

AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF THE PHILOSOPHY OF BUDDHISM AND ITS DEVELOPMENT AS A SYSTEM OF EDUCATION IN ANCIENT INDIA

DR. RAMJEE DUBEY

(Associate Professor, M.V. College of Educational, University of Delhi)

ABSTRACT

Mahatma Buddha was the founder of the philosophy of Buddhism. He was not happy with the things happening around him. Buddhist philosophy is based on the four basic truths discovered by lord Buddha himself. These four Arya Satya are:

1. Sufferings
2. Causes of Sufferings
3. Control over Sufferings
4. Methods to control Sufferings

Ash tangs or 8 noble paths are:

1. Right Knowledge
2. Right Resolution
3. Right Speech
4. Right Action or Conduct
5. Right Vocation
6. Right Efforts
7. Right Contemplation
8. Right Concentration

The Buddhist education system was divided into two categories i.e.

1. Primary Education
2. Higher Education

Three Oaths are corner-stone of the Buddhist Sangha:

1. To take refuge with the Buddha
2. To take refuge with the Dharma
3. To take refuge with the Sangha

KEYWORDS: Arya Satya, Monks, Ash tang Marg, Monastries, Pababja, Primary Education, Buddhism, Buddhist education, Buddhist Oaths, Higher Education

INTRODUCTION

The moment the idea of writing about Buddhist philosophy and its implications in the field of education came to my mind, I immediately thought to give it a literary colour. I recall a Hindi poem of subhadra kumari chauhan which is directly related to the philosophy of justice, peace and non-violence. The title of the poem is "Maa kah ek Kahani". It has been a tradition in our culture that grandmothers and mothers used to tell stories to small children to keep them quiet and calm and also to enculture them and transmit some valuable message to make them good human beings. The poem begins with the request of the young child Rahul to his mother to tell a story. The mother rejects the proposal and request of the child saying that I am not your Nani/Grandmother. She wants to get rid of him but the child is determined to listen to a story from his mother and he tells his mother that the maid says that you are daughter of Nani and so you are competent and able to tell a story. This poem is about a boy named Siddhartha. Let us turn towards the story which was told by the mother after a long debate. It has a direct bearing on the concept of peace, compassion and justice. I am not going to narrate the whole story here but the issue was regarding a swan which was wounded by the cousin of Siddhartha whose name was Devdutt. Devdutt claims that the swan was his property since he has hunted it. Siddhartha on the other hand claims the ownership of the swan on the ground that he is the saviour. But Devdutt was stubborn and he was not ready to give up his claim they both fought a long argumentative battle over the ownership of the swan and ultimately failed to decide which brought the issue to the court for the decision of the King. After hearing both the parties the king decided the case in favour of Siddhartha. He passed the judgement with remark that since he has saved the life of the swan it belongs to him as the saviour is greater than the person who has wounded it. The child whose name has been referred times and again as Siddhartha was none other than Lord Buddha. It clearly reflects that the philosophy of Buddhism which we study today was there in the mind of Gautama Buddha since his childhood which came out later on. He was no stranger to violence. He lived, as prince and sage through one of the most turbulent period in history of India. The expansionist tendencies of Magadha and Kaushala had claimed the smaller republics known as janapads. Every conquest was attended by massacre and often entire population were enslaved and resettled. That political climate was there during the period of Buddha. Among the Buddha contemporaries were the blood thirsty royal cousins Ajatshatru, Kaushal, Bandit Unglimaal and Devdutt, the Buddha's cousin who attempted to assassinate him. Despite provocations, however the Buddha never wavered in his insistence on Ahimsa.

PHILOSOPHY OF BUDDHISM

Mahatma Buddha was the founder of Buddhism. He was not happy with the things happening around him and ultimately left his kingdom to become a sage. I have already mentioned the Political rivalries amongst the republics but these were not the real cause of his turning towards becoming a saint. He saw and observed the sufferings through his own eyes in the public life i.e. old age, diseases, and death. These were the

sufferings which compelled him to search the solution to get rid of them. He discovered four basic truths (Arya Satya) which are core of Buddhist Philosophy. These are as follows:

1. **Suffering:** The first truth or Arya Satya is Suffering. Means the life is full of pain and agonies from birth to death.
2. **Causes of Sufferings:** The sufferings are not without causes. There is a reason behind each and every suffering i.e. Greed, Anger and Sorrow etc.
3. **Control over Sufferings:** These sufferings can be controlled by winning over our greed and anger.
4. **There are methods to control Sufferings:** Sufferings can be controlled and eradicated by keeping a control desires. There are 8 methods to control them known as Ashtangs.

