, 1975). After the anointing of King Parakramabahu VI (1412-1467 A.D.), Kotte became the official kingdom and ruling capital of Sri Lanka between 1412 and 1597 A.D. Also, the Kingdom of Kotte is considered the last kingdom of ancient Sri Lanka under the sovereign of one Sinhalese king (Adikari, 2006).

The Kotte period is noted for its exceptional and notable development in education and literary activities. It is noted that during the kingdom of Kotte, all five kings who ruled Kotte i.e., King Parakramabahu VI (1412-1467), King Buvanekabahu VI (1469-1476), King Pandita Parakramabahu VII (1476-1485), King Veera Parakramabahu VIII (1485-1505) and King Dharma Parakramabahu IX (1505-1528) extended their patronage for the upliftment of education (Adikari, 2006). Those kings mainly contributed to education and literary activities by providing necessary leadership and guidance in all matters connected to education, arts, literature and

culture. Those activities were at their peak during the reign of King Parakramabahu VI, which ran for nearly 52 years. The contribution and patronage of King Parakramabahu VI towards the development of education and literary activities were prominent when compared to other kings during the Kotte period and any other monarchy in ancient Sri Lanka (Ranasinghe, 1969; Kuruppu, 1972).

The political, economic, and social stability during the Kotte period under the reign of King Parakramabahu VI provided the utmost support to the Buddhist monks in engaging in education and literary activities without disruptions. During the Kotte period, education was at its peak, and *pirivena* was considered an excellent center for teaching and learning. Most of these *pirivenas* were started during periods of previous kingdoms during Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa, Dambadeiya and Gampola and reached a notable progression during the Kotte era (Thilakasiri, 2008; Vidyalankara, 2014). However, except for a few key institutions, there is not much information on these education institutes or their education systems in contemporary sources.

A closer examination of *Sandesha Kavya*, or messenger poetry, reveals aspects related to the classical education system in the ancient Kotte period. Compared with other information sources such as '*katikavath*' and inscriptions, the *sandesha* poems provide more information on higher education in the Kotte period. However, evidence connected to education is scattered in those messenger poetries under different headings, and therefore, facts related to education should be carefully examined and extracted from them.

The poetic genre was higher in the Kotte period than in any other era. The '*Sandesha Kavya*' or the messenger poetry was known as the most popular and recognized genre of literature during the period of the Kotte. This poetry tradition is a transregional and multireligious poetic form and, according to Berkvitz (2017), is found in most South Asian languages and across religious traditions. This poetic tradition was initiated in the Gampola period and marked its advanced stage during the Kotte period. The messages carried by birds generally addressed a deity, asking for blessings or favours for some worldly success, particularly in protecting and ensuring the prosperity of a king.

This study was carried out to explore education during the Kotte period by giving closer attention to the literary evidence in *Gira Sandeshaya* (message carried by a Parrot) and *Hansa Sandeshaya* (message carried by a Swan) to study education during the ancient Kotte period. It aimed to present a comprehensive analysis of the education system, curricula, notable educational institutes, and teachers in the Kotte period using *Sandesha* poems.

Methodology

This present research adopted a qualitative approach and mainly utilized secondary data to investigate the Kotte period. The evidence for the study was gathered from historical chronicles and an extensive body of literature related to a wide range of subjects relevant to the era, including historical events, political dynamics, literary contributions, and religious practices.

The study's approach involved a comprehensive review and analysis of secondary sources, aiming to provide a complete understanding of the education activities in the Kotte period. Historical chronicles and other contemporary literature sources comprising scholarly books, *Sandesha Kavya* or messenger poems, and other academic works deliver information related to different features of the Kotte period of ancient Sri Lanka. The validation of facts related to the present study was done through cross-checking with literary sources used to obtain data for the study. Collected data were analyzed and presented under several sub-topics according to the objectives of the study.

Results and Discussion

Education in the Kotte Period

The Kotte era marked significant advancements in education and literature that flourished with the Buddhist monasteries or Buddhist monastic colleges, especially during the reign of King Parakramabahu VI. Moreover, the cultural renaissance and intellectual flourishing were notable in the Kotte period.

