

# ROLE OF BUDDHIST ETHICS FOR BETTER A EDUCATION

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## ABSTRACT

*The Pāli term “Ajjhāpana” can be translated as “education or advice” in the English language. Education is a lifelong process, lasting as long as we continue our existence and so long as the education exists with us. From the Buddhist point of view, each and every subtle thing in our life and our environment teaches us a good lesson, the world in which we live acts like a classroom. In this way, the entire role of Buddhist teachings can be known as a system of education. The educational aspect of Buddhist teachings can be highlighted with reference to three types of Buddhist concepts; Dhamma-desana (preaching of Buddhist teaching), Dhammasavana (listening of Buddhist teaching), and Dhamma Sakaccha (discussion of Buddhist teaching.) The above three concepts have used in Buddhist tradition as means to diffuse the message of the Buddha from his time to present.*

*Specifically the Buddhist doctrine of four sublime thoughts; Metta (loving kindness), Karuna (Loving kindness), Mudita (sympathetic joy) and Upekkha (equanimity) are the key ethical concepts which need to be established at a global level. These four sublime thoughts provide necessary guidelines for us to become a perfected person in society. The aim of education from Buddhist point of view is a social work, Bodhisattva practice, religious and social obligation of human life. The*

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*ultimate goal of Buddhist education works as a psychological process and it focuses on psychological transformation of one's behavior. This psychological transformation leads the person from general life (Lokiya) up to the Lokuttara (spiritual level). Therefore, in this research expects to discuss how Buddhist ethical teaching contributes for a better education in our society.*

## 1. THE ROLE OF BUDDHIST ETHICS IN EDUCATION

The term education has ascribed different definitions but none of them have given exact meaning and answer to the term education, at present; the development of science and technology has made a huge impact on education therefore the term education contains broader meaning. However, let us focus the attention on few definitions given on education.

Education is an attempt, developed to inculcate lofty ideas in the mind of children...<sup>1</sup>, Training the students to useful and productive roles is education...<sup>2</sup>, Education is giving training in civilization...<sup>3</sup>, Education is to direct the students towards the desired goals...<sup>4</sup>, Education attempts to modify behavior through the process of learning...<sup>5</sup>

The above definitions show the meaning that education is a training process and it is goal oriented function. There is no unanimously acceptable real meaning given on education and the real meaning of education is still unclear because the purpose of education and the goal of education seem to have considerable differences from society to society. For example, a child who is born in a *Negro* family his education would depend on the skills of making trap and catching the animals. Therefore, it is very difficult to formulate a universally acceptable definition for education. Simply, it is said that the education is a guiding process as well it is a process of building up a sound foundation in general knowledge on

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1. Petars R.S, (1967), *Concept of Education*, London, page.05.

2. Petars, R.S, (1966), *Ethics and Education*, London, page. 31.

3. Unesco, (1953), *Humanism and Education in East and West*, Paris, page.79.

4. Upali D. Seram, (1977), *Educational Criteria*, Colombo, page.20.

5. S.B, Kakkar, (2004), *Educational Psychology*, Printic Hall of India Private Limited, page 01, New Delhi.

subject matters. In addition to knowledge on subject matters, the education is grounded on ethical and psychological relationship of human society. The general education was secular, religious, moral, ethical, spiritual, vocational, professional all these are integrated into one. The nature of educational institutions, subject matters of study, the strategies of teaching, measures of disciplinary such all had moral and social elements combine in a one system.

As mentioned by *S.B. Kakkar* “the aim of education is to modify behavior and all that conditions it...”<sup>6</sup> *Lindgren* suggests, three aspects should be encompassed in education. These are: the learner, the learning process, or what goes on when people learn; and, the learning situation. However, modern education systems have been influenced by modern science and technology. At the same time, science and technology have made huge impact on life styles of people. Therefore, ethical basis of education is more important than ever before in our society, in this regard, formulation of Buddhist doctrine based educational system will be a successful way to build up ethical education system in our society. This small article expects to make some suggestions on this matter.

Human beings are rational beings on this Earth and they have the ability of thinking and reasoning more so than other beings. From the origin of human civilization, education has held a pivotal role for the development of human society. The etymological root of education origins from Latin “e” (=out) and “ducere” (= to lead) conveying the idea of ‘leading one from the darkness (<Latin “e”) to the sphere of light. This sort of teaching is discussed in early Indian Upanishadic religious contexts in such a way that leading one from the unreal to the real... Here, it is possible to understand the point that the fundamental role of education is to lead a person from unreal to reality.

