



AN INQUISITORIAL EXAMINATION OF PUBLIC POLICIES ENACTED FOR ANCIENT SOCIAL WELFARE (FROM THE ANURADHAPURA KINGDOM)

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Abstract

This study examines public policies enacted for social welfare during the Anuradhapura Kingdom, a historical period in Sri Lanka that spanned from the 4th century BCE to the 11th century BCE. This research sheds light on the policies and initiatives implemented to promote social welfare within the kingdom by delving into ancient texts, inscriptions, archaeological evidence, and historical accounts. The research acknowledges the challenges of studying archaic policies due to limited written records and the need to interpret archaeological findings. However, by employing an interdisciplinary approach and integrating historical research with various sources of evidence, this study aims to provide valuable insights into the social welfare policies enacted during the Anuradhapura Kingdom. Qualitative Research Methodology was used here. Accordingly, the literature survey collected the data, and primary and secondary sources were used. The investigation focuses on several key areas, including providing citizens with basic needs such as food and water. It also examines the availability and accessibility of healthcare and medical services, promoting education and knowledge dissemination, social support systems for vulnerable groups, infrastructure development, and the legal frameworks governing social welfare. By understanding the ancient policies and practices that supported social welfare in this historical context, this research contributes to our broader understanding of the evolution of social welfare and governance systems throughout history. Furthermore, it offers a basis for comparison with contemporary approaches to social welfare, highlighting potential lessons that can be learned and applied in the present day.

Keywords: Anuradhapura Kingdom, Infrastructure, Vulnerable, Social Welfare, Public Policies.



INTRODUCTION

The term "welfare" refers to a broad concept. A social welfare system is an organisation that assists people and communities in obtaining a desirable level of life and health. At times, it is interpreted as services conducted to provide the citizens of a country with a shared standard of living. Creating a suitable standard of life and health guarantees well-being by giving people a shared standard of living through the services offered for personal growth. There is a strong emphasis on free health care, education, security, and services connected to individual basic needs. Social welfare is not tied to a specific country, set of people, time, or history; it is dynamic and adapts to individual requirements.

When considering the Sri Lankan context, the origins of this field can be traced back to the ancient period. It is also evident from the facts that Sri Lanka's national historical heritage began with the rise of kingships and progressed to the formation of welfare for Sri Lankan citizens. The physical and spiritual environment of the inhabitants was developed with the influence of Buddhism, primarily in the region of Devanampiyatissa. In this regard, monarchs were regarded as essential figures in society responsible for ensuring the general welfare of the people. The welfare procedure of the Anuradhapura Kingdom was unique in the history of welfare. The dominance of political authority under many local and foreign rulers represented more welfare functions since it produced the concept of statehood and the most extensive period of kingdoms. Because migrations and invasions affected the Anuradhapura Kingdom at different times, there were direct and indirect effects on this period's welfare. Rulers have devised long and short-term policies, laws, and decrees to prevent such reasons, meet the people's demands, and construct a moral society. Considering the king's responsibility for the state's welfare, the inspiration of Buddhist philosophy, and the king's goal, the amassing of merits in the two realms, led the kingdom's rulers to engage in welfare work. As a result, the study problem is "What is the form of public policies implemented for the ancient social welfare?" This research aimed to determine the social welfare measures implemented by the rulers of the Anuradhapura kingdom.

METHODOLOGY

A systematic research plan was prepared to collect the required data. The qualitative research methodology was used here. Accordingly, the literature survey collected the data, and primary and secondary sources were used. The primary source was Mahavamsa. As secondary sources, a variety of other reading resources were used. After that, the information obtained from primary and secondary sources was thoroughly investigated to reveal an actual research output.

Data Analysis is a crucial task involved in any research. As noted earlier, this research is qualitative. Therefore, the conclusions will depend on the ideas derived from the collected data. A suitable scientific analysis method was chosen to arrive at valid conclusions and avoid errors. At the very outset, the available information was classified and analysed using the thematic analysis method.



