

The Dhamma of Hope: Kertarajasa Buddhist College's Experience in Educating the "Unequal"

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Abstract

While addressing the educational equality, religious affiliated colleges, especially Buddhist Colleges, play a large role in sustaining the community's desire to get further and higher education through direct participation in the community. By participation of Sangha and the community, the existence of Kertarajasa Buddhist College is an attempt to improve the coaching of ethics, moral, and spiritual Buddhism in Indonesia and East Java in particular. By focusing on Kertarajasa Buddhist College and using qualitative research through

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depth interviews and direct participant observation as a teacher of the College, this paper discusses the aspects of what's included in community participation in education and how the process took place as seen especially through the perspective of the (alumnae) students and the stake holders of the College.

Keywords: *Marginal student, religious-based community participation, students' confession, Kertarajasa Buddhist College*

STAB Kertarajasa and its Roles in the Community

Ideally, equal opportunity for education mandated in the constitution should be implemented by providing free and quality education to those who needed it. However, in Indonesia, this mandate was accompanied by the privatization of education that caused the cost of education to increase. As the results, many people cannot afford higher education and the decreasing numbers of people go to college affecting the lower position of Indonesia's education achievement in the education map of the world as expressed in UNESCO's Education for All (EFA) Global Monitoring Report 2011. With an education development index rate of 0.934 or still below the minimum standard of 0.95-1 needed to make progress, Indonesia ranks 69th out of 127 countries surveyed (Jakarta Post, 2 May 2013). The problem of quality education in Indonesia was also revealed in the results of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD) Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). Indonesia dropped from 57th position (PISA 2009) to 64 (PISA 2012) among 65 countries. Indonesia lags far behind other Asian countries such as China, Singapore, Japan, South Korea, and Vietnam, who finished 20th major (www.theguardian.com). Worldbank revealed that the education gap is still one of the causes of low Indonesia's position in the education field. "A poor child born in Papua leaves school with approximately 6 years of education, compared to a child in Jakarta who can expect to complete 11 years of schooling" (<http://blogs.worldbank.org>). The high cost of education impedes people's access to education. For example, although the SPP for SD / MI has been officially abolished, the fact remains there are other expenses outside of school fees which are a barrier for the poor to send their children to school.

The lack of government education budget is considered the main cause of low quality of education. Even though the Indonesian government investment surged three-fold in a decade it seems it had not been able enough to improve significantly the position of Indonesian education (Al-Samarrai, 2013). Therefore, the effectiveness of education provision such as the importance of improving the quality and quantity of teacher training programs becomes one alternative effort to erode the education problem. In this case, the existence of Kertarajasa Buddhist College (Sekolah Tinggi Agama Buddha/STAB) as an institution which aims to prepare educational personnel as well as missionaries of Buddhadhamma (dharmacarya and dharmaduta) is important in addressing the problems of educational quality, as STAB is an integral part of the education system in Indonesia. The existence of Higher Education Buddhism itself has long been recognized by the government as an important instrument to ensure equal distribution of development outcomes and the distribution of democracy in the order of pluralistic Indonesian society (Putra, 2011). In addition, STAB Kertarajasa plays a large role in sustaining the community desire to get further and higher education through direct participation in the community. This suggests that the public can particularly participate, not just as an object of government, in achieving development goals as stated in the Millennium Development Goals MDG and post -2015 Development Agenda.

STAB Kertarajasa, which first began with STAB Dhammadipa name, is part of Dhammadipa Arama temple located in Batu, Malang-East Java. The school was founded in 2000 by the Foundation Dhammadipa Arama with Operating Permit from the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia to print Buddhist human resources, primarily as a preserver and expounder of the Dhamma. STAB Kertarajasa and also Padepokan Dhammadipa Arama are two institutions under the auspices of the Foundation Dhammadipa Arama. After 1 (one) year running lecture, on October 7, 2002 the Department of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia established Buddhist High School Kertarajasa registered status with the Acharya Dharma Studies Program Number: DJ.V/63/SK/2002 dated October 7, 2002. This undergraduate Education Program (S-1) Department of Dhammacariya STAB - Kertarajasa is organized under

the National Accreditation Board of Higher Education No. 030/BAN-PT/Ak-XV/S1/X/2012.

