

Enlightening Minds: Promoting Education through Buddhist Principles in India

By

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Abstract

The goal of Buddhist education is to transform the personality into the highest form of humanity through moral, intellectual and spiritual perfection. These three abilities which complete human life undoubtedly lead man through worldly happiness to supramundane happiness which is the highest achievement that we all seek equally. Education is taught or expected to shape the character of a society. This article tries to discuss the teachings of Buddhism in ancient India. It is well known that the rise of Buddhism in India ushered in the golden age of Indian culture and civilization. The rise of Buddhism in India led to the establishment of many centers of learning that did not exist before. Buddhist education brought revolutionary changes in society. We still remember the glory of Nalanda University, Vikramshila University, Sonepuri University, Salwan University, Jagadhar University, Pandit Vihar University, and Taxila University etc. This article also emphasizes the important role of Buddhist monasteries in promoting education in India and other Asian countries.

Keywords: Education, Buddhist Principles India, Enlightenment, Wisdom, Learning, Cultural Heritage, Holistic Development

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Introduction

The most important contribution of ancient India is in the field of education, not only to India but to the world. Also remember that education is not an abstract term. It shows itself in cultural, economic, personal, philosophical, scientific, social and spiritual progress. In other words, education is a means of developing the mind for the betterment of individuals and society. Buddha was the founder of Buddhism. It is one of the 11 religions in the world. Gautama Buddha attained enlightenment under the Bodhi tree in Bodhgaya and became known as Tathagata or Buddha. "Buddha" means scholar, wise, intelligent and "Tathagata" means one who knows the truth. Buddha visualized the current situation and showed people a very moral way of life. Buddhism not only showed the noble path to the people of India, but also spread its brilliance to the whole world. That is why the name of Gautama is still remembered with respect and reverence.

Development in Education

In the field of education, Buddhists made an amazing contribution. The Buddha first started his teaching career wandering from house to house, village to village and street to street. Then he founded his Centres of education in the monasteries such as Veluvanarama in Rajagraha, Jetavanarama and Pubbarama in Savathi. The Buddhist Sanghas and Viharas served as great Centres of Education. Students came to these places to receive education not only from different parts of India but also from Tibet and China etc. Nalanda, Taxila and Vikramshila which gained reputations as great educational Centres were actually originally Buddha Viharas only. Nalanda particularly enjoyed great reputation as an educational Centre and has been described as the Oxford University of Buddhism. It may be noted that these institutions did not impart instructions only in religion but also in other subjects such as secular literature, logic, philosophy, medicines, military science and economics.

Aims of Buddhist Education

The goal of Buddhist education is to attain wisdom. In Sanskrit, the language of ancient India, the Buddhist wisdom was called "Anuttara-Samyak-Sambhodi" meaning the perfect ultimate wisdom. The Buddha taught us that the main objective of our practice or cultivation was to achieve this ultimate wisdom.

- i. The chief aim of Buddhist education was all round development of child's personality. This included his physical, mental, moral and intellectual development.
- ii. The principal goal of the Buddhist Education is to change an unwise to wise, beast to priest.
- iii. The chief aim of education was propagation of religion and inculcation of religious feelings and education served as a mean to achieve salvation or nirvana.

The nature of mass education

In the early days, Buddhist education was limited to the monasteries and to the members of the monasteries. But then it became open to all. Buddhist education brought revolutionary changes in society. Monasteries or Buddha Vihars were the main centers of learning, and only Buddhist monks could claim to learn. People generally receive moral and religious education from monks.

Women's education

It appears that women did not occupy the same position as in the Vedic period. It is well

known that the Buddha refused to admit women into the Sangha. But after some time, at the insistence of his dear disciple Ananda, the Buddha allowed about 500 women, including his stepmother, to enter the Viharas with many restrictions and reservations. The Buddha Sangha focuses on the cultural and social development of women.

There are bhikkhunis who have very high spiritual knowledge and can influence many people. Many monks also take responsibility for social services. Some of them studied philosophy deeply and became poets and writers. Some of them even study politics and actively participate in the politics of the day. Some of them even went abroad to spread Buddhism. Sheelbhattarika, Prabhudevi and Viyanka were famous as poets and writers at that time. Emperor Asoka's daughter Sanghamitra was a very famous Bhikshuni who rendered great service to Buddhism.