ASH TANGS OR THE NOBLE 8 PATHS

Mahatma Buddha discovered these Eight paths to get rid of sufferings. If we truly follow these eight paths we will not fall into trouble and ultimately get emancipated. These eight paths are as follows:

1. **Right Knowledge:** The first path of getting rid of the suffering is to know the real reason of the suffering. Since this world is an Illusion, we do not know what is true or false. So if we want salvation or mukti from sufferings which are due to our desired. We will have to give them up.
2. **Right Resolution:** Right resolve or resolution is essential for eradication of evils from our life it means strong will and commitment towards our goal. We will have to refrain ourselves from the worldly pleasures.
3. **Right Speech:** Speech plays a vital role in our life it is very essential to be soft and moderate in our speech. We must speak right words. We should not speak a lie or say harsh words or abuse to anyone. Our speech should be pure and holy and not impure.
4. **Right Action or Conduct:** This is one of the most important and relevant path of making our life happy and pleasant. We should maintain individual and social ethics in our life by doing good to others and harming none. Good actions are the treasures of right habits which lead us to socially acceptable and praise worthy life.
5. **Right Vocation:** The way we work and earn our bread and butter in our life matters much more than anything else. While earning money our means should be right and the vocation we choose for our livelihood should be pious and holy. We should not adopt any wrong method or means to earn money. We should also be kind and compassionate to others.
6. **Right Efforts:** It is related to righteousness in our social life. We should not adopt go for any bad efforts to achieve our goals in life. The karmic theory of Hindu philosophy goes with this principle of Buddhism. We should always be positive in our thought and action. Spiritual peace and holiness is attain through this.
7. **Right contemplation:** In our philosophy the most desirable of all the means and ends of happiness or pleasure in contemplation. It has direct bearing on our peace of mind and contentment in life. Living our life with what little material means we have is the core of this philosophy. Once the great saint

Bulle Shah went to his guru and prayed him to show the path of attainment of god or the almighty. He smiled and said " turn your face from the mundane world and move towards the spirituality. it is the only way to obtain happiness and pleasure."

8. Right concentration: This is last but not the least marg to attain the highest of the Purusharth Chatushtya or moksh which is known as nirvana in Buddhist philosophy. When the individual acquires above mentioned seven means he automatically reaches the eighth one i.e the right concentration. It is ultimate marg of emancipation,salvation or moksh from this mundane world.

THE BUDDHIST EDUCATION SYSTEM

The Buddhist Education System is as follows:

1. Educational structure: Buddhist education was altogether different from the Vedic one. Their basic aim was spiritual which means attainment of nirvana. The students were called monks. They used to pursue their education in the monasteries popularly known as Vihars. The Buddhist education was divided into two categories i.e I) Primary education and II) Higher education.

I) Primary Education: During the Buddhist period primary education was spread all over the country but the vihar of today was full of monasteries and monks. The name of vihar is after those vihars of those days which were the centres of spiritual and educational attainment. The process of primary education can be discussed as under:

a) Pababja (Initiation to education): This was the method or the process of beginning of education in Buddhist education system. It was just like upnayan of the vedic education. It aims at presenting oneself to the sangh leaving behind the worldly things. Education was not caste based any individual can enter the sangh for pursuing study. The hair of the disciples or the monks were removed and they were to wear yellow clothes. After attaining the age of eight years pababja ceremony was performed and then the student was permitted to enter the math as a sermon. They used to take three oaths for paying obedience to system which were as under:

i) I take refuge with the Budhha. ii) I take refuge with the Dharma and iii) I take refuge with the sangh. After completion of the primary education upsampda was performed as a ceremony and the sermon was made to follow ten laws such as speaking truth, not to steal etc...

II) Higher Education: After the completion of primary education the sermon were admitted to the higher education. During the Buddhist period Indian society had undergone a great change in the field of education. Higher education as a concept was not alien to the monks. It was really meant for the monks and the teachers of Buddhist sect. There was a ceremony called upsampda when the students turned twelve then before starting higher education he was to undergo upsampda ritual. After upsamda ritual child becomes a complete monk and was not permitted to go back to his family. The basic difference between 'Pababja' and 'Upsampda' was that whereas pababja was performed to get initial entry into the system, upsampda was the final entry

into the sangh for the whole life. There is a fundamental difference between the Hindus and the Buddhist regarding the theory of the education. To quote Das-" The character of Buddhist education of which monastery was the centre will be evident from the fact that the Buddhism included in it the non recognition of the Vedas and of the Brahmin hierarchy as well as of the religious aspect of the caste system. Hence the Buddhist education was not based on Vedic study and its teachers were Brahmins, except those who had converted to Buddhism." Although, These two statements are diametrically opposite but one can say without any reservation that the Buddhist education began by destroying domestic lies. Education shifted from the home of teachers to the monastery, thus evolving into a monastic system. The system was not based on Vedic study and was open for all and not for only three high born castes. Education was imparted to those who entered the holy order and become monks.

