

SUBJECT REVIEW REPORT

DEPARTMENT OF SANSKRIT



***FACULTY OF HUMANITIES
UNIVERSITY OF KELANIYA***

24th to 26th March 2008

Review Team :

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1. SUBJECT REVIEW PROCESS

The panel met at 8.30 a.m. on 24.03.2008 at the Department of Sanskrit, University of Kelaniya, for the first introductory meeting with Quality Assurance Specialist, Prof. Colin N. Peiris. He briefed the panel members on the objectives and the process of subject review, and explained the significance of all the stages in the procedure and highlighted the role of the reviewers as impartial observers of the functioning of the relevant Department, focusing on the importance of their final report for quality assurance and development.

The panel met at the Department of Sanskrit on all the three days, and carried out their duties by observing, checking and discussing with the staff as well as the students the teaching and learning process, research activities of the teaching staff, their contribution to the university community as well as the resources of and facilities available in the Department.

The panel worked along the guidelines provided and following the agenda prepared by the Head of the department, in line with the typical agenda supplied by the Quality Assurance Specialist. However, we had to make minor adjustments to it as demanded by the exigencies of the situation.

The panel is pleased to record the excellent and cordial co-operation extended to them by the Head and other staff members of the Department of Sanskrit. It being the vacation time with students being busy with their examinations, we never expected that we would be able to meet any students and observe any teaching. But to our surprise, the Head had made prior arrangements for the students to attend a few special classes and make their own presentations.

2. BRIEF HISTORY OF THE UNIVERSITY, THE FACULTY AND THE DEPARTMENT

The University of Kelaniya, known at the inception as Vidyalkara University, was created in 1956, by promoting the former Vidyalkara Pirivena which had been established in 1875. On 17th June, 1956, the Vidyalkara University was inaugurated by His Excellency Rajendra Prasad, President of India. Sanskrit was one of the few subjects included in the curriculum of this new University from the very beginning. Dr. Rahul Sanskrtyayan, a renowned Indian scholar, was the first Head of the Department of Sanskrit. By an Act of Parliament, the two Pirivena institutes, Vidyodaya and Vidyalkara, were granted the status of independent Universities in 1958. At that time the total number of students in the University was 263 out of which 132 were monks. By 1963, there were 40 lecturers on the permanent cadre while 30 more have served the University on a visiting basis. The first Vice-Chancellor of the Vidyalkara University was the well-known oriental scholar, Ven. Kiriwattuduve Pannasara. The University was moved from its original premises at Peliyagoda to its present location at Dalugama in 1972. This University which became the Kelaniya Campus of the newly established University of Sri Lanka, under the provisions of the Universities Act of 1972, was renamed Kelaniya University in 1978.

The Department of Sanskrit was originally housed in a room of the Faculty of Science. Thereafter the Department was relocated in a room in the new building of the Faculty of Humanities, where it remained for 15 years, and at present it is located in a separate building known as K 20.

Since its inception the Department of Sanskrit has been serving the University under the headship of 10 renowned scholars. The present Head of the Department is Rev. Dr. Induragare Dhammaratana, whom the panel noted to be an active, committed and exemplary leader with a clear vision. There are at present five permanent members on the academic staff, two temporary lecturers and four visiting lecturers in the Department.

Despite the fact that Sanskrit is one of the less popular subjects, this Department has been successful in attracting nearly 100 students at undergraduate level and 5 – 10 postgraduate students.

3. AIMS, LEARNING OUTCOMES

3.1. Aims

3.1.1. The Department aims at providing an opportunity to those students who have successfully completed the University Entrance Examination with the necessary credits at the G.C.E. (A/L) examination, including Sanskrit as a subject. This will entitle them to follow a General degree course with Sanskrit as a subject, or to pursue a Special degree course of Sanskrit provided they do well (at least with a B pass) in the subject at the examination held at the end of the first year.

3.1.2. However, the door is also open to those students who have not offered Sanskrit as a subject at the G.C.E. (A/L) examination, but display a strong propensity to learn the subject. Such students can obtain the approval of the Head of the Department to follow Sanskrit studies according to their choice.

3.1.3. The Department also provides postgraduate courses/research programmes leading to M.A., M.Phil. and Ph.D. degrees for both local and foreign students.