The *Sandesha* poetry or the messenger poetry provides significant information on these monastic education centers or *pirivenas* along with the details of the social and cultural aspects of the society in the Kotte period. Those *Sandesha* poems have a narrative journey, and the journey of the messenger starts from a specific place and carries out the message to a recipient at an exact destination. Upon closer inspection of this narrative journey of *Gira Sandeshaya* and *Hansa Sandeshaya*, information about education and related activities such as leading education institutes or *pirivenas*, notable monks, subjects taught at those institutions, teacher-student relationships, teaching and learning methods etc. could be found.

Gira Sandeshaya is the fourth *Sandeshaya* among the *Sandesha* poems written during the Kotte period. The author of this *Sandeshaya* is unknown, and according to the reference given in verse 55, it could be assumed that the author of this poetry was a high-ranking monk who lived in a temple in Jayawardanapura (Wickramasinghe, 1963). Thilakasiri (2008) presumed that *Gira Sandeshaya* was written in the last few years of King Parakramabahu's reign, around the period of 1447-1467. In *Gira Sandeshaya*, a parrot has been chosen as a messenger to carry out a poetic message from Jayawardanapura Kotte to Vijayabha *pirivena* in Totagamuwa. The recipient was the chief monk of the *pirivena*. The *Gira Sandeshaya* conveys a message to the Thotagamuwe Sri Rahula Thero, the chief incumbent of the Vijayaba *Pirivena* in Thotagamuwa, requesting him to implore Lord Natha for his blessings to ensure the well-being of King Parakramabahu VI, the protection of his troops, and the safeguarding of Buddhism in Sri Lanka. The messenger took four days to reach his destination and spent three nights there. There were 248 poems in the *Sandeshaya* describing the journey.

Leading Education Institutions

Prominent educational institutes were functioning during this period, and these institutions played a crucial role in advancing the scholarly and intellectual pursuits of the time. Gnanananda *Pirivena* of Vidagama, Padmavati *Pirivena* of Karagala, Vijayabahu *Pirivena* at Totagamuwa,

Sunetradevi Pirivena at Papiliyana and *Irugalkula Pirivena* at Mulgirigala were the significant education institutes functioned in the Kotte era. According to Adhikari (2006), *Vijayaba Pirivena* and the Sri Rahula Thero belonged to the *Gramavasi Nikaya* (sector) and *Padmavati Pirivena* at Karagala and *Vanaratana Mahimi* to the *Vanavasi Nikaya*, respectively. *Gira Sandeshaya* describes the Sri *Vijayaba Pirivena* of Totagamuwa and the Sri Rahula Thero, the chief monk of the *pirivena*. Also, *Hansa Sandeshaya* gave information on *Padmavati Pirivena* at Karagala and *Vanaratana Mahimi*, the chief incumbent of the *Pirivena*. However, according to the available literary evidence, it was notable that there was a certain amount of literary competition between these two *Nikayas* (Adhikari, 2006). However, the impact of that competition brought many scholarly and literary advantages to the education and literary tradition in Sri Lanka.

Sri Vijayaba *Pirivena* at Totagamuwa

Sri Vijayaba *Pirivena* at Totagamuwa is considered one of the leading education institutes in the Kotte period. This outstanding education institute was located in the Totagamuwa in the southern part of the country. This was started in the 11th century and renovated from time to time in the 12th, 13th and 14th centuries (Adhikari, 2006; Wickramasinghe, 1964). Sri Vijayaba *Pirivena* was in its highest fame in the 15th century, especially during the Kotte period. This *pirivena* was established by King Vijayabahu I (1051-1106 A.D.) in the Polonnaruwa period and rebuilt by King Parakramabahu IV (1303-1333 A.D.) after the massacre by Magha invaders during Kurunagala era (Adhikari, 2006; Wickramasinghe, 2008). The king renovated the monastery by building a two-storied mansion. Vijayabha *pirivena* attained high academic standards during the headship of Totagamuwe Sri Rahula Thero. His noteworthy contribution to literature and expert knowledge in different languages and subjects certainly brought international popularity to the *pirivena* and maintained an excellent level of education. Moreover, the kinship and close link between the great King Parakramabahu VI and Rahula Thero also brought the *pirivena* to a higher level of literary tradition. King Parakramabahu VI treated Sri Rahula Thero as his own son and due to this kinship and strong bond, the Vijayabha *pirivena* received a significant royal patronage.