To quote Basaham "Membership of the Buddhist order was not restricted by caste, but slaves, soldiers, debtors and others under obligation or in tutelage might not enter it without the permission of their superior. Novice might be admitted from the age of 8 upwards, but they would only qualify for full membership of the order after a long course of study, at the minimum age of 20. The right of admission were simple, involving putting on the three yellow or orange robes of order, ceremonially shaving the head and pronouncing the three jewels i.e. I go for refuge to the Buddha, I go for the refuge to the doctrine (Dharma), I go for refuge to the order (Sangha)"

"While the Buddhist monk resembled his Christian counterparts in his vows of chastity and poverty, he took no vow of obedience. Each novice or junior monk had his preceptors and was expected to treat him with great respect but he was essentially a free member of community of free men. There was no central authority to regulate the many monasteries and enforce uniformity, each was a law unto itself only by the precepts of master as it had received them and as it interpreted them. The constitution of the monastery had element of democracy about it. The chief monk or abbot was not appointed from above or nominated by his predecessors, but held office by the suffrage of all the monks in the monastic parish. The day to day business of the monastery was managed by a committee of elder monks and significant decisions such as the admission or the expulsion of members could only be made by the committee and not by the chief."

Thus it can be said that the Buddhist educational system in particular and order in general was more democratic in theory as well as in practice. There was no means to impose the command from above and thus it was liberal to a great deal.

"The daily life of the monk was chiefly spent in study and religious exercises, but he was expected to take his share in the work of monastery, cleaning his cell and sweeping the courtyard and the monastic buildings, while the elder monks devoted much of their time teaching the novices. Among the most important of the monks spiritual exercises were the four sublime mode in which sitting quietly, cross legged, he endeavoured to fill his mind with four cardinal virtue of Buddhism - Love, Pity, Joy and Serenity- and to consider all living beings in the light of these virtues."

Buddhism ethics and morality deserves special attention in this context, although their monology or science of ethics was inter-related with Buddhist order, they paid too much attention towards the development of human values through their scriptures and their actions. To put it into Basham's words- "Buddhism inculcates a high system of ethics. The noble eight fold paths, whereby a man attains nirvana, is not merely a matter of belief or knowledge, but also one of the conduct and the four cardinal virtues of Buddhism are more positive in character than the non-violence and abstinence of the Upanishads."

To sum up, it can be said in nutshell that the Buddhist order left a far reaching influence on the Indian cultural heritage. The term charity goodness, restrain and self-control would impact on the great emperors of that time like Ashoka who in response established free dispensaries for the common helpless and needy people. To quote the address of the Singla which is the culmination point of Buddhist morality regarding laymen. "Husband should respect their wives, and comply as far as possible with their requests. They should not commit adultery. They should give their wife full charge of the home, and supply them with fine clothes and jewellery as far as their means permit. Wife should be thorough in their duties, gentle and kind to whole household, chaste, careful in housekeeping and they should carry out this work with skill and enthusiasm."

Thus it can be said that in the Buddhist education system proper weightage was given on the relation of a man with his fellow beings, relation of a pupil with his teacher and relation of a husband with wife etc. It breathes a spirit of warm affection and fellowship, not raised to an exalted spiritual level but of an everyday practical type.

"Among the most important vehicles of Buddhist teachings are the JATAK stories. These are mostly of secular origin and many merely inculcate shrewdness and caution in everyday life. Others teach generosity and self-abnegation in morbidly exaggerated forms, for instance the tale of king sivi. But many of the Buddhist are the ethical quality, such as that of the monkey who saved the life of the fellows from the kings archers at the risk of his own by making himself a living bridge over Ganges."

Concluding it can be inferred that even though Buddhism as a religion lost its hold on the people, it made significant contributions in the development of education in India. During the Buddhist period, Education was not the monopoly of Brahmins. A desire for popular education was created by the system. In Buddhist educational centres people speak their mother tongue. Hence, education reach the masses to some extent. We are trying our best today to make the education universal by all means. It is only recently that the mother tongue has been accepted in schools as a medium of instructions.

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