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## THE BUDDHIST EDUCATION IN ANCIENT INDIA: AN ANALYSIS

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### Abstract

The Buddhist education in India was very old, long, and as well very complex. Buddhist education aims at a personality transformation into the highest form of humanity through ethical, intellectual, and spiritual perfection. The main focus of Buddhist education was to develop an overall personality of a human being. The arrival of Buddhism in India was around the sixth cent. Bc and that was the time when the people of India were dealing with the very hard supremacy of Brahmanical religion in India. People were fed up with the cruel system of Brahmanical system. People found Buddhist education very pure and there was no complication like the Brahmanical system. It's very simple and understood by the common people also. Therefore, Buddhist education is grounded on the primary psychological need of all living beings. Buddhism taught them very basic things and opposed religious sacrifices and all, which common people liked about it most. Education is seen or expected to shape the character of a society. Buddhist education develops in 6<sup>th</sup>-century bc and spread to India as well as all over the country. This paper attempts to discuss Buddhist teaching methods in ancient India. The paper also highlights the important role played by the Buddhist monasteries in the development of education in India.

**KEYWORDS:** Education, Buddhist Education, Women Education, Monasteries.

### INTRODUCTION:

The most important contribution of ancient India not only for India but also for the world is in the field of education. After all, it is education that develops a society. Education makes one's personality. In other words, it can be said that education is the means for developing the mind and for the betterment of the individual as well as society. Actually, before the arrival of Buddhism in India, the education system was limited up to certain levels. At that time only people of higher caste and class were subjected to the education system. But at the time of Buddhism whole thing was totally changed. Actually, before Buddhism, society was racially discriminated. And among whom Brahmins were considered to be dominating in the society. They thought their birthright for religious training and education. But another category of people was deprived of their religious and educational rights as they were not considered a part of society. It is to be said that on the arrival of Buddhism a new and special kind of Education System came into in ancient India. Buddhism made tremendous changes which played a valuable role in the development of the Education System in

ancient India. There was a new society totally free from discrimination. Now there was progress in every segment of society. Buddhist education was based on the teaching of Lord Buddha. These teachings were so important that they remained a source of inspiration for the individual as well as social development in India in the ancient time period as well as even today. As we all know the most effective way to convey the message of the Buddha to the world is the method of education. Through education, we can impart good knowledge to an individual. Buddha also adopted the method of education to propagate his teachings. The Buddha is known as the great teacher for both gods and men, as his method of education was so effective and meaningful, that the people almost from all over India became his followers within the forty-five years of his teaching career. It is only possible with the simple teachings of Buddhism which everybody liked about it.

### AIM OF BUDDHIST EDUCATION:

The chief aim of Buddhist education was the all-around development of individual personality. This included the physical, mental, moral, and intellectual development of individuals. The main aim of Buddhists education was to develop the character of persons. During this period, special emphasis was laid on the formation of the character of the students. Student life was hard and rigorous. Simply obtaining education for every class in ancient times was very difficult. There were many hard rules to acquiring an education. In the Buddhist era, religion was given top priority and education was imparted through it. The chief aim of education was the propagation of religion and inculcation of religious feelings among the people and education served as a means to achieve salvation or nirvana. Adopt Buddhism was more beneficial for people as it doesn't have so much of obligations and restrictions as compared to other religions. The emergence of Buddhism allowed people the freedom to obtain an education and to practice their religion themselves. The goal of Buddha's teaching or Buddhist education is to attain wisdom. The Buddha taught us that the main objective of our practice was to achieve this ultimate wisdom. The chief aim of Buddhist education was all-around development of a child's personality. The aim of Buddhist Education is to make a free man, a wise, intelligent, moral, non-violent & secular man. The most important aspect of Buddhist education was that it remained open to all persons irrespective of castes.

The very important thing about Buddhism was that it was open to all classes of people. There is no restriction and boundation. As it teaches very simple things. Buddhist Education was wide open and available to the people of all walks of life. The Buddhist education system is aimed at regaining our intrinsic nature. It also teaches absolute equality. This is very important in Buddhism religion as it doesn't discriminate against people. Buddha's teaching helps us to realize the perfect and ultimate wisdom. With wisdom, we can solve our all problems and turn it into happiness. In the Buddhist era, religion was given top priority and education was imparted through it.

### BUDDHIST EDUCATION AND ROLE OF DIFFERENT MONASTERIES:

As mentioned earlier that Buddhist education is aimed at purity of character. Maintaining character was the most important thing about Buddhism. It was training for moral character rather than the psychological development of the students. One has to attain the stage of Bodhisattva then true education is a must. Mental and moral development were key points of the Buddhism religion. Teachers use to give lectures on different required topics and students use to listen to them with attention. Attendance of every monk was compulsory in the sangha or in monasteries. The medium of Buddhist education was the common language of the people so that it could be easily understood by the common people. In fact, this is the main quality of Buddhism it doesn't force things on common people and preach them in their own common languages. The history of Buddhist education records its utmost development in India during the 4th to the 12th centuries AD. Basically not only in India, in fact, but it also makes remarkable growth in other abroad countries. Outside also, Buddhism gained a lot of popularity. Buddhist education includes all the basic things which should be there and should be known to common people.