In *Gira Sandeshaya*, 'Vijayaba *Piriven Wanuma*' or narration of Vijayaba *pirivena* gave semblance to education practices in the Kotte period. Verses 217-227 narrate Vijayabha *pirivena* and, with close exploration, some understanding of the education practiced at that time in the temple premises could be extracted. According to the *Gira Sandeshaya*, the messenger parrot rests on the clump of trees within the Totagamuwa Temple premises and observes the activities and surroundings of the great *pirivena*. This narration gives a substantial amount of information about the Vijayaba *pirivena*, including its outstanding education system, student life, and subjects taught during the period of Sri Rahula Thero, the chief incumbents of the *pirivena* (Wickramasinghe, 1964). Both Wickramasinghe (1968) and Thilakisiri (2018) argued that the Vijayaba *pirivena* in Totagamuwa was not in the limelight as a renowned education institution before the period of Rahula Thero,

The author of *Gira sandeshaya* describe the Vijayaba *pirivena* as follows;

පතන කිරණ දුරු කළ දද ගළ	පාය
සරන කවුළු බිම් බිතු දිළි පිළි	පාය
නිසන් බැබළි සුර පහ සරි වෙළ	පාය
බලග උතුරු දිග විජයබ මහ	පාය (Verses 217)

According to the above verse of the *Gira sandeshaya*, the Vijayaba *pirivena* was decorated with flags and crystal pillars and also, there were windows to get the sunlight. Hence, based on this building structure and designs, the author compared the Vijayaba *pirivena* to the divine palace in heaven.

Furthermore, through the observation of the parrot, as mentioned in the *Gira sandeshaya*, we can get a clear picture of the high standard maintained by the Vijayaba Pirivana in both teaching and learning. The following verses of *Gira Sandeshaya* provide evidence of that as follows;

“මනරම් වෙහෙර තුළ තැන තැන සැපැම්

“ගැඹුරු නොයෙක තැන් පිලිවිස සිත් ලෙසි
වෙහෙර පසෙක ඉඳ සොඳ පොත් පත් රැගෙන” (Verse 222)

According to the above verses, it is clear that the students of Vijayaba *Privena* had a hazel-free environment to learn and discuss various subject topics. As they studied different subject areas, providing a scholarly environment to the students was essential. The guidance and direction of Sri Rahula Thero drove Vijayaba *Pirivena* into an excellent center for both teaching and learning. He laid a solid foundation for the *Pirivena* during his tenure as the chief incumbent or the “*Sangharaja*” of the *Pirivena*. The Thero himself brought fame to the *Pirivena*, and, many foreign scholars studied in Vijayaba *Pirivena* during his time (Adhikari, 2006). His wisdom, scholarship of *Tripitaka*, literary excellence, and mastery of the six languages made him an extraordinary scholar.

On the other hand, the author of *Hansa Sandeshaya* narrated the tremendous academic institute of the *Vanawasi Nikaya*, the *Padmavati Pirivena at Keraqala*.

Padmavati *Pirivena* at Keragala

Padmavati *Pirivena* at Keragala was also noted as a leading education institute in the Kotte period. According to the inscription of Keregala, this temple and the education institute were built during the period of the Kingdom of Dambadeniya (Vidyalankara, 2014). This *pirivena* made a significant and outstanding contribution to education during the reign of King Parakrambahu VI. Vanaratana Thero, a notable monk in the *Vanavasi* fraternity, rendered excellent service to the betterment of the *pirivena* during his period as a chief incumbent of the Padmavati *pirivena* (Adhikari, 2006).

In *Hansa sandeshaya*, Verses 170-182 of 'Padmavati *Piriven Wanuma*' or narration of Padmavati *Pirivena* provides valuable information on the education practices in the Kotte period. According to the narration given by the Swan, monks were sitting in places around the Padmavati *pirivena* and were busy with their studies.

සරණ වැද ගුරුන් කියවා දිනෙන් දි	න
පරණ අලුත් පොත් පෙරළා පනිත් ප	න
දරණ කරන ලෙස ඉඳගෙන වෙනින් වෙ	න
හෙරණ සික කියති හේරණෝ තැනින් තැ	න (Verse 170)

According to the following verses of *Hansa sandeshaya*, it was clear that both the teacher and the student had a friendly environment to discuss matters related to the studies. Also, these discussions occurred in any place they preferred within the *Pirivena* premises. Providing a hazard-free place for education is one of the key aspects of learning and teaching. Therefore, by the below-mentioned narration of *Hansa Sandeshaya*, it could be argued that Padmavati *Pirivena* at Keragala provided the best learning environment with calm surroundings for students and as well as to teachers.