3.1.4 A two-year undergraduate Diploma Course of Buddhist Sanskrit has been designed for foreign students to be followed in the English medium.

3.1.5 The Department proposes to start a certificate study course for those who are interested in Ayurvedic medicine, astrology, aesthetics and dramaturgy, provided that they possess a working knowledge of Sanskrit to read and understand such technical texts with the help of a teacher.

The Department also aims at

3.1.6 Providing students with appropriate knowledge of fundamental Sanskrit to enable them to keep close contact with other languages such as Sinhala, Tamil, Hindi, Pali, Prakrit and even modern languages.

3.1.7 Providing students with a sufficient knowledge of the Vedic language and Indian philosophy with a view to enable them to make a comparative study of Indian and Western philosophy.

3.1.8 Educating the students on later developments of Mahayana Buddhism in India and Sri Lanka up to the Polonnaruwa Period of Sri Lankan history in particular.

3.1.9 Giving necessary assistance to the students to write essays on Sanskrit poetry, dramaturgy, epigraphy etc., enabling them to develop their cognitive abilities of language media.

3.1.10 Providing the students with a critical knowledge of later Buddhist teachings and Buddhist Sanskrit texts for reading and comprehension.

3.1.11 Providing a range of challenging learning opportunities within the modular teaching structure in operation in the University, enabling them to develop cognitive abilities of language and transferral skills that would permit them to contribute effectively to learn technical terms using in scientific activation.

3.1.12 Strengthening the relationship between students and the teaching staff, and make an environmental enthusiastic learning within the Department through the activities of the society apart from pure study programmes.

3.1.13 In the field of Sanskrit studies the relevant subjects are taught mainly by means of lectures, by giving assignments and holding discussions. Subject material hand-outs are distributed in the class so that the students may follow the lecture easily.

3.1.14 By this method the students would gain an understanding of the subject, which knowledge they may be able to use to much advantage in their researches in the related fields.

3.1.15 Teaching, learning and assignment methods are followed in accordance with the internal evaluation criteria operative in the university system.

3.1.16 As regards the course unit system applicable to the B.A. General degree programme, three kinds of courses are provided, to wit,

- (i) Core subjects,
- (ii) Elective subjects and
- (iii) Auxiliary subjects.

3.1.17 Units of core courses are provided for those students who offer Sanskrit as their main subject. But some of core courses may also be followed by students belonging to other Departments.

3.1.18 Units of auxiliary courses are meant for students from other Departments. No elementary knowledge of Sanskrit is expected of them.

3.2 Learning Outcomes

3.2.1 Those students who have successfully completed their B.A.Special degree in Sanskrit may apply for M.A., M. Phil. and Ph. D. degree programmes in Sanskrit and other relevant subjects in the field of Indology.

3.2.2 After successful completion of either Special or General degree, the students may pursue higher studies pertaining to Buddhist schools other than Theravada, and later Mahayanism.

3.2.3 Those students who have gained complete mastery over Sanskrit language and literature may apply for courses pertaining to other related subjects such as Sri Lankan history, Sinhala language, Epigraphy, Astrology, Ayurvedic medicine, etc.

3.2.4 Students who have come to the end of their study programme, are expected to have learnt the historical and fundamental origin of the ancient language of Sanskrit enabling them to use Sanskrit etymology in coining technical terms for various subjects including modern languages and scientific subjects.

3.2.5 The students would be able to grasp what they could offer to the world through Sanskrit studies.

3.2.6 The students are expected to have developed their ability for critical self-directed learning of the above programmes.

4. FINDINGS OF THE REVIEW TEAM

4.1. Curriculum Design, Content and Review.

4.1.1. The Department of Sanskrit offers two undergraduate programmes and post-graduate courses at M.A. and M.Phil. levels. No students have enrolled for Ph.D. in this Department. The curriculum of the Department as is demonstrated in the syllabuses for the course units, covers almost all the areas in the discipline of Sanskrit. Sanskrit, being an ancient Indo-European language, is considered as the 'mother language' of a number of vernaculars of India, including Sinhalese. As is seen from numerous references in the classical Sinhala literature and several ancient inscriptions of Sri Lanka, Sanskrit has been in use in the island since the early years of her history. And more important is the fact that a large number of books written in Sanskrit was thrown into fire by the Theravadins as a result of the long-drawn dispute between the Mahavihara and the Abhayagiri fraternity. This happened at least three times within one century, that is, the fourth century. Since Mahayanic texts were all in Sanskrit, many other works written in Sanskrit on various subjects must have suffered the same fate. This was an irreparable loss to indigenous Sanskrit literature. Yet, by good fortune, a few Sanskrit works written in Sri Lanka have survived the ravages of time. The most important among them are the Jatakamala of Aryasura and the medical treatise Sararthasangraha of King Buddhadasa (4th century), the valuable *silpa* text, Manjusri-bhasita-Vastuvidyasastra and Citrakarmasastra (5th to 7th century) and the Janakiharana of Kumaradasa (8th century).