DISCUSSION

Reasons that influenced ancient kings of Sri Lanka to resort to welfare

The foremost aim of everyday human actions in any society is to achieve material development. It is the responsibility of the state and the ruler to help the citizen to achieve this physical development. In identifying the historical background that affected social welfare in ancient Sri Lanka, the issues that influenced the ruler to turn to welfare are also unique. These details can also be identified from literary and archaeological sources. Society's special needs became a priority for the rulers to focus on social welfare. The ancient agro-economic pattern of Sri Lanka used the river water for their livelihood and cultivated along the river.

Nevertheless, over time, due to the pollution of the river water and the increase in the number of cultivated paddy fields, they had to face the problems of insufficient river water. However, the inhabitants had no choice but to live by the river. Soon the population percentage of the society also increased. In such a situation, the need for water for food production and fulfilling other basic needs for most people was strongly felt. It is said in the genealogy that because of this, the need for the construction of tanks doubled, the lakes were enlarged, and the tanks were created (Mahawamsa, chapter 10).

Although the first colonists in this country practised polytheistic religions, Buddhism began to develop as a specific religion after the Arrival of Arahata Mahinda and Arrival of Arahata Sangamitta. Up till then, people have worshipped invisible forces such as trees, stones, the sun, and hearts; no symbol or institution could be worshipped. However, after Buddhism came to this country, it became a personal need. Buddhism was introduced to Sri Lanka, but its spread had to be started from scratch. Due to these reasons, the construction of Buddhist religious buildings, such as temples and stupas, started. To build morals through the buildings and propagate the dharma, the ruler allocated funds from the state treasury to build temples. In this way, the rulers considered social welfare and worked to preserve their fellow citizens' physical and mental health. The ruler resorted to carrying out such welfare works because people's lives became complicated over time, and they became physically and mentally ill due to busyness.

The theory that can be built through the Buddhist concept and the ruler's expressions is that the king's objective caused the rulers to focus on welfare. In ancient Sri Lanka, which had a culture nourished by Buddhist philosophy, the hierarchy of power from the top to the bottom followed Buddhist teachings. It is clear from specific incidents and situations that the influence of this Buddhist dharma exists even in the behaviour and thoughts of the individual.



Ancient public policies on social welfare

If a person is in an abnormal condition mentally or physically, the whole process of that person is disabled. Then that person has no sound mind to think alone or be creative. He or she does not have love and concern for himself. Similarly, love for others cannot arise in him or her. According to this reason, individual and community liberation develops through the awakening of individual consciousness and the development of self-strength. In that way, if each person develops individually, joint development will naturally occur in that community. Common sense, interest, and national cooperation will be built through that. Sociologist Mayes (2015) points out that an individual's problem will directly affect society. A problem caused by one person will affect the entire society just as damage to a tiny part of the body affects the entire body. It is clear from Mayes's idea that community development can be created through individual development. Looking at ancient society, it is clear that work was done for the ordinary human good and the welfare needs of individuals.

The public policies that the rulers of the Rajarata kingdom implemented could be discussed under the following pillars.

Health-care services

According to literary and archaeological sources, the ancient kings of Ceylon were engaged in numerous responsibilities to preserve the health of their fellow residents as a public service. The administrators have mostly attempted to protect the campaigners' physical and mental well-being, and according to Mahavamsa, King Pandukabhaya, concerned with personal health and hygiene, built the city's governing system to establish the population's physical and mental health. "Five hundred servants were employed to clean the city, two hundred saddle men to dispose of excrement, and one hundred fifty saddle men to carry the corpses to the tomb outside the city" (Mahawamsa, chapter 10). In addition, two buildings were constructed for Sottishala and Sivikashala. There are two schools of thought on whether the sivikasala was a hall where the Shiva linga was replaced or a maternity ward. According to others, a sottisala is a building used as a sanatorium or a site where Brahmins sang the Vedas.