මද කුන් පවර පෙරුරු උවදෙස් නො හැ	ර
දන ගත් ගුමුරු පද පදරුන් නියම ක	ර
නැණවත් පසිදු පඩිවර ඉද වෙහෙර තු	ර
පවසත් නොයෙක් තකු වියරණ සඳ ලක	ර (Verse 178)

During the period of the Kotte Kingdom, these two *pirivenas* rendered excellent services in both teaching and learning. Hence, without any doubt, it was clear that both these academic institutes offered a noteworthy and outstanding service and contribution to improve the education landscape in Sri Lanka.

Curricula and Subjects

In general, both *Gira* and *Hansa Sandesha* discuss valuable information about the subjects taught and the systematic alignment of the *pirivena* education system in the Kotte period. Vidyalkara (2014) stated that these educational institutes were similar to the present-day universities. These *pirivenas* were recognized as centers of education for both lay people and monks. The curricula in *pirivenas* were mainly focused on religious education. Verses 219-221 of the *Gira Sandeshaya* narrate that *Suthra*, *Vinaya* and *Abidhrama* were taught in Vijayabha *Pirivena* at Totagamuwa. Verse 219 of the *Gira Sandeshaya* says that a group of clergy students were learning *Abhidhrama* as follows.

“අබ්දම් පෙළ අරුත් විමසන සහ	ගණය” (Verse 219)
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Suthra Pitakaya was also another popular subject area in the curriculum of the Vijayaba *Pirivena* and verse 220 describes it as follows.

සුතුරු දහම පවසන සමහර ස	හය (Verse 220)
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Suthra was also taught at Padmavati *Pirivena* and the below verse of the *Hansa Sandeshaya* described that students discussed the *Suthra Pitakaya* as follows;

අයෙක් සුතුරු පෙළදම් පදරුන් අස	නි (Verse 176)
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According to the below verse of the *Gira sandeshaya*, students examined the *Vinaya pitakaya*, the code of discipline. Students were clear of all their doubts on subject matters while discussing among themselves and also with their great teachers.

සමහර සුපිළිපත් සහ ගණ මන මෙ	නය
පුවතර අරුත් ටිකා ගෙන වෙන වෙ	නය
පැනසර ඇදුරු උවදෙස් බස් දැන ගෙ	නය
නොමහර ගැඹුරු තැන් විමසති වින ය	නය (Verse 221)

Not only the Vijayaba *Pirivena* but also the Padmavati *Pirivena* at Keragala taught *Vinaya Pitakaya* and related areas to the students. Below verses of *Hansa Sandeshaya* narrates how the clergy students learnt *Vinaya*, *Tika* and *Gatapada* at the Keragala Padmavati *Pirivena*.

පැවැති සියල් ටිකා ගැට පද දැ	කය
විමති නොවී මදකුත් එක ද තැන	කය
කැමති ලෙසින් පවසන හැර සිත සැ	කය
අසති නොයෙක් සහ ගණ විනය පිට	කය (Verse 178)

A large number of monks studied subjects related to Buddhist studies such as *Tripitaka*, *Atuva*, *Tika*, *Anutika*, *Prakarana* Sanskrit, Pali, *Nighandu*, *Kosha*, *Nisabana*, *Tera bana* and *Kasayin virita* in these two academic institutes. Also, secular subjects such as poetry, medicine, and astrology were taught in these *pirivenas* (Adhikari, 2006). Vidyalkara (2014) further explains that language education had been given a prominent place in the curriculum in *pirivena* education in the Kotte period, and Sinhala, Pali, Sanskrit, Maghadhi, and Tamil were the popular languages among them.

Also, the great scholar Totagamuwe Siri Rahula Thero holds the title of “Shad Basha Parameshwara” which means “Master of Six Languages”. Those six languages included Sanskrit, Prakrutha, Maghadhi (Pali), Gauraseni, Apabhransha and Pyishavee (Vidyalkara, 2014).