4.1.2 The Abhayagiri monastery is known to have been a religious as well as an educational centre of international fame, where Sanskrit must have been one of the key subjects taught there. In the Polonnaruwa Period (11th to 12th centuries) there has been a revival of Sanskrit studies in the island.

4.1.3 Thus Sanskrit has been an inseparable element in many aspects in the culture of this country. Hence, the work being done by the Department of Sanskrit, teaching the subject at

university level, maintaining the expected standards and promoting research in the field, is praiseworthy, which needs more encouragement and financial support.

4.1.4 The syllabuses of this Department are designed to cover three aspects of Sanskrit studies, i.e.,

1. Vedic Sanskrit,
2. Secular Sanskrit and
3. Buddhist Sanskrit.

Students following both General and Special degree courses seem to like all these three varieties of Sanskrit.

4.1.5 The Department has designed and proposed a course of Sanskrit for foreign students. However, this has not yet been started.

4.1.6 Another new course recently introduced is the course on Sinhala technical terms. This is an auxiliary course worth 2 credits. The Department has also initiated some new projects in order to generate interest among the students, as well as to engage them in practical field work. One of such projects is the recreation of selected Sanskrit inscriptions

4.2 Teaching, Learning and Assessment Methods

4.2.1 The panel observed some teaching by participating in some specially organized lectures. That was the 'exam time' in the Faculty, so there were no regular lectures conducted at that time. But, thanks to the pre-arrangements made by the Head of the Department, we were able to watch two lectures given by two of the senior dons in the Department to the final-year students. We were impressed by the quality of the lectures. Upon questioning, we found the lecturers were using modern methods and technology as and when required. One of the lecturers, Ven. N. Revata, maintained satisfactory eye-contact with the students and tried often to communicate with them through lively interaction. The students were motivated and keen in learning. They had chosen Sanskrit as their major subject with full understanding of the prospects for jobs upon graduation. Once they select the subject, they follow it to the end, without dropping out. During our stay at the Department, we did not hear of any drop-outs.

4.2.2 The assessment procedure followed in general is the standard method introduced by the course unit system. The two courses offered by the Department are as follows:

- | | | | |
|--------------------------|---|----------------|----|
| 1. General degree course | - | No. of credits | 76 |
| 2. Special degree course | - | No. of credits | 80 |

However, this Department, as some other Departments in the Faculty of Humanities at Kelaniya, does not hold semester-end exams, for Special students, but at the end of the first semester, students have to write assignments. Each assignment is worth 02 credits.

From the next academic year, the Department of Sanskrit proposes to abandon this method and to introduce a new method to conform to the standard system of assessment.

4.3 Quality of Students including Student Progress and Achievements

4.3.1 Students following the courses in this Department show good quality in understanding subject-matter, grasping what teachers intend to communicate in class and undertaking research projects and working on them successfully. By observing two such projects, one on the indigenous Sanskrit scholars and their contribution, and the other on the standard of Sanskrit in the Kotte Period, we found the outcome to be of the expected levels and hence commendable.

4.3.2. The final-year students who made presentations seemed to be confident and possess an adequate understanding of their subjects.

4.3.3. By checking and observing the mark-sheets of the previous examinations conducted by the Department, the reviewers were satisfied with the performance and achievements of the students.

4.4 Extent of Use of Student Feedback

4.4.1. Methods of obtaining student feedback have not been practised, as this a new concept in most of the Departments in the Social Sciences and the Humanities. The lecturers and the professors in the Department acknowledged the unavailability of student feedback, and they are keen in introducing a method of student evaluation of teaching.

