

THE BUDDHIST EDUCATION SYSTEM IN THE INDIAN SUBCONTINENT: AN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

With the advent and advancement of Buddhism an innovative complete education system was established in this sub-continent for Buddhists. Basically this education system was based on Buddhist life system. As Buddhism was a new religion, so its education system is a part of Vedic education system. The Buddhist education system is not a part of Vedic education system at all, rather the students of history know that the Buddhist education system was the best and advancing more in many respects than the education system of the Vedic period.

1. THE OBJECTIVE OF BUDDHIST EDUCATION SYSTEM

The key object of Buddhist education system was to enhance the mental ability of all irrespective of caste, creed, color, class and gender to build hale and hearty physique, character and the development of personality. The particular aim of the Buddhist education system was to develop inquisitiveness, self-confidence, self-reliance, social service and social responsibilities in the minds of learners. Another aspect of the Buddhist education system was to make the people free and ability-based citizens by educating in many mundane subjects such as agriculture, commerce, rearing

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domestic creatures, homeopathic treatment etc. There were two kinds of education in the Buddhist education system. One was for the Sangha and other was for lay communities. The major characteristics of the Buddhist education system is the Sangha education system. Before the great-Parinibbana (the final passing away), in response to disciple Ananda, Lord Buddha said: 'In my absence the Sangha would take the responsibility of education of the disciples.' And later on, the discovery of a clear and systematic Buddhist education system was the testimony of carrying out this responsibility successfully. We appreciate a good similarity between the narrations about the ancient Indian Buddhist education system by Chinese traveler named Yiet Sin as scripted in Vinaya Pitaka (one of the canonical texts in Buddhism).

2. SANGHA EDUCATION SYSTEM

To enter the Sangha in Buddhism after renunciation, the learners having gone to the educators expressed their intention to do so. The criterion to enter the Sangha is at least seven years old, in good physical shape, adept, non-debtor and self-motivator in nature. To enter the Sangha the learners must practice the five precepts for ten to thirty days as lay devotees. On completion of his life, a lay devotee by wearing his robe s/he expressed his/her intention to enter the Sangha. If the Sangha sought after the learners to enter then they requested Sangha-achariya (Sangha-educator) to arrange primary matters. On this occasion being bald-headed and taking robes and bowl, the students went forth. Educator was called as an Upadhyaya (Chief-educator). In the presence of chief-educator, the Sangha-educators recited the Vinaya. As a Samana, the learners must lead 20 years in the Sangha. It was the final learning time for Samana. After finishing Samana line, the chief-educator appear at the meeting of the Sangha-educators with learners. In this meeting the Sangha-educators advised the learners to practice the great-precepts (227 precepts) and ordained them as Bhikkhus. This system is also going on for Sangha education in many areas now.

3. NECESSITY OF IMPARTING DHARMA EDUCATION TO THE CHILDREN (TENDERAGE)

Soft-hearted children need to become the member of the

society. So they must be equipped with the knowledge and practice of Dharma. They must be inspired to learn compassion, sympathy, purity, justice, wisdom and equanimity. The aim of Dharma teaching is to make the children good citizen, patriots. They must evaluate excellent human values.

4. MASS EDUCATION SYSTEM

In the Buddhist education system, not only Bhikkhu-Samanas but also the general people got chance of proper education. The then India ranged from north-west frontier to Tamralipti or Tamluk of Bangaland in east, and this vast land is full of Viharas. The famous Chinese traveler Fa Hien informed that he saw many Viharas everywhere in India and Pataliputra was the centre of Buddhism and practicing teachings. In the era of king Harshabardan in 629 A.D, Huen San informed in his book that, during that time in India there were about five thousand Viharas and more than two 2,00,000 Bhikkhu-Samanas and other students in the Viharas. Besides, many aged scholars from everywhere went to study there. Famous teachers taught in those Viharas. The popularity of Viharas spread across the world. As a result, not only the local but also many foreign students went there to study. Some of the famous figures were Asanga, Basubandhu, Aswaghosa, Nabayanbadra etc. who were indebted for their learning to those Viharas.