The vision of STAB Kertarajasa is the realization of quality human resource professionals, and Buddhism. While its mission: 1) hold a college tri dharma (teaching, researching, and community service) to produce quality human resources, professional, and religious according to the Buddha Dhamma; 2) cooperating with various parties to support the Tri Dharma University, and 3) to provide facilities and create conditions conducive to learning in the learning process. Arama Dhammadīpa Foundation serves as the foundation of education in fostering STAB Kertarajasa with providing input and solutions to the STAB Kertarajasa problems. The foundation makes up of the chairman of the foundation and foundation management, which consists of the donors and sponsors who provide encouragement and support for the existence of STAB Kertarajasa. This paper will discuss the role of community participation in the continuity of the educational process in STAB Kertarajasa composed of regular students and special classes, namely novice (*Sāmaṇera* dawn *Aṭṭhasīlani*) who during the period of education, living in Padepokan Dhammadīpa Arama, Batu. By focusing on Kertarajasa Buddhist College and using qualitative research through depth interviews and direct participant observation as a teacher of the College, this paper discusses the aspects of what's included in community participation in education and how the process took place as seen especially through the perspective of the (alumnae) students and the stake holders of the College.

Participating Dana, Participating for Education

Ummul (2008) describes the relationship between the community and educational implementation based on Law no. 20 of 2003. He explained that the community is entitled to participate in the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of education programs. On the other hand, it is a public obligation to provide assistance resources in education. Community participation in education may include the participation of individuals, groups, families, professional organizations, employers and community organizations in organizing and monitoring the quality of educational services. Community participation in education plays a role in enhancing the

quality of educational services which includes planning, monitoring and evaluation of education programs. Community participation can be ideas, energy, expertise / skills, and property, in the form of cash donations in fixed / regular or incidental. To be able to create participation, there are some prerequisites, such as a sense of the similar values, attachment to goals, the existence of leadership which can motivate cooperation, and the presence of a good atmosphere (Hermino, 2013: 191).

In STAB Kertarajasa, public participation takes place on the basis of Dana/Giving focused on the monastery, but there is also assistance submitted to STAB Kertarajasa. With high trust and basic fundamentals of giving which prioritize aid funded through the monastery (vihara), funds delivered by people and sympathizers of monastery to leaders of Dhammadīpa Arama vihara monks to further managed by the Foundation Dhammadipa Arama. This whole process is a power of good karma / moral power, both donors and recipients which mutually produce, where the people exercising dana want to express good deeds, while those which accept had the opportunity to receive good karma. Susan Elbaum Jootla beautifully summarized the ultimate act of giving (dana) as one of the essential preliminary steps of Buddhist practice. It could change individual's kamma and liberate from his/her samsara if it acted within the light of Buddhadhamma.¹ The Buddha taught that Vihara is the best 'field' to spread the seeds of dana, especially since the monastery played an active role in building the ethics and morality of the novices (Sāmaṇera and Aṭṭhasīlani) in order to strengthen Buddhadhamma faith through organizing and training them as the dhamma disseminators. Accordingly, people are happy in merit-giving, in the hope of achieving peace, tranquility, health, and sustenance. "So, no need to be asked. If there is a monk, people immediately want to give as giving dana to the monk is equal to extending the dhamma itself," said Bikkhu Mahathera Khantidaro, the Abbot of Dhammadipa Arama. "[perhaps] the simple life of Bikkhu is what the people respect," he continues. In addition to Buddhists, not least also the donors come from different faiths. Typically they provide support after coming to the monastery or after following

1. Jootla, Susan Elbaum. *The Practice of Giving* <http://www.accesstoinight.org/lib/authors/various/wheel367.html> Accessed 12 December 2013.

vippasana in the monastery and feeling calmness and blessing afterwards. Donors are not only from the area of Malang, where the monastery is located, but also from many other areas of Indonesia. However, the Bikkhu Khantidaro expressed his decisiveness to hold fast to the teachings of Theravada despite receiving assistance from other parties. He revealed his experiences receiving help from other sects who finally stopped because there are strings attached to it.