The *Jañā Sutta of Saüyutta Nikaya* very clearly illustrates the Buddhist standpoint on education thus; *Anto jañā bahi jañā, jatāya jañitā pjā, Taiü taü gotama pucchāmi, ko imaiü vijañaye jañaye jaña, (A tangle within, a tangle without, people are entangle in a tangle. Gotama, I ask you this: who can untangle this tangle?) Sälepatiññhāya*

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6. *Ibid*, page. 02.

*naro sapanno, cittaü panna bhāvayaü, Ātāpā nipako bhikkhu, so imaü vijañāye jañāü* (A man established in virtue, discerning, developing discernment and mind, a monk ardent, astute: he can untangle this tangle.) (Translated by Tanissaro Bhikku)

Both of these stanzas point out the true nature of Buddhist teaching. The prime aim of Buddhism is to making people aware of reality through the knowledge (*Gāna*) and wisdom (*paññā*). From the Buddhist point of view, both knowledge and wisdom can be known as best educational position and these two positions depend on ethical ground. When we examine the Buddhist doctrine from educational point of view, there are ample references encapsulated in the teaching of the Buddha. The *Pali* terms such as *Sikkhā*, *Ajjheti*, *Adhyapitat*, *Ajjhayaka* can be found in Buddhist texts, those terms convey the meaning of education, the word *Sikkhā* is derived from the verb '*Sikkhati*' which means control, training, leading toward a goal, discipline, developing, cultivation "The terms *Ajjhāpana*, *Ajjheti*, *Adhyapitat* are derived from the root *Adhi* which means (directing the mind towards the observation and understating). In this context, it is clear that education is a process of transforming the thinking and reasoning aspects of a person. A.S. Altekar pointed out the importance of education thus; "cry out, there is a learned man and people will flock round him, cry out there is a good man and people will not look at him..."<sup>7</sup> He further adds the fact that educational systems do not aim at imparting a general knowledge of a number of subjects.<sup>8</sup> Historically, the history of general education system in ancient India goes back to very early times say more than 2000 B.C or even earlier. There are references in ancient scriptures said about the *Ashrams* and *Gurukulas* where young students received their education in the *Vedas* and *Brahmanas*..."<sup>9</sup> when we look at the aim of education in those days and today, we can find enough convergences and divergences. But those days and today's the aims of education are connected in the development of

7. A. S. Altekar, (1944), *Education in Ancient India*, Nand Kishore and Bros, Educational Publishers, page. 10.

8. A. S. Altekar, (1944), *Education in Ancient India*, Nand Kishore and Bros, Educational Publishers, page. 22.

9. S.N.Sharma, (1994), *Buddhist Social and Moral Education*, Parimal Publication, Delhi, page. 38.

the personality trait of an infant. And the cultivation of body, mind, intellect and spiritual aspect of a child is constituted as one whole in education.

Sanskrit term “*Adhyāpana*” and the Pāli term “*Ajjhāpana*” are used to produce the meaning of education. The *Pali* –English dictionary gives the meaning to the term “*Ajjhāpana*, advising and education<sup>10</sup>” *Monier William’s* Sanskrit-English dictionary gives the meaning for the education as ‘advising and educating’. *Robert Caesar Childers* dictionary of *Pali* language provides the definitions to the term education “*Ajjhāpana*, instruction and *Ajjhāpeti*, to teach, to instruct.”<sup>11</sup> English *Pali* dictionary gives the meaning; educate, *Sikkhāpeti*, *Uggaḍhapeti*, *Sikkhāpana*, *Ajjhāpana* and the person who engages in that task is known as *Uggahadāyaka*.<sup>12</sup>” In this way, Buddhism uses different synonymous for the term education. The Sanskrit word, *Adhyāpana* (Education) can be interpreted as *Ajjhāpana* in *Pali* language. Moreover, the *Pali* term *Uggahā* which indicates the meaning “to study” and the term *Uggahapaka* indicate the meaning “teaching”. As noted by *Piyaratane* “A new interpretation has been made to the word education through the word *Sikkhā*. This means, ethical training and spiritual development of a person...”<sup>13</sup> The education was primarily intended to transform the inner nature of person and the formation of character through the development of moral and ethical values. In other word, education is the main tool of inculcating moral values by controlling the original animal nature of human.