Similarly, the patronage exhibited by the ancient Sri Lankan rulers for the field of medicine is evident from literary and archaeological evidence. During the reign of Dutugemunu, when most chapters of the Mahawamsa were dedicated, services rendered to better the health of ordinary people could be identified. Pregnant mothers were provided free food, beverages, and medicines, eighteen nursing stations were created for the sick, and midwives were paid salaries and gifts, according to the Mahawamsa (Udepala, 2013).

King Buddhadasa, who recognised the ancient Sri Lankan civilisation, was interested in the fourth group of bhikshu, bhikshuni, upasaka, and upasika, and animal health. He also authored the medical treatise "Sarththa Sangraha." According to the material in the chronicle literature, King Buddhadasa was a surgeon, a psychotherapist, and a veterinarian.

- King Buddhadasa cured a leprosy-stricken monk.
- A venomous snake's stomach tumour was treated by cutting it and using it as medicine;
- A monk suffering from a stomach sickness caused by milk consumption was cured by drinking a horse's blood and
- one doctor was hired for every ten villages (Udepala, 2013).



The rulers of the ancient ages used this method to promote the health of the ordinary people, and the soil was uncovered with the remnants of a great infirmary created to care for the monks. Given the ruins here, significant sums of money appear to be spent from the treasury for such large structures.

This is the world's oldest hospital, built in the 9th century AD. This was done under the patronage of King Sena II, according to Mahavamsa. Mihintala Hospital, on the other hand, is necessary due to two inscriptions constructed by King Mihindu IV. Medicine stores, a Buddha temple, and the ruins of a medicine boat are among the institutions housed in this square-shaped structure. The two earthen jars discovered during the 1954 excavations were imported from the East, and because they were built airtight, it is possible that they were medicinal storage tanks. These hospitals can be found in or around Madirigiriya, Polonnaruwa, Alapatha Piriven Complex, Anuradhapura Thuparamaya, and Ruwanweli Saya. Archaeological evidence was discovered in Vessagiriya, Arankele, of hospitals established for monks' and the laity's health care. Hospitals were the primary source of physical health care. The ancient rulers were likewise concerned with the community's mental health and set out city designs to foster mental wellness. Cities are planned with proper trash disposal, water management, landscaping, and the natural environment as top priorities. Cities with distinctive designs, such as Anuradhapura and Sigiriya, can be identified. Furthermore, a review of inscriptions from the final part of the Anuradhapura era shows that many officials collaborated with the medical service (Udepala, 2013).

There are even resources for learning about hospitals and pharmacies that produce medications. Given this, it is necessary to state that the fundamental cause for the formation of a great culture in the ancient ages was the healthy society formed due to providing health facilities for fellow residents.

Education advancement

The Ancient state administration regarded education as a social service and appropriated funds from the state treasury. Piriven was the most important educational establishment in ancient society. Monks received their primary education at the Piriven. Children of kings and nobles were sometimes educated in these settings. Those institutions were built and maintained with the assistance of the state. Piriven, the historic educational institution that began in this country, was founded by the Mahindagamana—on the recommendation of Mihindu Thero, King Devanampiyathissa established the first pirivens. One of the goals was to spread religion. During this time, inscriptions and ancient literature give information on teachers, students, and educational disciplines. Early inscriptions suggest that people imparting wisdom used names like "Thera, Mahathera, Acharya, and Achari" (Dhunuwila, 2013).

It is clear from the construction and dedication of the first pirivena temple, "Kalaprasada Pirivena," built at Tissamaharama in Anuradhapura for King Devanampiyathissa for Mihindu Thero (Mahawamsa, Chapter 15).

Many Pirivenas were established by King Devanampiyathissa, including Marugana Pirivena, Phalagga Pirivena, and Diksanda Senevi Pirivena (Udepala, 2013).

Another significant one is "Monarapirivena," founded in the 4th century AD by King Buddhadasa, according to the Mahavamsa (Udepala, 2013). The Mahavamsa mentions the king giving daily donations to the 500 monks who stayed there (Mahawamsa, Chapter 15). In addition, a significant portion of the state treasury's budget was utilised to maintain this educational institution, which was created with a concentration on theological education (Udepala, 2013).



