

Plato's Theory of Education and its Relevance to Sri Lanka's Education System

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Abstract- This paper attempts to discuss the Plato's theory of education and its relevance to Sri Lanka's education system. Education means 'upbringing' and it deals with the cultivation of virtues. It gives humans the ability to achieve their fullest personal, spiritual, physical, mental, emotional and intellectual potentials. During the learning process, pupils acquire variety of skills, creativity, thinking knowledge and attitudes. The aim of education is formulated by educational thinkers and policy makers who emphasized that the aim of education is social justices, happiness and freedom. And the educational system should be work out reached this highest goal, in their perspective. Plato's approach to education is a holistic, including facts, skill, physical discipline, ethics, music, and art as well. His great concerns was on generating more creative and talents pupils who can shine as a ruler of the state and to lead the government for benefits of the nation. The present education policies of most countries try best to promote educational setup to achieve in the same goals expressed by Plato in personal and public life of children and. Though there is a significant difference exists between the educational policy of Plato's time and the present context, there is the assumption, that to some extent Plato's educational philosophy and new educational paradigm are the same namely, the concept of physical education, moral education, aesthetic education, liberal education, music in education, educational guidance, free education for all, citizenship, community service, and discipline in schools. It shows that our present day curriculum is already formulated and emphasized in the Greeks and Plato's thought. In this point, exploring the educational theory of Plato will expand our knowledge in the field of education, to create responsible citizens and to the development of the welfare of the society. The conceptual analysis and comparative method used in this study are mainly based on Plato's two dialogues: The Republic and Laws. In addition, data is collected from books with critical analysis, scholarly articles, conventions, newspapers and recognized source of web.

Key Words - Education, Paradigm, Virtue, Ruler, Philosopher King.

I. INTRODUCTION

Plato (427 or 428–347 B.C) was the most famous classical thinker, all-time philosopher and educationist in the history of western philosophy. Plato's educational thought or the curriculum of educational system or paradigm is in his two dialogues: Republic and Laws in which he identifies the goal of education is to produce citizens who are shine as a ruler of his ideal state. His Republic is in the form of dialectical debate or dialogue—the technique of philosophic conversation by questions and answers. According to Patterson, the dialectical skill is the ability to pose and answer questions about the essences of thing. This form of presentation enables the author to present contrasting points of view as a series of conversations held between individuals who had different opinions concerning the topics under discussion [1]. Plato's ideas on education inspired his followers to explore new paradigm or academic-support strategies in education. One of the strategies is student-centered teaching and learning method, also known as learner-centered education.

The educational system or stage of Republic is divided into years, each stage corresponding with level of education. There are: a) Primary stage (up to 17 to 18years): The early training in literature, music, gymnastic and in elementary mathematics will be carried out on with as little compulsion as possible [2]. At this stage children should be educated by their mother or nurse in the house. This stage shows that he recommended play method at elementary level; Student should learn by doing. This stage can be compared with play group stage. b) Special physical training stage (from 17 or 18 to 20 years): In this stage, for practical education and training, especially the military training and two year compulsory national service in the army by the military class and ruler class. In this view, leadership program for undergraduates can be compared with Plato's physical and military training for students. Compulsory leadership training for undergraduates in Sri Lanka was a mandatory program introduced in 2011 by the former Sri Lankan government. The same government believed that this training program will be a very valuable contribution to make University student's life meaningful and provide the necessary background to become a responsible citizen with positive attitudes and inculcate leadership qualities in them. c) Intermediate stage

(from 20 to 30 years). In this stage, selected few will go through the advanced course in mathematics, d) Dialectic stage: After a further selection the year from 30 to 35 will be given to dialectic (Philosophy), and especially to the ultimate principal of morality, e) Higher education stage (from 35 to 50 year). In this stage, practical experience of life will be gained by public service in subordinate posts, f) Stage of wisdom (After 50 years - social service education): at 50 the best will reach the vision of the good. Those who fulfill the entire requirements would automatically become the ruler of the state. These steps show that rulers are not selected on the basis of the election system. Plato believes that above program of studies can exist in the ideal state and it is gradually ascending to the philosophic love of truth. The aim or object of Plato's educational paradigm consider emphasis on present day's education, though there are many positive aspects: educational process never ends, and the supreme importance of training in the earliest years of life and education in all stages should be the state's responsibility. However, both programs have expressed similar ideas which have resulted in creating responsible citizen.

II. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of the study indicate that Plato relates his theory of education with his political philosophy which is the basis for philosophical foundation of education. The goal of philosophy of education of Plato is to create three classes of learners for future in his ideal state. They are civil servants (workers), rulers and warriors. Plato believed that moral education through curriculum led all three of classes to ideal citizens or a virtuous society in the future. Plato's highest aim in education is virtue. According to Socrates, virtue is knowledge. Virtue is moral excellence. In this sense, excellence means justice, both individual and social justice. Personal virtues are characteristics values that are promoting collective and individual greatness.

Plato's educational concept can be compared with modern value-based education. Plato's explanation of virtues does not produce the degenerate and corrupt type rulers but it produces kindness, consideration, generosity, honesty, gratitude, and many other ethical considerations rulers or produce a nation of disciplined citizens [3]. Finally, we can say that philosophical thoughts help build our professional reputation. In other words, one can come to correct understanding of any thinks. Therefore, moral education is necessary to inculcate harmony in the society by preserving the traditional values. What we need today is values based-education. That's why, present day curriculum is also combined both intellectual ability and virtue.