The ultimate purpose of educational teachings in Buddhist texts work as a cognitive process. This cognitive process morally and ethically is very advanced. When we examine religious discourses both Eastern and Western, it is possible to understand the fact that most of religious movements and religious institutions have made considerable influence on education. Specifically, from a religious

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10. Rhys David and Stede, (1966), *Pali English Dictionary*, Pali text society, London, pages. 11-12.

11. Childers, Robert Caesar, (1909), *A Dictionary of the Pali Language*, London, page. 21.

12. Buddhadatta Polvatte, *English Pali Dictionary*, (1955), Delhi, India, page. 164.

13. Piyaratane Kadawathgama, (2002), *Teaching Methodology and Strategies Highlighted in Buddhism*, page. 03.

perspective, religious values and customs are basic concepts in the context of education. During the pre-Buddhist era in India, the concept of education is highly recognized as an occupation, especially, under the leadership of Brahmanism. Education was considered as a fundamental social requirement in *Brahmanic* period. They have divided human life into four divisions. The first division of life was devoted for the education (*saisaveabhasta vidyanam*). One of the stanzas in a Sanskrit text reported that how much the education governs the entire circle of life. The stanza illustrates the ultimate goal of education, *Vidyā dadāti vinayaü vinayād yati patratäü, patratvād dhanamapnoti dhanād dharmaü tatah sukhaü* – education/knowledge brings discipline, from discipline brings worthiness, from worthiness one gets wealth, from wealth one does good deeds, from that comes happiness. The ancient Indian education system was conceptualized to promote social happiness. The education is a best agency to promote social wellbeing and social order, when there is no good educational background in a society such a society might be possible to decline. The internally and externally exploited nature of society will depict through the signs of wounded mentality as a form of a war or any other form of social conflicts. When we look at the root cause of internal and external conflict in our society, the conflict comes due to the vacuum of proper educational background of conflict supporters.

The origin of Buddhism can be understood as an active response to contemporary religious thoughts. The philosophical outlooks of Buddhist teachings have promoted Buddhism to the level of highest social recognition. *Brahmajāla Sutta in Dāgha Nikāya* illustrates how far contemporary society in six century B.C in India at the time of Buddha was twisted by sixty-two dogmatic views. In this regard, the dawn of Buddhism can be known as a means to discharge people from the darkness of ignorance (*Avijjā*) and leading them to the light of wisdom (*paññā*). This philosophical outlook has provided a new path to be known in Buddhism as a favorable doctrine of education.

The early Buddhist sources deal with wide range of educational terms and concepts, *Vijjā* (knowledge), *Vijjācarana* (knowledge

and conduct), *Satthā* (Teacher), *Upajjhāya* (Preceptor), *Antevāsika* (Pupil), *Bāla* (foolish), *Paḍḍita* (Intelligent), *Medhāvi* (Intellectual), *Bahussuta* (skilled) *Dhamma-desanā* (preaching of Buddhist teaching), *Dhammasavanā* (listening of Buddhist teaching), and *Dhamma Sācakchā* (discussion of Buddhist teaching), *Sunātha* (Listening), *Dhāretha* (Comprehension), *Carātha* (Conduct) etc... The uniqueness of Buddhist educational philosophy based on ethics and morality, the three-fold path of knowledge *Sāla* Morality, *Samādhi* (Concentration) and *Paññā* Wisdom can be understood as a deep insight of Buddhist education. The most outstanding educational teaching is available in the teaching of eight-fold path; the eight fold path well explains the ways and means to manage the entire behavioral system of human character. Buddhism suggests right view; right thought, right words, right actions, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right mental concentration as vital tools for the development of personality. These eight types can also be understood as behavioral modification steps and these steps will contribute for the cultivation of good educational life-style in social life of persons. At this exposition, Buddhism suggests ethically and morally perfected term like “*Sammā*” which means “right”, the entire eight components of eight fold path connected with right way of thinking, right way of behavior and right way of understanding, these three faculties can be regarded as favorable personality development strategies in Buddhist educational principles. These eight strategies are basic components in the path of enlightenment. As there has been suggested by *Dhammadassi* “As a matter of fact, the uniqueness of the Buddhist view on education lies much on it ethico-philosophical path upholding knowledge and realization ... in other word, knowledge for Buddhism, is only a means to an end, and not an end in itself...”<sup>14</sup>

The educational structure of Buddhism is recorded particularly in Buddhist monastic Order, when we make a careful study of *Vinaya* texts, we will be able to formulate a substantial picture of the development of early Buddhist monastic life. The development of monastic life shows the educational background of Buddhism.