The *Gira Sandeshaya* verse 227 clearly described as follows that Sanskrit, Magadha, Elu, and Tamil poetry were taught in the Vijayaba *Pirivena* ;

සිරිමත් සොළුරු එවෙනෙර තැන තැන ලකු	එ
ඉඳසින් ලෙසට පෙර කිවියර සිරි රුකු	එ
දැනගත් සඳ ලකර වියරණ වියත් මු	එ
පවසත් සකු මගද එළ දෙමළ කිවි න	එ

It is interesting to note that due to South Indian invasions in the country for an extended period and the close links between South India and Ceylon, the Tamil language and Tamil culture were also taught in *Pirivenas*. Moreover, Tamil was quite a popular language during the Kotte period. Therefore, the Tamil language was also there in the curricula of both Vijayaba *Pirivena* and the Padmavati *Pirivena*.

As language studies were in the *Pirivena* curricula, the books related to language studies, such as Grammer and Lexicon, were written by the scholarly monks in the Kotte era. As a result, the *Moggallana Panchika Pradeepaya* and *Buddhippasadhaniteeka (Padha Sadhna Teeka)* by Totagamuwe Sri Rahula Thero were considered the leading and popular textbooks among the students who studied Grammer in these institutions (Vidyalankara, 2014). Furthermore, students of Padmavati *Pirivena* used the book titled '*Niyasateekawa*' and verse 171 of *Hansa Sandeshaya* confirmed it as follows.

මෙන් සක කිරීම පිරිසිදු කර සිල් ගු	ණය
ඉන් සැක නොවී කරනුව සසර තර	ණය
නන් සිය පද නිබඳ රකිනා ලෙස ප	ණය
මුත් සික සික වළඳ විමසන සහ ග	ණය

Sanskrit was also another popular subject in the *pirivena* curriculum of the Kotte period. The bilateral relationship between India and Sri Lanka was the main reason for this and the literary evidence of the *Gira Sandeshaya* shows that the Brahmin students from India studied Veda at the Vijayabahu *Pirivena* at Totagamuwa.

නියුණු නැණින් කෙරෙමින් සේක නිවා	රණ
පමුණු වමින් එකිනෙක සමය කා	රණ
දැමුණු සිතින් ඉඳ කර වෙහෙර පු	රණ
බමුණු රසෙක වෙදරුන් කරන දා	රණ (Verse 223)

On the other hand, the above verse gave information about foreign students who were studying in the great Vijayaba *Pirivena*.

According to Vidyalankara (2014), the curriculum and subjects taught in these *pirivenas* were not limited to religious studies. Subjects such as Medicine, Astrology, Economics, Mathematics and Veda were taught in the *pirivena*. Padmavati *Pirivena*, on the other hand, rejected such a curriculum and strictly adhered to a group of subjects that were in keeping with the Principles of a *Vanavasi* institution. As Padmavati *Pirivena* was more focused on the spiritual well-being of the students, they imposed restrictions on the teaching and learning of these subjects. It gave priority to the education of novice monks, focusing more on Tripitaka education. The verse 224 provides evidence for the mathematical and astrological calculation done by the students residing at the Vijayaba *Pirivena* in Totagamuwa as follows.

බබා සේද තැනින් තැන ගහ ගණන් බැ	ද
පබා කර සිදත් සමහරු ගණිති ඉ	ද (Verse 224)

Medicine was also another subject taught in the Vijayaba *Pirivena* and verse 225 of the *Gira Sandeshaya* explained as follows how students learn medicine in the *pirivena*. ;

මුනිවිරු දෙසු සදහම් මෙන් ඇම දව	ස
උවදුරු දුර රකිනුව සත් වග වෙසෙ	ස
පෙරු'දුරු ඉසිවරන් පැවසු නොයෙක ලෙ	ස
වෙදවරු වෙදසතර පිරුවති එහි සතො	ස (Verse 225)

According to the above verse, the main idea of students learning medicine was to heal and cure people with different illnesses. Students could heal people who needed mental and physical support, especially with religious therapy, and also from the knowledge they gained from learning medicine in the *Pirivena*.