In ancient times, the fundamental goal of education was to shape attitudes. According to inscriptions and other archaeological evidence, educational institutions were supposed to develop decent citizens for society (Dhunuwila, 2013).

In this sense, it is an actual oath that the education system was established in society as a service to the people during the administration of the ancient government. That work was done to further its development.

Tank Construction

The expenditure of resources for initiatives that help to protect and build the economy is one of the essential services provided by the ancient state treasury. Most significantly, the management is dedicated to advancing the irrigation industry. Some kings saw it as their duty to construct tanks for their subjects. The labour of the residents to build these tanks was frequently obtained for free. The dry region was home to the majority of ancient kingdoms. The first Arya tribes established settlements near the rivers. Due to river flooding, the necessity for water storage tanks arose over time. The kings were prompted to build the tanks by the seasonal shift of water in the rivers, overcrowding, and the absence of any other way to collect water for agriculture besides river water. As a result of the development of tanks, farmers could carry out their agricultural activities adequately throughout the year. This ensured the country's economic growth and food self-sufficiency.

According to the Mahavamsa, the Anuradha Lake, erected by the minister Anuradha near the Kumbhanadee Valley, was the oldest identified lake among the lakes formed in this country (Mahawamsa, Chapter 8). There is, however, no archaeological evidence. According to this, the oldest known irrigation business is King Pandukabhaya's Abhaya Tank (Mahawamsa, Chapter 10). Gamini and Jaya Tanks were also visible but are yet to be recognised. The irrigation sector experienced a significant renaissance during Devanampiyathissa, and the concepts of tank, dageba, hamlet, and temple were popularized. This time, the Tisa Tank was built to cover 400 acres. The reign of Dutugemunu is also a significant phase in irrigation history. This time, Sorabora Lake was formed on the initiative of a giant named Bulata. Several kings were influential in the development of tanks throughout the ancient kingdoms. The Poojavali said King Saddhatissa built 18 tanks (Ellawala, 1962). Padaviya Lake, according to legend, was constructed by King Saddhatissa. King Vasabha is well-known for his tank-building abilities. Rajavali claimed that King Vasabha built 12 tanks (Ellawala, 1962). King Mahasen was another ruler who was heavily involved in the irrigation sector. Minneriya Lake is the most important of the lakes he made (Mahawamsa, Chapter 37). King Dhatusena also constructed large-scale irrigation enterprises in this manner. Kalaveva is one of a kind among them. The Parakrama Samudra, made by King Parakramabahu, is significant as a basic irrigation plan from the Polonnaru Kingdom. It is clear from the evolution of the irrigation industry that managers are developing it and making people happy by gradually enlarging the small-size tanks, adding the necessary components for regular tank maintenance, and adding canals and tunnel water systems.

On the one hand, the rulers appropriated funds from the state treasury for the irrigation business. Still, irrigation-related taxes, such as "Matsya Bhagaya, Diya Badda, Bojakapati," provided an additional source of revenue (Udepala, 2013). The king was able to keep the loyalty of his subjects by doing so. Instead of using state wealth for other purposes, resources were invested in a specific way through the irrigation sector. As a result, the irrigation business supplied a social service and a financial investment for the public budget.