Because of the magnitude of the giving-consciousness of the community, Bikkhu Khantidaro Mahathera does not feel worried to provide food for the inhabitants of the monastery around 100 people, including 74 students. Moreover, the temple also covers the cost of living and tuition fees of the novices; even they have a savings account that came from the monastery. They also receive travel expenses to visit areas during the holidays to carry out Buddhist devotion in these areas. Sammanera and atthasilani also have contributed to raise funds for the monastery, for example, they donate money to the temple that he got from a lecture or chant fills in community events. Great attention to pabajita program can be viewed as a very important aspect of the existence of STAB Kertarajasa within the vihara Dhammadipa Arama because, as stated by Dr. Bikkhu. Santacitto Sentot, M.A., one of faculties at STAB Kertarajasa, "Another important aspect of establishing this college is that here, not only students are taught theoretically, but also they are given opportunity to practice strictly the life of monks and nuns to improve their moral and spiritual life. This can be considered the greatest contribution of this college to the society, as moral and spiritual qualities are the key to social harmony."

Apart from the Dhammadipa Arama viscera centered, community participation in the educational process in STAB Kertarajasa also takes place in the corners regions of the archipelago, either through vihara and Buddhist organizations such as Magabudhi (Council of Indonesian Theravada Buddhism). Donors from the regions usually sponsor a student of STAB through assistance given to bikkhu who heads the vihara in their respective areas. Thus, it is common for donors in their respective regions through regional head bikkhu partially and even fully finances the departure of some prospective students from Borneo, Lombok, and Bali to STAB Kertarajasa Batu.

In addition to the cost of departure, a few regular students receive living expenses and tuition from donors of their region of origin. Other than that, donors also help in the activities of students during their courses such as community service activities and conferences. However, as expressed by a bikkhu who has long helped students from Lombok to study at STAB, it is difficult to get donors to help regular college students, except for the purposes *athasilani* and *samanera*. "The donors would only help for certain period of time, not every month let alone every day." Therefore, regular students cannot expect a full scholarship throughout their college career as *samanera* dan *atthasilani* received.

Spreading Hope despite Minimum Dana

It must be acknowledged that the *dana* from the donators are limited, therefore, some of students have to work alongside their study, which is not easy. However, there are many students who eventually quit college and go back to their homelands. Directly or indirectly, the interruption of the regular students' expectations for higher education cannot be separated from the general view that the *pabajita* (*samanera* dan *attasilani*) have seen a greater potential for generation of missionary and preserver of Buddhist *dhamma* so they get greater priority of receiving the *dana* of the people. In fact, they can show the performance and contribute to the *Dhamma* and the community in the future, because there is no doubt lay community plays an important role in the cycle of giving (even in the materialistic sense) in order to sustain the course of this exposition of *Dhamma*. As Bikkhu Mahathera Khantidaro admitted, "the *Vihara* (*sangha*) life is highly dependent on the community and vice versa."

Therefore, efforts should be made in the affirmative equivalent to regular students. Thus, both *pabajita* and students alike will be able to acquire some education through community participation, such as Bikkhu Santacitto firmly said:

"As we know, Buddhist minority especially those who come from villages have limited economic resources. They could not afford to support themselves to get education in highly recognized universities like UGM (University of Gadjah Mada or

UI (University of Indonesia), etc. With the establishment of this college which provides free education, at least, they could taste higher education. They gain knowledge and at least, they would feel confident in the society with their good education.