Economics was another popular subject among the lay students of the Vijayaba *Pirivena* and verse 226 of the *Gira Sandeshaya* described how students studied economics at the *Pirivena* :

සුරගුරුවන් උතුරු දෙමහයි වන පොති න
සමහරු රුත් සතර පිරුවති නොයෙක න (*Gira Sandeshaya*, Verse 226)

Though secular subjects were not very popular in the curriculum of the Vanaratana *Pirivena*, the verse of the *Hansa Sandeshaya* given below provides literary evidence that students studied poetry and drama at the Vanartana *Pirivena*;

දොසේ දුරලමිනි සඳ වියරණ ලක ර
ඇසේ කියන විසිතුරු කවි නළු සත ර (*Hansa Sandeshaya*, Verse 179)

Based on the above literary evidence extracted from both *Gira Sandeshaya* and *Hansa Sandeshaya*, it could be concluded that a well-balanced curriculum was practiced in the *pirivenas* and the level of education was at a high standard during the period of the Kotte kingdom.

Notable Scholarly Monks in the Kotte Period

During the 14th to 15th century Kotte era, several famous, scholarly, renowned monks were attached to education institutes or the *Pirivenas*. Their role and contribution to the upliftment of education, advisory, administration or literature were not second to the monks who served in the same capacity in the ancient Anuradhapura or Polonnaruwa era.

Contemporary literary and inscriptional evidence proved that Sri Rahula Maha Thero at the Vijayaba *Pirivena* in Totagamuwa, Vanaratana *Mahimi* at the Keregala *Pirivena*, Vidagama Maitriya *Mahanetrprasadamula Himi* of Ghanananda *Pirivena* , Mangala *Mahasami Himi* of Sunethradevi *Pirivena* at Papiliyana, Buvanekaba *Mahathera* at the Gatara *Pirivena* in Kelaniya and Wettave Thero at the Vijayaba *Pirivena* rendered a memorable service to the development of religion and education in the Kotte period (Adikari, 2006). As the present study was based on the literary evidence found in *Gira Sandeshaya* and *Hansa Sandeshaya*, this section of the report mainly focused on the contribution made by the great scholar Totagamuve Sri Rahula Thero, the chief incumbent of the Vijayaba *Pirivena* in Totagamuwa and about the Vanaratana *Mahimi* at the Keregala Padmavati *Pirivena*.

Totagamuwe Sri Rahula Thero

Totagamuwe Sri Rahula Thero was in the Vijayaba *Pirivena* in Totagamuwa during the 15th-16th centuries. Totagamuwe Sri Rahula Thero was famous as the “Master of Six Languages” and earned and held various other titles as well. Those titles reflected his wisdom and fame. In the scholarly world, Rahula Thero was known as the “*Pandita Shiromani Shadbhasha Parameshvara Rajaguru Tripitaka Vagisvaracharya Sirisangabo Totagamuwe Sri Rahula Sangharaja Mahasami*” (Adikari, 2006).

Vijayaba Pirivena gained universal fame and was considered a complete *Samastha Shastra Shala* (a school for the whole range of disciplines) during his period as the head of the *pirivena*. Both local and foreign scholars paid tribute and respect to his brilliance and amazing wisdom reflected in many of his literary works, including *Pancika Pradipaya*, *Parevi Sandeshaya* and *Kavyashekharaya* (Adikari, 2006).

During his long and distinguished tenure as the chief incumbent and the principal of the Vijayaba Pirivena, the Thero engaged in many scholarly, literary and religious activities. The *Gira Sandeshaya* describes as follows the erudition of the great Siri Rahula Thero in verses 232 to 248.

ගැඹුරු විජම් පෙළ කිරි සයුර ඇම වි	ට
කවුරු සිදිසි වෙති මෙකලට එ යති	ට (<i>Gira Sandeshaya, Verse 234</i>)

His knowledge of *Abhidhamma* is evident in the above lines, which also says that he can never be compared with another scholar in the country.

නරදම් සැරි සුතුරු දම් තුඟු සුරතුර	ට
මනරම් ඔහු නවණ දෙරණ ම විය පිහි	ට (<i>Gira Sandeshaya</i> , Verse 235)

Not only the Abhidhamma, he also has a profound wisdom in *Sutra*. Moreover, the lines below describe how Rahula Thero explained *Vinaya pitaka* (Code of Discipline) and related facts to the novice monks.