Quality and Responsibilities of Teachers

A teacher must be a monk for at least ten years and must have purity of character, purity of mind and wealth. The teacher and students of the monastery were responsible. But the teacher is fully responsible for the education of our student monks, clothing, food and accommodation. The teacher is responsible for the treatment whenever the patient is sick. They looked at the all-round development of students. There is a sense of mutual respect between teachers and students. Their relationship was like father and son. The teacher is considered the spiritual father or the intellectual father of the student.

Student concept

The goal of Buddhist education is to create a free person, a wise, intelligent, moral, non-violent and secular person. Students became judicious, humanistic, logical and without superstition. Students have become free from greed, lust and ignorance. Buddhist education was wide open and available to people of all walks of life. A student was expected to serve his teacher with all devotion. When getting up in the morning, the student arranges everything for the teacher's daily routine. The student had to prepare to learn whenever the teacher asked. The Buddhist system imposes an obligation on the disciple to serve that teacher as part of education.

Admissions

Monasteries were centers for imparting education during the Buddhist period. In order to be accepted, the student had to appear before the teacher and ask him for lessons. The teacher was fully responsible for the education of his pupil. On the other hand, the student also had to respond to the instructions given by the teacher. The student did not answer to any other Bhikshuka in the monastery at all. Novices first entered the Sangha (Bhikkha Sangha), after which they had to follow the monastic rules and the rules of the Sangha. Even today, these rules are followed.

Teaching method

Initially, private and group lessons took place. Later it became a classroom. In due course the Sangharamas developed into residential colleges and universities. Throughout the history of education, universities have played a major role in the promotion of Buddhism, Buddhist history, art and culture. World famous scholars like Atisa Dipankar, Silabrada, Santarakshit were the teachers in the universities. Many valuable books have been written. We still

remember the glory of universities like Nalanda, Vikramsila, Sompouri, Salban, Jagaddal, Pandit Vihar and Taxila. The superiority of these universities was unrivaled. Students from China, Myanmar, Thailand, Gandhara and all parts of ancient India came to these universities. Buddhist education is a combination of individual education and classroom education.

The curriculum was spiritual in nature. The goal of education was to achieve salvation or nirvana. The teaching method was mostly oral.

These were the following methods: -

- Verbal education
- Discussion
- Prominence of logic
- Tours
- Conference
- Meditation in solitude

Six Buddhist Universities of Ancient India

It is well known that with the rise of Buddhism in India, there was a golden age of Indian culture and civilization. All aspects of Indian civilization progressed under the influence of Buddhism. Many centers of learning have sprung up which did not exist before. Buddhist India had six major universities that achieved wide fame. These six were Nalanda, Vikramashila, Odantapuri, Jagaddala, Somapura and Vallabhi.

Nalanda University

Nalanda is the most famous ancient university in India and its ruins are preserved by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI). It is located in Bihar, the ancient land of Magadha. Magadha is known as the birthplace of Buddhism. Nalanda was a prosperous city at the time of Buddha. He visited there on a mission trip. Nalanda University was founded in the early 5th century in present-day Bihar by Shakra-ditya of the Gupta dynasty and flourished for 600 years until the 12th century.

Nalanda is the first university in the world to have residential areas for students and teachers. It also had a large public hall and three libraries. Students from countries like Korea, Japan, China, Tibet, Indonesia, Fars and Turkey came to study in this university. A clay emblem of Nalanda University is on display at the AST Museum in Nalanda. We received a comprehensive account of Nalanda University from the eminent Chinese scholar Hiun Tsang who came here for research during the reign of Harsha Shiladitya. He wrote the famous Buddhist travelogue of the western world "Ta Tang Si Yu Ki" in Chinese. Ai-Tsing (675-685) was also a Chinese monk who came to India and studied at Nalanda. At the time of Fahyeon's visit, it was a typical Buddhist monastery. Nalanda University occupied an area of 30 hectares. Nalanda was blessed with the presence of some of India's most eminent personalities. Among them were Nagarjuna, Aryadeva, Dharmapala, Silahadra and Kamalashila. Most of their works are available in Tibetan and Chinese translations. When the Muslim raiders led by Bakhtiar Khailiji set fire to Mahada Nalanda, the main population perished. On 19 November 1958, the President of India, Rajendra Prasad, inaugurated the Nava Nalanda Viharaya near the ancient university. The Chinese government donated 500,000 rupees to a mausoleum to house these relics. Muslims brought the idea of the university to the West, and subsequently, universities emerged in the Western world.