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14. Dhammadassi, (2009), *Buddhist contribution to education*, Department of Pali and Buddhist studies, University of Sri Jayawardenepura, page. 15.

The first instruction of the Buddha “Walk, monks, on tour for the blessing of the many folk, for the happiness of the many folk out of compassion for the world, for the welfare, the blessing, the happiness of *devas* and men. Let not two of you go by one way. Monks, teach dhamma which is lovely at the beginning, lovely in the middle, lovely at the ending... completely fulfilled, wholly pure...”<sup>15</sup> This is the first educational lesson which is instructed by the Buddha. Here, Buddhism presents the ideas that whatever the knowledge and ability which we have, we must make use of them for the wellbeing of humanity as well as for the wellbeing of social climate.

The Buddhist educational principles deal with ethical propositions for an example, “if the teacher becomes ill, he should tend him as long as life last, he should wait until he recovers ... at this point, Buddhism suggests at this level the relationship of teacher and student is not limited to gain for knowledge or skills. But it must be a heart to heart relationship as well a lifelong commitment for taking care of each other. In this regard, it is therefore no wonder that in the relationship of teacher and student has a spirit of piety and religiousness of the mind. This relationship should have been considered as a foremost aim of education in Buddhism. As noted by A.S. Altekar “The direct aim of all education, whether literary or professional, was to make the student fit to become a useful and pious member of society...”<sup>16</sup>

The disciple was considered as the important factor in the character of student, the most important aspect of discipline of student life was pure and humble life, respecting to the teacher, preceptor and seniors in the Order, simple living, early rising, observance of daily duties, celibacy, observance of religious precepts, dedication and devotion to Buddha Dhamma and *Sangha*, commitment to the institutional rules and regulations. At the same time, teacher was expected to present an ideal life by his own conduct. The teacher was considered as a father of his disciples and taking care of students out of compassion, out of equanimity, out of loving kindness. The

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15. The Book of the Discipline, (2000), Vinaya-Pitaka Volume IV, Mahavagga, Translated by I.B. Horner, PTS, Oxford, page. 28.

16. A.S. Altekar, (1944), *Education in Ancient India*, Nand Kishore and Bros, Educational Publishers, page. 10.

teacher should offer proper education to the best of his capacity. It is his pious duty, and the teacher should not discriminate among his students because of caste, religions, social background, gender or any other consideration. At the time of Buddha, social division is one of the social needs; Buddhism pointed out the emergence of social division was happened not because of one's caste or birth but because of historical and economic reasons. Buddhism indicates that caste will not affect one's moral and ethical climate. "The basis of superiority of an individual could not be anything else but his moral behavior. Neither caste, nor profession, nor riches, nor learning, not status could determine the quality of a man in the society except the moral quality of an individual concerned..."<sup>17</sup> when questioned what are the qualities of a *Brahmana*, Buddha said one who has discarded the evil, conceit, ill will, defilements, anger, attachment and versed in knowledge and conduct are some of pertinent features of holly person. From Buddhist educational perspective, Buddhism advocates the importance of equality and democracy in the Order. The members of *Sangha* could be taken as an exemplary model in social order as well as the symbol of democracy in Buddhism. The ultimate object of Buddhist education is aimed at the gain of freedom; freedom of thinking, freedom of free will, freedom of language, freedom of religious thought etc... Buddha affirmed that due respect and veneration in society is to be given on the basis of one's moral and ethical qualities and behavior.

The development of personality is a key factor of educational system; this can be done through the cultivation of self confidence, self reliance, self determinism, self esteem, and self control. The early Buddhist texts have suggested the terms such as *Attakāra* (Self performed), *purisakāra* self govern, *purisabala* self power, *purisa viriya* self effort, *purisathāma* self strength, *purisa parakkama* self ability and *purisa dorayyha* self effort as some of terminologies which assert the personality development level in ethical and moral proposition. The pinnacle of Buddhist education ethical characters are represented in the practice of ten perfections (*Pāramitā*) which are supportive factors for the cultivation of perfect life.

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17. S.N. Sharma, (1994), *Buddhist Social and Moral Education*, Parimal Publication, Delhi, page. 52.