Well, there are certain methods by which education is imparted to the people like-

- 1) *Oral teaching*- it is there at that time because there was nothing written source. That's why if we see the teachings of Lord Buddha then we found that most of the things that Buddha generally spoke. We hardly don't get anything in written materials, but yes later on his speeches were written by his disciples. But earlier there is nothing in writing.
- 2) *Performing Meditation* alone to concentrate on certain things. Some Buddhist monks were more interested in isolated spiritual meditation mainly in lonely forests and caves because they were the sources of lonely places.

3) *Educational Tours*: In ancient, the major of the Buddhist monks was to transmit Buddhism, so for this reason to propagate Buddhism in different countries the monks usually travel and give sermons to people. Hence some Acharyas like Sariputta, Mahayaggalva, Aniruddha, Rahula, etc. gave sermons to the people of different countries.

The Buddha first started his teaching career wandering from house to house, village to village, and street to street. Then he founded his centers of education in the different monasteries like in Rājagaha and many more monasteries. Earlier the different Viharas and monasteries were the centers of education during the Buddhist period. Besides monasteries, there was no other organization for imparting education. Merely the Buddhist could obtain religious and other types of education. And in that monasteries, monks lived also. There was a good relationship between the monks and their teachers. There were many disciples of the Buddha who were very eminent in different skills in the fields of Dhamma. The teaching of the Dhamma became a traditional heritage of the monks. Basically, the teacher and student were responsible to the monastery. Both were following the concept of “simple living and high thinking” principle. Their lives were full of purity, nobleness, and humanity.

In fact, they were very human to other people also. They follow Four Noble Truths- 1) Dukha. 2) dukha ka kaaran. 3) dukha ka nivanan. 4) moksha at last. The teacher used to bestow all the affection on his student. Bhikshus were the teacher. Buddhist viharas or monasteries have their own methods of Imitation and training for imparting knowledge.

Teachers were very much respected at that time. No doubt they hold a very important place in society and in the life of monks. There was a mutual understanding between the teacher and the pupil. Their relations were like father and son who had respect and love for each other. The teacher was regarded as the spiritual father or intellectual father of the student. During the Buddhist period, the position of the teacher was very important in the field of education. There were the categories of teachers like – Acharyas and Upadhyas who were respected in the society. Basically, Buddhist text includes various disciplines or subjects such as the Lokayata system, Astrology, the four Vedas and Vedangas, Astronomy, the philosophical system of Samkhya, Yoga, Nyaya, Music, Medicine, Magic, and a number of arts and crafts as well as Arithmetic. No doubt there were different intelligent monks in various fields. Usually, in this Buddhist education, the Viharas functioned as residential schools where various groups of students and teachers stayed together and had a very good relationship. Buddhist Education made certain revolutionary changes in society. The Buddhists in the world first made Education open to every individual in society. Well, students don't matter irrespective of any caste, creed, or religion got the opportunity to have an education which was denied by the superior class in the society. In India also, in Vedic Educational schools students from lower classes were refused to get admission. As this was not the case in Buddhist education, as it is open to all.

Well, the monasteries or Buddha Viharas were the chief centers of learning at that time and only the Buddhist monks could be admitted to them for education. Thus, the people, in general, received moral and religious education from the monks. The monasteries were the centers of education during the Buddhist period. Besides monasteries, there was no other organization for imparting education.

The universities of **Nalanda, Vikramshila, and Vallabhi** were perhaps the most important universities of ancient India. Nalanda University was an institution of higher studies situated in Bihar and was known for Buddhist studies, and mainly attracted students from abroad like China, Nepal, Tibet, and Korea, who went there to study valuable Buddhist manuscripts. It means that at that also these held a unique importance and even someone who takes education from these universities was considered highly great personality because taking admission in these universities was not an easy task. These universities hold a unique position as compared to other universities, and among all of these universities, Nalanda was the most ancient and valuable university. Nalanda University was a very huge university and more rooms for students and teachers, there are numbers of meditation halls, temples hall, and many more were the different unique things in this university. Nalanda's main importance comes from its Buddhist roots as a center of learning. Hieun Tsang, the famous pilgrim from China came here and studied here only, and later on, he taught here for 5 years in the 7<sup>th</sup> Century A.D. it is said that Nalanda University at that time had more than 10,000 students and nearly more than 3,000 teachers. There were great figures from any university which shows how many people from different places were eager to study at this university. Nalanda was one of the centers of scholarship also and Buddhist studies in the ancient world. Later on, in the 12th Century, the Muslim invader Bakhtiyar Khalji sacked the university.