4.4.2. However, some teachers in the Department are considering of approaching students in casual and unofficial ways to get feedback from them. It was encouraging to note that the Department now understands well the necessity of student feedback in order to enhance the quality of teaching.

4.5 Post-graduate Studies

4.5.1. Post-graduate studies are being encouraged in the Department, and we noted that a number of graduates have enrolled for post-graduate courses provided by the Department. The academic staff consists of 03 Ph.D. degree holders and 02 M.A.s. So the Department is fully equipped to guide post-graduate research. We heard that the candidates were visiting their guides regularly for guidance.

We had the good fortune to meet three post-graduate students enrolled in the Department.

1. Rev. B. Indajoti.

He is working on Puranic literature for the degree of M. Phil, Presently he is engaged in collecting data and working on the sources. He has not yet presented his final research proposal for registration/approval. The candidate is getting sufficient help and guidance from the Department.

2. U.L.D.B. Chandima Gunasinghe.

He is engaged in research leading to M. Phil.. His topic is Moksha with special reference to Bhagavadgita.

This student is also still at the initial stage of his research.

3. Asoka Gunasekera.

This post-graduate student is a Temporary Assistant Lecturer in the Department. He has obtained registration for the degree of Ph.D. Mr. Gunasekera's research topic is 'Myths and Psycho-therapeutic Aspects in Atharva Veda and Rituals of Sri Lanka'. He proposes to undertake a comparative study on this subject.

4.6. Peer Observation

This is not in existence at present, as is the case in many other Departments in university system in Sri Lanka. This Department is very keen in practising peer observation. Through inter-personal discussions among colleagues in the Department, peer observation takes place to some extent. However, the Department is willing to begin peer observation in the next academic year.

4.7. Skills Development

The Head of the Department, Ven. Dr. Induragare Dhammaratana, has taken some positive steps in skills development of the students. He is training the students in word processing in Sanskrit using the Devanagari script. At the same time, the students of this Department are taught how to use IT for learning and research purposes. The Department has introduced a course for developing skills in IT and English.

4.8. Academic Guidance and Counseling

The reviewers are satisfied and impressed with the performance of the Department in academic guidance and counselling. We had a long discussion with the Head of the Department and the Head of the Modern Languages Department, Dr. Hemanta Sirisena who is also Senior Student Counsellor. Rev. Dr. Dhammaratana has been involved in counselling for a long time. He has helped students faced with personal and psychiatric problems on many occasions. He is open to discussion with students and peers, and actively participates in programmes on guidance and counselling.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The Review Team's judgment of the eight aspects studied during the review visit is summarized below.

Aspect Reviewed	Judgment Given
Curriculum Design, Content and Review	Good
Teaching Learning and Assessment Methods	Good
Quality of Students including Student Progress and Achievements	Good
Extent and Use of Student Feedback, Qualitative and Quantitative	Satisfactory
Postgraduate Studies	Good
Peer Observations	Unsatisfactory
Skills Development	Good
Academic Guidance and Counseling	Good

The overall judgment is suspended

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1. Most of the students whom we met were of the opinion that they would much benefit if at least one course unit on formal Sanskrit grammar is included in each year of the four-year course. This idea is worth considering when future revisions of the syllabuses are contemplated.

6.2. Most of postgraduate research projects undertaken by postgraduate students appear to belong to abstruse subjects like Hindu philosophy and Buddhist philosophy. Students should be encouraged to extend their research activities to more secular aspects of Sanskrit studies.

6.3. The Department of Sanskrit needs more space, for both the staff and classes. Lectures are held at present in one large room, partitioned into three. The staff members are using small cubicles as their offices. As such, we wish to recommend that the academic staff should be provided with proper office space. The clerk of the Department is also working in a small cubicle. Another difficulty the Department is facing at the moment is lack of sufficient space for the Departmental library. Yet another problem needing immediate attention is the complete absence of toilet facilities within the Department. The lecturers, the junior staff and students have all to look for toilet facilities elsewhere.