මනහර විනය පදරුත් මහා මිණි	නදන
ගෙනඈර දෙමිත් යති ගණ කරවයි	නදන (<i>Gira Sandeshaya, Verse 236</i>)

His wisdom on grammar is narrated in the lines below;

සතර පතළ කළ ඇදුරන් සෙ පො	රණය
නොහැර සිත සෙ දැන ගෙන අව්විය	රණය (<i>Gira Sandeshaya, Verse 237</i>)

This work compared the erudite knowledge of religion, and literature of the great Rahula Thero with those of the Maha Rishi Agasti as follows.

සසමය සතර සිදු අගතිසි කර ත ලය

අසමය සිපිරි පිරිසිදු ගුණ ඇමක

ලය (*Gira Sandeshaya*, Verse 238)

Verses 239 and 240 of *Gira Sandeshaya* narrated his knowledge and wisdom in writing of epic poems and in related subject areas such as *Chandas* and *Alankara*.

සේපිරියත් මහකව් දන ගෙන යෙහෙ

න (*Gira Sandeshaya*, Verse 239)

සිනිඳු සුවඳ මුවරද විය සඳලක

ර (*Gira Sandeshaya*, Verse 240)

Finally, his expertise in six languages was described as;

රහන පවර රහ බිම් විය සබා

සය (*Gira Sandeshaya*, Verse 245)

The Vanaratana Thero of Keragala

The Vanaratana Thero of Keragala Padmavati *Pirivena* is also considered one of the pioneer and scholarly monks in the erudite and literary tradition in Sri Lanka. In *Hansa Sandesha*, the *dasapada sahalla* (the ten-lined verse) defines his patrimony while verses 183-197 vividly describe erudition and fame (Adikari, 2006). According to the below-mentioned verse 183 of the *dasapada sahalla* in *Hansa Sandeshaya*, the fraternity of Vanaratana Mahimi began with Wattala Nagasena Thera of the Dambadeniya period.

වත්තල වෙහෙර වැඩ -වැඩ උන් වනවාසයෙහි තෙරිඳුන්ට මුතුබුරු (*Hansa Sandeshaya*, Verse 183)

Many scholars, as well as the inscription of Keragala, confirmed that Vanaratana *Mahimi* was considered one of the great monks who had been honored by the King Parakkramabahu VI (Adikari, 2006). Author of the *Hansa Sandeshaya* preached the knowledge and erudition of the renowned Vanaratana Thero as follows;

බටුවා ලෙසින් අටුවා ඇදුරෙකු දෙවන- සිටුවා යසස් තුටුව පෙළුරුත් දෙසන (*Hansa Sandeshaya*, Verses 184)

විජම් පෙළ අරුත් අතැඹුල ලෙසින් දිටි (*Hansa Sandeshaya*, Verses 185)

වෙසෙසින් සුතුරු අබ්දම් ගන් වැද (*Hansa Sandeshaya*, Verses 186)

ඉතුනු ගැඹුරු පදරුත් සුතුරු පිටකය (*Hansa Sandeshaya*, Verses 187)

Above lines of verses 185-187 describe eminent Vanaratana Thero's great wisdom on *Tripitaka* including all *Suthra*, *Vinaya* and *Abhidhamma*. Also, the following lines provide literary evidence for his knowledge on Astrology and subjects of poetry, including *Chandas* and *Alankara*.

හැම වියරණ ඔහු නැණකෙලි කෙලි මඩල (*Hansa Sandeshaya*, Verses 188)

ඇති තතු ලෙස සවු සතරම දත් බැවිනි (*Hansa Sandeshaya*, Verses 189)

දෙසැට දිටුම විමසා නුවනින් නිසකි (*Hansa Sandeshaya*, Verses 191)

නැකත් සතර අතරක නොතිබිය යන (*Hansa Sandeshaya*, Verses 192)

Based on the above narrations given in the *Gira Sandeshaya* and *Hansa Sandeshaya*, it could be concluded that these two great scholarly monks furnished memorable service to the religion, education, literature, and the country at large.

Conclusion

The Kotte period is considered one of the golden eras of the history of Sri Lanka in terms of education and literacy prosperity. The education system and institutes played a remarkable role in teaching and learning in this era. Moreover, royal patronage received through scholarly and literary activities was prominent. The *Mahasangha*, with abundant royal patronage, engaged especially in educational and literary activities, performing a matchless service to the community, religion and the country.

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