In education, giving punishment for wrong doers are at present become a matter of controversy, the ancient Indian religious literary sources have pointed out ample of evidences with regarding the recommendation of punishments for students. “*Āpastamba* recommends that a teacher should try to improve refractory students by banishing them from his presence or by imposing a fast. He seems to be opposed to physical chastisement. *Manu* grows eloquent over the virtues of’ gentle persuasion, but eventually permits the imposition of mild physical punishment by a thin rod or rope. Gautama agrees with him, but adds that a teacher giving a severe punishment would be liable for legal prosecution...”<sup>18</sup>

Buddhism recommends the fact that *Sahasāpateyya daīdaū* (punishment should not be recommended with hostile mind). In ancient time, the practice of corporeal punishment can be recognizable. *Mahādukkhakaōda Sutta* enumerates number of deadly punishment methods that were implemented at the time of Buddha. The Buddha having known bad consequences of those punishments, he criticized and rejected them. The *Dhammapada* records”<sup>19</sup> An individual may have been deluded in the past. But later on corrects his thinking and becomes a disillusioned person. He, therefore, is like the moon that has come out from behind a dark cloud: thus, he illumines the world. Who so by wholesome *Kamma* covers up the evil done illumines this entire world as moon when free from clouds. In this sense, Buddhist educational principles teach the fact that the Arahat person is the highest educated person because he was free from defilements and enjoy highest bliss of spiritual happiness. Buddhism promotes each and every person on this earth to achieve this goal. The Buddha’s final advised to venerable *Ananda* thus; “*Ananda*, be lamps unto yourselves, beget a refuge to yourselves. Betake yourselves to no external refuge. Hold fast to the truth Dhamma as your lamp. Hold fast as a refuge to

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18. A. S. Altekar, (1944), *Education in Ancient India*, Nand Kishore and Bros, Educational Publishers, page. 27.

19. *Dhammapada*; Treasury of Truth, Illustrated *Dhammapada* (Lokavagga), edited by Sarada Weragoda, Buddha Dhamma Education Association, Yo ca pubbe pamajjitvā, pacchā so nappamajjati, Somaū lokaū pabhāseti, abbhā muttova candimā 173-174 stanza, Yassā pāpau kataū kammaū, kusalena pidhāyati, Somaū lokaū pabhāsetā, abbhā muttova candimā, pages. 729--731.

the truth. Look not for refuge to anyone except yourselves...and whosoever, *Ananda*, either now or after I am dead, shall act thus, it is only they among my recluses who shall reach the topmost eight and even they must be willing to learn ...”<sup>20</sup>

As a summary of this study, it is possible to understand that Buddhism suggests outstanding educational characteristics which assume by a true educator thus; He is free from attachment, He knows the true nature of dependent co-origination and the way of origin and cessation, he personifies the Buddhist moral ideal, He is vigilance on moral and ethical behavior, he is always in a state of four basis of mindfulness, his behavior is in accordance with the laws of morality, he is always in a state of bliss of supreme happiness. It is noticeable that Buddha himself continued his religious mission while stepping forward by encompassing current social barriers to deliver the Dhamma to his audience. As mentioned in *Ariyapariyesana Sutta of Majjhima Nikāya* the ascetic Gotama wanted to find out *Kiū Kusalagavesi* what is morally good, this is the highest moral duty in Buddhist education. The *Alagaddūpama Sutta* explains the fact that somebody should not learn his doctrine with the intention of defeating of others or in the intention of gains fame from others, this ideal example shows how much the teachings of Buddha have a close link with education. The Buddha says that “here, *bhikkhu*, some misguided men learn the *Dhamma* discourses, stanzas, expositions, verses, exclamations, sayings, birth stories, marvels, and answers to questions but having learned the *Dhamma*, (*“idha bhikkhave ekacce moghapurisa dhammaü pariyapunanti, suttaü geyyaiüveyyākaranü, gātha udāna itivuttaka jātaka abbhutadhamma vedalla”*)<sup>21</sup> The wide range of educational ethics in Buddhism is mentioned in *Kalama Sutta* thus: revelation (*anussava*), tradition (*paramparā*), hearsay (*itikirā*), authority of religious texts (*pitakasampada*), logical format (*takkaetu*), merely on the view that seems rational (*nayahetu*), reflection on mere appearance (*ākāraparivitakka*), agreement with a considered view (*diññhiniijjhānakkhantiyā*), considering the competence of a person (*bhabbarūpatāya*) and considering that the recluse is our teacher

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20. S. N. Sharma, (1994), *Buddhist Social and Moral Education*, Parimal Publication, Delhi, pages. 69-70.

(*samano no garu*). In this exposition, it is very clear the fact that Buddhism advised when somebody engages in the practice of education, the practitioner should not cling to dogmatic views and the educational practitioner should have a critical mind and critical thinking on entire circle of life.

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