7. ANNEXES

Annex 1. AGENDA FOR THE REVIEW VISIT

Day 01 (24.03.2008)

08.30-09.00 Private meeting of Review Panel with QAA Council Representatives
09.00-09.30 Meeting with the Dean and Head of the Department
09.30-10.00 Discuss the Agenda for the visit
10.00-10.30 Tea
10.30-11.30 Departmental Presentation of the Self-evaluation Report
11.30-12.30 Discussion
12.30-01.30 Lunch
01.30-02.30 Observing Departmental facilities (Depart. Library, lecture halls)
02.30-03.30 Observing other facilities (Computer facilities etc.)
03.30-04.30 Meeting with the Department Academic Staff
04.30-05.30 Brief Meeting of Reviewers

Day 02 (25.03.2008)

08.30-09.00 Meeting with Technical Staff & other Non-Academic Staff
09.00-09.30 Observing teaching – Lecture
09.30-10.00 Observing teaching – Lecture
10.00-10.30 Observing Students' Presentations (B.A. Special students)
10.30-11.00 Observing Documents (Working Tea)
11.00-11.30 Meeting with postgraduate students
11.30-12.00 Meeting with undergraduate students
12.00-12.30 Observing teaching – Lecture
12.30-01.30 Lunch
01.30-02.00 Observing teaching – Lecture
02.00-02.30 Observing teaching – Lecture
02.30-03.00 Observing Students' Presentations (B.A. General students)
03.00-03.30 Observing teaching – Practical Class
03.30-04.00 Observing teaching – Practical Class
04.00-05.00 Meeting of Reviewers

Day 03 (26.03.2008)

08.30-09.30 Observing teaching (First-year Students)
09.30-10.00 Observing Publications and Students' Assignments
10.00-11.00 Reviewers private discussion with individual lecturers
11.00-11.30 Meeting with Academic Guidance and Counselling Staff
11.30-12.00 Reviewers' private discussion
12.00-01.00 Meeting with Head of Department and Staff for reporting
01.00-02.00 Lunch
02.00-03.00 Report Writing

Annex 2. LIST OF PERSONS MET

1. Prof. Kulatilake Kumarasinghe, Dean/Faculty of Humanities
2. Ven. Dr, Induragare Dhammaratana, Head/Department of Sanskrit
3. Ven. N. Revata, Senior Lecturer/Department of Sanskrit
4. Ven. Prof. Kahapola Sugataratana/Department of Sanskrit
5. Prof. S.A.G. Wijesinghe/Department of Sanskrit
6. Ven. Embogama Vimalajnana, Lecturer/Department of Sanskrit
7. Dr. Hemanta Sirisena, Head of the Dept. of Modern Languages and Senior Student Counsellor
8. The Clerk of the Department of Sanskrit
9. The Peon of the Department of Sanskrit
10. Rev. B. Indajoti, postgraduate student
11. Mr. U.L.D.B. Chandima Gunasinghe, postgraduate student
12. Mr. Asoka Gunasekera, Temporary Assistant Lecturer & postgraduate student

Annex 3. THE TEACHING SESSIONS OBSERVED

It being the examination time of the Faculty of Humanities, when students were on vacation, we could observe only two teaching sessions specially organized by the Head of Department. They are as follows:

25.03.2008: 10.00 – 11.00

Lecturer: Ven. N. Revata (for final-year students)

25.03.2008: 11.00 – 12.00

Lecturer: Prof. S.A.G. Wijesinghe (for final-year students)

Annex 4. LIST OF FACILITIES OBSERVED

1. The Departmental Library
2. Computer Facilities available in the Department
3. Class Room Facilities
4. Office Facilities for the Academic Staff
5. Facilities available for taking lunch and tea.

Annex 5. LIST OF DOCUMENTS OBSERVED

1. Self-evaluation Report submitted by the Head of Department
2. Syllabus of B.A. Special degree in Sanskrit programme
3. Syllabuses of courses provided for B.A. General degree programme
4. Syllabus of Course of Diploma in Buddhist Sanskrit for Foreign Students
5. Syllabus for proposed Certificate Course of Sanskrit
6. Syllabus for First-in-Arts for external students
7. Syllabus for B.A. General, Part I, for external students
8. Syllabus for B.A. General, Part II, for external students
9. Lecture hand-outs distributed during lectures
10. Final-year dissertations submitted by students who have followed B.A. Special degree in Sanskrit programme
11. Two M. Phil. theses submitted by two members on the present academic staff
12. Publications of the academic staff
13. Periodicals published by the Department of Sanskrit
14. Sample signature sheets provided for marking student attendance at lectures