In those Viharas the students got both primary and high level education. At first, child level students learned about Sanskrit alphabet with vowel consonant making structures. Then they started to learn about five texts those were: (1) Grammar, (2) Science of Arts and Crafts, (3) Science of Medicine, (4) Logic, and (5) Philosophy. So it is clear that, at primary education level both religious and mundane types of education were included. Later for higher education the students selected one of the five subjects and be skilled on it.

Every Vihara had two types of school – school of external department and school of internal department. First type of school was for general people. Anyone who was not a Buddhist was able to get education from that kind of school. The second type of school was for Samanas. In the description of Yiet Sin we got two

types of students. One type of students learned about Dhamma to enter the Sangha and another type of students learned about mundane teachings such as agriculture, commerce, cattle rearing, accounting and herbal treatment etc. Ordination was not needed for the second type of students. The Viharas did not provide any financial or household support to them. Yiet Sin described a sequential description related to the Buddhist education system in accordance with students' age. Learning started at the age of six. Grammar was emphasized at the age of eight. At the age of ten, they got higher degree of learning about the grammar and at the age of fifteen they learned about grammar of the renowned grammarian Panini, the great speech of Patanjali, Logic, Abhidhamma etc. Besides these, the Samanas learned about Sutta, Vinaya and other Buddhist philosophies. For higher education the students entered into Nalanda, Taxila, Bikrampur, Odantapuri universities etc. Besides these, some of the most famous Viharas were Kaniska Vihara in Peshoyar (now in Pakistan), Puskarbati monastery, Udyan monastery in the north-west frontier, Tilaksree monastery, Raktamrita monastery of Karna-Suvarna, Kancipur monastery in south, Pundit Vihara in Chittagong, two monasteries of Hinayana and Mahayana in Pataliputra, Nagardan Vihara in Jalandhar, monastery of Matipur, Bhadra Vihara of Kanyakujja, Purbashel and Abarshel monasteries etc. In those Viharas, there were large libraries to acquire knowledge. Many antique texts were in those libraries.

In addition, there were 18 kinds of occupational activities during the time of Buddha. Those are listed below. But Buddha strictly prohibited doing the no. 10-13 occupational activities.

1. Carpenter
2. Blacksmith
3. Stone-artisan
4. Weaver
5. Shoe-maker
6. Potter
7. Ivory-artisan
8. Painter

9. Jeweler
10. Fisherman
11. Butcher
12. Hunter
13. Cook and Confectioner
14. Barber
15. Florist and Flower seller
16. Sailor
17. Basket-maker
18. Artist

5. WOMEN EDUCATION

The education process of women in the Sangha started in the lifetime of Buddha. On the request of Mahaprajapati Goutami, Buddha directly permitted the women to enter the Sangha. Besides household chores those women disciples took active part in donations, social welfare, rendering service for the sufferers, helping others etc. Many wise, helpful and Vietnam women were enlisted in Buddhist texts named Therigatha, which are now legends. The Sangha took the responsibility to teach the women like other Bhikkhus. The Bhikkhunis also remained single for their lifetime and taught Vinaya and other teachings. Women education spread throughout India on the patronization of the Buddhist Sangha.

6. TWO TYPES OF EDUCATOR

There are two types of educators in the Buddhist education system: (1) Upadhyaya (Chief-educator), (2) Karmachriya (Action-educator). The Sangha-achariyas used to read Vinaya rules in the presence of Upadhaya. The Samanas had to pass twenty years in the Sangha. After completion of the Samana period Upadhayas along with students attended a meeting called by the Sangha-achariyas. The Karmachariyas taught the learners Vinaya (rules of Sangha). Both of them (Upadhayayas and Karmachariyas) continued their life in learning. They remained single for the whole life so that nothing could hamper learning. Their needs were very

little. In that time, the educators got very low remuneration that was only three times higher to the learners' monthly wages.

7. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EDUCATOR AND LEARNER

The relationship between educators and learners was very co-operative in ancient Indian education system. The same can be said about the Buddhist education system. Yiet Sin informed that learners came to educators to learn lessons in the morning and in the evening every day. The learners served their best to comfort the educators, even cleaning the educators' bedroom is also learners' duty. On the other hand, the educators took care of the sick learners and gave Medicare to them. The learners were submissive to educators for depth of knowledge of educators and the educators also loved their learners from their heart. It was said that Anguliamal became ready to cut his own mother's finger to give the educator's pay.

8. MEDIUM OF EDUCATION

Lord Buddha gave his sermon with a great vision in mass education. In lieu of the then Deva-language named Sanskrit he delivered his discourses in Magadi, Prakrit and Pali languages. Even in the era of Ashoka the elderly Sangha-Nayakas gave discourses on the teachings of the Buddha and composed the canonical texts in Koshal Magada language that means Magadi/Prakrita and Pali languages. Therefore in the Buddhist education system the people's languages were used in mass education and got recognition.

9. CHARACTERISTIC OF THE BUDDHIST EDUCATION SYSTEM

In the history of ancient Indian education system, Buddhist education acquired a great significance for its own specialization.

At first, making room for all kinds of people irresponsibility of caste, creed, colour, class and gender, Buddhist education established a democratic ideal in ancient Indian education system.

Secondly, in Buddhist education residential education system spread all over. In that education system, the Bhikkhus in Sangha, got chance to stay together with tolerance, co-operation, and self-dependence and develop their personality.

Thirdly, as the learners of the Buddhist Sangha were so vast that the class system had to be introduced. As there were two kinds of educator to teach. So it was possible to analyze the virtues of the students.

Fourthly, Buddhist education took the ideal of mass education for the first time in the country. The way of learning became ease and the growth rate of literacy rose, as a medium of education was the mother tongue.

Fifthly, as the Viharas and monasteries were established by the donation of people. So general schools were created in India by the patronization of Buddhists at first. The popularity of Buddhism has resulted in spreading the Buddhist education system too. In calculating periodically, we see from Ashoka to Pala dynasty in Bengal, Indo-Banga attained the golden-age of Buddhist civilization and culture. The Viharas etc. became the centre of residential education. Those Viharas were built by the contemporary kings, the rich and the people's donation. In that process, the Viharas became Universities. Taxlia, Nalanda, Bikramsila, Odantapuri etc became residential universities. At that time those universities opened the door of knowledge in this sub-continent, as a result, Indo-Banga culture got the international recognition. Having a good management of studying Buddhist texts and other texts in those Mahaviharas, many students from China, Korea, Tibet, Nepal, Sinhala and Java went there to study. Thus, the Mahaviharas became the centres of international and cultural relationship. It was possible to establish a cultural relationship between East Asia and Indo-Banga by the Viharas. With the passage of time the civilization as well as culture is now considered to be the glorious chapter in the history of Indian sub-continent for which Indo-Banga still takes great pride.

10. SUGGESTIONS

The objective of Buddhist education should be more comprehensive, sustainable, modern and universal. The following suggestions are unavoidably needed for the welfare of the Buddhist people of the world.

1. Buddhist education should ensure the realization of socialistic ideals of any country.

2. This education should ensure the protection of women's rights and their empowerment.

3. This education should ensure the protection of environment that will be free from pollution.

4. This education should be non-violent global problem-solving.

5. This education should ensure natural understanding, co-operation and co-ordination among the Buddhist people of the world.

6. This education should ensure the welfare, development, justice, equity, human rights, peace, reconciliation, non-violence, identity, disarmament, authenticity and universality.

7. This education should be blessing like-'May the rains of Lava, blazing stones and weapons from now on become a rain of heart-touching colorful flowers.' May all battling with deadly weapons from now on be a playful exchange of rosy fragrant flowers.

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