In his ideal society or state, Plato emphasizes that education is compulsory as it is in the present context. He emphasized the importance of childhood learning at the extreme level as they should be separated from their mothers and be brought up by the state. Based on the identification of children's skills and interests, curriculum of education should be given to develop their skills and interests, further. As a result they would become productive member of the society and fulfill their duty in society and state. This shows that students have freewill to choose their career based on their interests and ability which is the main paradigm in the present day's western educational system. Plato also had a search for intelligent-gifted children in the whole society. He never believed that the talent or intelligent belongs to a limited class of any society.

While Plato considers better education for people, he also believes strong body and mind of the students. He therefore recommended sports for strong body and music for sound mind in their curriculum. In other words, his emphasis on sports, games and music lead to the physical and mental development of children. These recommendations are being used in the contemporary Sri Lanka's education system such as physical education, sports and yoga, musical therapy, aesthetics and culture etc., and they play a vital role in personality development of person. Hence, both Plato's time and present day paradigm of education work for the welfare of people and state.

III. EDUCATIONAL THEORY OF PLATO

Major ideas in Platonic educational theory are:

1. Education for all: education for all children begins at an early age. Plato wants every boy and girl to be educated to the highest limits of their ability. Men and women should receive the same education and share equal responsibilities in public duties. It shows the importance of equality in the learning of Educational theory of Plato. Malala Yousafzai, who is striving for women education, won the Nobel peace prize but Plato emphasized this concept long time ago. In this view, our contemporary educational system promise of equal opportunities in education and equality in education, the vision of education to improve the quality of life of every citizen in the country, and the belief in education as a development process in the social, cultural, religious, political and economic spheres of every community and ethnic group. Plato believes that all people can easily exist in harmony when society gives them equal educational opportunity from an early age to compete fairly with each other. Without equal educational opportunity, an unjust society appears since the political system is run by unqualified people; oligarchy, defective democracy, or tyranny will result [4]. However,

nowadays 'Education for all' is considered as human rights. If any child is prevented from the right to education, it becomes a violation of human rights. In the same way, education for all is emphasized in modern educational systems of many countries today, including in Sri Lanka.

2. Education should be provided by the state:

It is the responsibility and duty of any state in upbringing the scholars, future leaders, civil servants, warriors, and social deposition, discipline or target jobs in the market. In the same manner, today, the free or independent or national education system that exists in many countries is directly controlled by the state like Sri Lanka provides state controlled education for a long time with the aim of creating a better society. Recently, government intends to introduce an outcome based education system to solve the issue of unemployment among graduates passing out from state universities. Hence, the major part of the educational theory of Plato has much relevance to curriculum and practice in the Western world and Sri Lanka, today.

3. Classes of a society in the state and education:

Plato divides society into three classes. They are rulers or guardians, warriors, artisans and workers. These three classes corresponding with the three faculties: intellect corresponding to ruling class, feelings corresponding to warriors and desires and appetites corresponding to working or artisan class. Each class and faculty has its own guiding virtue [5]. Plato felt that this system would create the much needed justice and happiness within the state [6]. However, modern scholars argue that, at present, this division of classes and education is not relevant and does not exist in any democratic society. But in my view, it exists and normal to have class in each society; when Colonial British ruled us, Macaulay who was member of the governing council of the East Indian Company introduced education system for slaves. According to him, we must do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions we govern - a class of persons, English in taste, in opinion, in Morals and in intellect.

4. Philosophers are kings:

Plato declared in the Republic that 'until philosophers are kings or kings are philosophers in their cities, neither the state nor the human face will be spared the evils which common people are heir to.' According to Plato, education must show the way to victory in the moral struggle which is the lot of all. As we know there are more evils in the present society than before because most of the present rulers do not possess the vision of truth. However, true philosophers see the vision of truth and has knowledge in the fullest sense i.e. if ruler or king becomes a philosopher then he can prevent all the evils of state.

The philosopher king is to be a better ruler of the state; a person of thought, who has the power of thinking. This is one of the basic qualities for any ruler or leader at any level. He should not be just led by his emotion. He devoted his entire life. For this, 'education is concerned from childhood with moral excellence and fills one with desire and passion to become a perfect citizen who knows how to be a just ruler and a just subject.' It is this upbringing and emphasizes the importance of the psychological foundation in education. Furthermore, when one is assigned with a duty, he or she should be aware of the knowledge of his or her duties. For instance, the minister of higher education who should be aware of the importance of education, its common system and a broad understanding of his or her field. This would be relevant even today to any state.

Would the education and knowledge enough for a better fulfillment of leadership and duties? Definitely not, Plato states that learning is never a substitute for wisdom. However, it is one of the factors for any leader for a better function of his duties and responsibilities. It is hard to see in the current politics is the philosopher king. Therefore, we have many problems and hardships such as an unpleasant increase in underworld activities, violent, racism, criminal behaviors, child and sexual abuse, state terrorism, political terror of opposition politicians, killings, gender discrimination, exploitation, cyber crimes, gang rapes etc. So, until philosophers are kings or kings are philosophers we can't stop such evils from the state. Plato states that only the best rulers can control of them.

IV. CONCLUSION

The discussion shows that Plato feels that the educational paradigm or system of his time was in need of reform. In this view, in the Platonic educational system, the production of an intelligent, philosophical, governing class becomes the ultimate aim. He wanted to create ideal citizens or society to the city state or ideal state. However, Platonic program of studies or classes of society in the state, and their education does not fit in to the need of present democratic society. Meanwhile, Plato systems noted the importance of giving moral education and good ethical training to their citizens. Though Sri Lanka's education system is controlled and centralized by the government from primary to universities, whether it has been managed successfully is questionable. In other words, it is questionable the success of state control over national educational system in relation to quality and employment (productivity) in the contemporary world. Therefore, the educational system has been turned into the private system but governments have realized their role in

relation to its curricula, methodology, and quality of private institutions.

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