This is because I believe the first primary reason why Padepokan Dhammadipa Arama established this Buddhist College. Besides teaching the importance of compassion which results in providing higher education to those who are weak economically, Buddhism emphasizes the importance of education. As Mangala Sutta says, having much knowledge as well as skills are of one of the highest blessings, for it will help people in progressing their life economically, socially and even spiritually. On this basis, it is a positive move by Padepokan Dhammadipa Arama to establish Kertarajasa Buddhist College, helping people especially young generation to improve their quality of life... Thus, in the midst of difficulty in educating children in higher education due to high fee, Colleges like Kertarajasa Buddhist College are established to solve that problem.”

Although it is not easy to raise public funds to support student study of STAB assigned area of origin, Cittaguto Bikkhu confirms his enthusiasm to help students study for several reasons: 1) their own personal change for the better, 2) they can help the development of Buddhism wherever they located, 3) they can avoid conversion as they already learned to know and understand the Dhamma well and properly, 4) in this way they could also raise their families’ dignity, and 5) and also help Buddhism.

For students of STAB Kertarajasa themselves, their primary motivation is not a scholarship to study at STAB Kertarajasa, but rather a desire to explore the Dhamma and spread it in the community. Most students did acknowledge that financial support is vital for people in realizing their desire to learn it, as expressed by one of the alumni, “Personal motivation alone is not enough if there is no support from the people who helped me in STAB success.” However, some of them admitted that the support or assistance in studies costs and the other things are not the main thing, because success is determined by the ethos of learning and individual will.

In fact, there is also criticism of the tendency of some students who abuse the dana that should be used for the study.

Managing Dana- Some Considerations

It could be also related to the issue of recording / accountability of the aid. A bikkhu who served in the region recognizes that there is no record mechanism for the aids he received because he did not manage funds in a professional manner. "If it had to be professional, it should be through a management agency, such as a foundation or another." Personal trust has become the philosophical foundation of the People's supporting distributed by the bikkhu who trusted in person. This is in contrast with the education funding coming from a Buddhist foundation professionals from outside, which requires a financial record in detail.

Other matters related to the recording of the donations are their lack of participation in planning and evaluation studies in STAB Kertarajasa although there are also regular donors of STAB who are often asked directly about the needs of STAB. Not only transmitting funds, donors should also be directly involved in monitoring the quality of the use of these funds so as to have a sense of engagement. Therefore, there is hope of donors to be more involved in the management of STAB as expressed by a donor. "Generally donors simply are the financier and facilitators, but as input, STAB may involve donors in development planning meetings of STAB." However, donors generally entrust to the management of funds in the foundation of STAB, because they consider the foundation and of STAB know better the needs of students. Other suggestions from donors and alumni associated with the participation of communities in supporting student of STAB Kertarajasa study are the need to establish communication with the community so that more people know and understand the development of STAB. In addition, STAB also needs to improve community services so that people feel a part of STAB.

With regard to the similarity of purpose and a feeling of shared, community can provide assistance not simply in money, but also through motivation. Student motivation is important in order to

cultivate hope for the future so that it shows in their fighting spirit. As proposed by Wisadavet (2003), any material support will not guarantee the quality of true education. “Middle and higher class families tend to instill in their children an awareness of the importance of education more than poorer families. Thus, children have different levels of motivation and application.”

Dassati me ti danam deti, as one also may give with the hope of getting a similar favor for oneself in the future, perhaps the story of Visakha² ‘checking’ her merit of donation (dana) can throw some light on how Buddhist donors should deal with their dana:

Once Visakha gave a learned explanation of the benefits she expected from her munificence when the Buddha questioned her as to what she saw as the advantages of her great generosity (Vin.i, 293-94). She said that when she hears that a particular monk or nun has attained any of the fruits of recluship, and if that monk or nun has visited Savatthi, she would be certain that he or she has partaken of the offerings she constantly makes.³

2. Visākḥā is patroness no. 1, she was the donor of vihara in Savatthi Pubbārāma, she attained Sotāpānnapada at the age of 7, and lived to the age of 120 years.

3. de Silva, Lily. *Giving in the Pali Canon* <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/various/wheel367.html> Accessed 12 December 2013.

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