Vikramasila

Vikramasila University was founded by Dharmapala of the Pala dynasty in the late 8th century and was located in Florida. Vikramashila University was founded in the late 8th century by Pala's grandson, Dharmapala and flourished for 400 years until the 12th century. Vikramashila University is located in the present day Bhagalpur district of Bihar. Vikramashila University has given direct competition to Nalanda University with more than 100 teachers and more than 1000 students enrolled in this university. This university is known for its special studies in the subject of Tantra (Tantrism). One of the famous Vikramashila University graduates is Atisa Dipankara, the founder of the Sharma tradition of Tibetan Buddhism, which revived Buddhism in Tibet. The era of Dipankara Sri Gna was the golden age of Vikramashila.

Odantapuri

Odantapuri is considered to be the oldest university in India. It is located in Magada, 6 km from Nalanda. Acharya Sri Ganga of Vikramashila is found here. King Gopala (660-705) was the patron who helped establish this university. According to Tibetan records, Odantapuri had about 12,000 disciples. This university also perished in the hands of Muslim invaders.

Somapura

Somapura is located in East Pakistan. King Devapala (810-850 AD) is said to have built Dharmapala-Vihara in Somapura. The ruins of this building cover an area of about 1 square mile. There is a large gate and a high wall surrounding the building. In addition to the church and temple, there are about 177 cells for monks. Among the ruins is a common reflector and a kitchen. The remains of the three-story building are worth seeing. The university flourished for about 750 years before it was abandoned after the Muslim invasion.

Jagadala

King Ramapala (1077-1129) is said to be the founder of this university. Jagadala University is the largest construction project undertaken by Pala Kings. It is a center for the study and propagation of Tantric Buddhism. He followed the methods, practices and traditions of Nalanda. According to Tibetan works, Jagaddala translated many books into Tibetan. Buddhist teacher Sakya Sri Bhadra entered Jagaddal to study after seeing Nalanda, Vikramashila and Odantapuri in ruins after the Muslim invasion. His student Danaseela is said to have translated ten books into Tibetan. Sakya Sri Bhadra is responsible for the spread of Buddhism in Tibet. He lived in Jagaddal for seven years. In 1027 Muslim invaders fired and destroyed Jagaddala.

Vallbhi

Vallabhi University was established in Saurashtra, present day Gujarat, around the 6th century and flourished for 600 years till the 12th century. The Chinese traveler Iting, who visited this university in the 7th century, described it as a great center of learning. Two famous Buddhist scholars, Gunamati and Sthiramati, are said to have graduated from the university. This university became famous for its studies in secular subjects and students from all over the country came to study in this university. Graduates of this university are given high positions due to their high level of education.

Conclusion

Buddhist monasteries in ancient times and Buddhist universities in later periods played a major role in the development of Buddhist education. The teachers in these institutions were highly qualified and devoted to their duties. The main objective of Buddhist education was to create a free man, intelligent, wise, moral, talented, non-violent and secular man. Buddhist education makes man rational, humanistic, logical and free from superstition. Integrating Buddhist principles into the Indian educational framework provides profound opportunities for learners to develop and foster holistic wisdom. Emphasizing values such as compassion, consideration, and reciprocity, this approach not only improves academic performance, but also equips students with the ability to navigate the complexities of modern life with resilience and empathy. We will develop people who As we reflect on the rich tradition of Buddhism in India, we recognize its enduring relevance in shaping modern education. By fostering an environment that fosters critical thinking, ethical reasoning, and social responsibility, we prepare our students to become compassionate leaders and agents of positive change in their communities. As we move forward, it is imperative that we continue to explore innovative ways to incorporate Buddhist principles into educational curricula and ensure that Buddhist principles remain accessible and inclusive to learners of all backgrounds. By doing so, we honor the legacy of Buddhism in India and pave the way for a brighter and brighter future for generations to come.

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