Road construction

Highways were built as a social service by the monarchs of Ancient Sri Lanka. The passengers were exhausted as they travelled across the high mountain ridges. Monarchs made routes through the plains to mitigate this to keep the travellers from becoming tired. According to the source material, passengers were transported mainly by wagons, animals, and river rafts (Udepala, 2013). The country's people conducted trading activities and maintained relationships with other members of society using various modes of transportation. As a result, highways were critical in meeting the community's needs. A primary route connecting Dambakola Patune and Anuradhapura dates back to the kingdom period. Because of these routes, the monarchs of Anuradhapura, the country's capital, have found it easier to maintain close Indian contact with Sri Lanka. The first mission by Emperor Ashoka to King Devanampiyatissa sailed from Dambakola Patune. After twelve days in Sri Lanka, they arrived in Anuradhapura (Mahawamsa, Chapter 11). Travelling by boat took seven days, and walking took five days. Between Dambakola Patuna and the main town was a short road. This may have made trade contacts between the two countries more accessible. There were highways from Anuradhapura to Mahathitta Port, Mahagrama to Anuradhapura, and Anuradhapura to the kingdom of Malaya in this manner (Udepala, 2013). In this approach, a road system can be identified across Sri Lanka, and it is also apparent from the source information that the kings-built rest houses for rest on the route. The king was in charge of roadway building and maintenance, while local rulers were in order of these tasks outside the capital. However, the king's responsibility to carry out these structures locally in collaboration with the money was also critical.

Welfare for Women and Children

A study of the Mihintala inscription reveals that the rulers were concerned with individual welfare regardless of gender (Gamage, 2009). As shown here, a woman has been entitled to one foot of land and a half and one "pana" of rice daily. The 24 hired female servants were each entitled to one foot of land and an annual wage for clothing. On the one hand, women's labour can be recognised as a proper evaluation and an opportunity to bolster women's welfare. In the same way, the rulers also paid attention to women's health, and it is clear from an existing description that King Buddhadasa treated a kelilolgama chandala woman who had a childless abortion to become pregnant (Mahawamsa, chapter 37). In addition, it is mentioned in the Thupavamsa that King Dutugemunu also gave chilli salt to all pregnant women and cloth to a midwife who gave birth from the treasury (Gamage, 2009). Children can be identified as another social segment needing special care. The sources describe the services rendered by the rulers of ancient times for the welfare of children. According to the Mahavamsa account of King 2nd Mughalan, he paid his children as he pleased and directed them to study (Gamage, 2009). It is also reported that a son named Tissa, who was taught weaponry by his parents and sent to the king, was given a mahagramaya as "bathgama" (Udepala, 2013).

Welfare for the vulnerable

The ancient rulers did much welfare work for people with various physical and mental illnesses who needed more attention and care. It is mentioned in the Thupavamsa that King Dutugemunu built hospitals in eighteen places, bought doctors from the treasury to cure all the sick patients, and always gave rice, as the doctors said (Gamage, 2009). King Buddhadasa, a doctor, also made halls for the blind and special halls with wages in various places on the highway (Mahawamsa, chapter 37). King Dappula-II provided bed and breakfast to orphaned married women (Mahawamsa, chapter 47). King Udaya the Second held a dan sala during the drought and regularly provided everyone with rice and sweets (Mahawamsa, chapter 49). It is clear from these facts that providing relief to the sick and



widowed was a long-standing tradition in this country. According to the facts mentioned above, it is explained that the rulers of the Anuradhapura kingdom did various welfare activities and formulated policies for public welfare and individual development.

CONCLUSIONS

A welfare system is an organised society that strives to assist people and communities in obtaining acceptable life and health. Social welfare can also be defined as the services supplied to the citizens of a country to provide a standard quality of living. It includes, for example, public health, education, security, and services connected to personal fundamental requirements. The Anuradhapura kingdom is the first kingdom of this country. According to the facts, social growth occurred in the previous Sri Lankan society in addition to social programs. As previously discussed, social progress occurred due to several welfare measures implemented by the ruler to address social problems in ancient society. The establishment of new cities, transportation systems, large-scale water projects, the expansion of the health sector, and so on was how civilisation progressed from the era in which it existed. By recognising the government policies enacted by the past rulers for welfare, it is evident that the rulers who devised these policies were more concerned with individual needs. Some rulers, however, have paid more attention to the issues that influenced the creation of those requirements and what they believe to be the cause. Finally, it can be said that the historical government policies on welfare indicate that the former rulers of Ceylon, nurtured by Buddhist teachings, enacted different programs to assist individuals and groups who required particular care.

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