Another university named, **Takshashila**, was also an early Buddhist center of learning and also hold a unique position in the list of universities. According to available references, it is dated back to at least the 5th century BC. Some historians dated Takshashila's existence back to the 6th century BC. Taxila was the capital of Gandhara and it was well known as a seat of learning and no doubt as usual people from all over the country went to Taxila to acquire knowledge. According to Jatakas, it is said that three Vedas and 18 arts were taught in that institution. Basically, great emphasis was put on the

practical aspects of the subjects. Taxila was also famous for teaching medicine, law, and military sciences. Takshashila is perhaps best known because of its association with Chanakya.

**Kashi** was another seat of learning of Buddhist literature in ancient times. It is just near Banaras. Later some time its teachers of kasha became famous and their schools attracted a large no. of students to acquire knowledge. So these universities were very famous on their own terms and had a great seat of learning as people from all over the world came here to learn and gain something and to become a renowned scholar as these universities deal with the different subjects.

These monasteries were educational-cum-religious centers in which the monks lead a very corporate life. These monasteries were the centers of ancient learning and religious training. In fact, they were highly famous abroad also because from the sources we come to know that the famous traveller like Hiuen- Tsang, Fahien, etc came to India with a thirst of knowledge and want to acquire education from these universities.

## WOMEN EDUCATION:

Women's education during the Buddhist period was at its lowest point, as the women folk were considered very backward in the Hindu society. Earlier in Buddhism also women were not allowed to enter the sangha. As Buddha thought that they will create disharmony in the sangha. Even Lord Buddha had regarded them as a source of all evils in society. So he had advised during his lifetime not to admit women in monasteries and Buddhist sangha also. Women's education during the Buddhist period was totally negligible. Hardly any attention was paid to them. But after some time due to the insistence of his dear pupil Anand, Buddha had allowable about 500 women along with his stepmother for admission in viharas with many restrictions and conditions. So somehow, they got admission to enter the sangha to impart education. As they had to follow all the rules like the monks. and later on, Lord Buddha was so surprised to see the dedication of women towards acquiring education. In fact from sources, a large number of ladies from this sangha became life-long students of religion and philosophy. Rules and regulations were almost the same for the monks and nuns in the sangha. Both were placed under more discipline. In fact, we have some great intellectual nuns in Buddhism. For example, Gopa, Mahaprajapati Gautami, Supriya, Patanchara, Amrapali, Sanghamitra, Kisa Gotami and many more. They all are highly qualified in their different areas. The women monks were not allowed to meet any male monk in loneliness in fact their residence was arranged separately at a distant place. As mentioned earlier rules and regulations were very hard in these monasteries. Some monk could give her religious instruction twice a month in the presence of another monk. There was no discrimination in the system to acquire knowledge. Monks and nuns were free to acquire higher education. Buddhist Sangha had given attention to the cultural development and social uplift of the women. Most of the women actually joined this sangha in order to get rid of the social evils which were going on them. Some had also joined it to get rid of the troubles of worldly affairs. Though Buddhist literature does not speak much of the system of the education of Bhikshunis, there are some references to newcomer Bhikshunis and taking charge of their education. It makes clear that there must have been some arrangement for their education. There were Bhikshunis whose spiritual knowledge was very high and they could influence a good number of people. Many Bhikshunis took the duties of social services also. As the name mentioned earlier of some nuns, did a lot for the propagation of Buddhism and had respect in the ancient society. In fact they were a remarkable service in the subject of Buddhism and were highly remarkable.

## CONCLUSION:

In the ancient period Buddhist Monasteries and in the later period which became Buddhist Universities played important role in imparting Buddhist Education. Undoubtedly, in the institutions teachers were highly qualified and sincere towards their duties and also were more focused on their goals. The main aim of Buddhist Education is to make a free man, an intelligent man, a wise, moral, talented, non-violent, and secular man in the society as there should be no religious boundation on them. Buddhist Education makes man, humanist, logical, and free from superstitions. It is a matter of great pride that Buddhist Education crossed Indian Sub-continent and expanded up to China, Korea, Japan, Tibet, Mongolia, Srilanka, Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodian, Laos, Vietnam, Malaysia, Singapore, and also there were a large numbers of followers of Buddhism which could be hardly seen as in other religion. Women education also made sufficient growth in Buddhism as being women there were no discrimination against as they were free to acquire higher education and were allowed to live in the monasteries. As it can be said that Education was free and universal in the case of buddhsim as it opened a concept of education and its importance in life.



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