

Buddhist Education and Knowledge System to the Social Development

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Abstract:- Gautam the Buddha was a great spiritual teacher. It can be argued that no other great social reformer in history has ever been born. Before his appearance, the state and society were governed by the Manusmriti, which dates back to the before Vedic era. He was born in a royal family of Kapilavastu, while enjoying royal pleasure, coincidentally when he observed the various hardships of human life, many questions arose in his mind. He was curious about the reasons behind death, suffering, pain, and loss in society as well as how to overcome them. However, he was not satisfied with the answers that he had found from the contemporary scriptures and the knowledge. One day he went out in search of the right answers to those questions which had arisen in his mind. Eventually, he realised the truth which he was searching for and he shared the truth for the welfare of human society. A new path in human society was found by the knowledge and education of Buddha. Buddhist education is an innovative educational approach that examines each person's potential. Buddhism teaches or trains the body, speech, and mind; in other words, it is a means of purifying the suffering that drives a person to engage in these activities. Buddhist teaching (*vidyā*) is divided into two sections: Mukhya (*mahā*) *Vidyā* and Gauṇa (minor) *Vidyā*. Each of them has five divisions. The five Mahāvidyās are philosophy, logic, art, medicine, and grammar. Conversely, the five Gauṇavidyās are astrology, poetry, lexicography, dramaturgy, and semantics. Mahāyāna maintains that the Buddhavacana both directly and indirectly incorporates these *vidyās*, despite the fact that this is debatable. During the golden period of Buddhism, numerous educational institutions, including Nalanda, Vikramaśīla, Taxila, Jagaddala, Vallabhi, Odantapuri, and Somapura, were founded to disseminate this knowledge and offer a wide range of reading materials.

Keywords:- Buddhist Education, Knowledge, System, Social Development.

I. INTRODUCTION

Through the exploration of Gautama Buddha's boundless knowledge, he came to understand that as there is suffering in life, so there are ways to alleviate suffering. He had sacrificed his royal life and kingdom and came to the human society to show the way of liberation from this suffering of life. He committed to liberating humankind from the darkness of ignorance by building up devotees and Buddhist friary. On one hand, his four Noble Truths and

Eightfold path had given him a new and unique recognition on the other hand his flow of knowledge and his philosophy was being promoted and disseminated by his followers from king to poor common people. There were institutional efforts for shining the light of knowledge; on the other side followers were continuously spreading their knowledge, educational philosophy and liberty of thought. At that time the Buddha gradually became popular for the propagation of the concept of non-violence, compassion and free practice of knowledge.

Regardless of caste and race, all had the opportunity of getting an education in that institution which was established by the followers of Buddha and Buddhist friary. Buddhist friary and monks established educational institutions one by one in different areas of the world. Buddhist education is a unique system of learning rooted in the teachings of the Buddha, emphasizing moral, intellectual, and spiritual development. It is deeply intertwined with ethical conduct, mental cultivation, and the pursuit of wisdom, aiming to nurture individuals who contribute positively to society. Unlike conventional education systems, which often emphasize material and professional success, Buddhist education focuses on inner transformation and the cultivation of values such as compassion, mindfulness, and equanimity. Buddhist teaching (*vidyā*) is divided into two sections: Mukhya (*mahā*) *Vidyā* and Gauṇa (minor) *Vidyā*. Each of them has five portions. The five Mahāvidyās are: philosophy, logic, art, medicine, and grammar. Conversely, the five Gauṇavidyās are: astrology, poetry, lexicography, dramaturgy, and semantics. The knowledge system of Buddhism—encompassing philosophy, logic, medicine, grammar, and the arts—has historically played a pivotal role in shaping social development. From the establishment of ancient monastic universities like Nalanda, Vikramaśīla to the dissemination of its ideals across Asia and beyond, Buddhist education has promoted intellectual inquiry, cultural exchange, and ethical governance. It was a great example of the development of knowledge which was found in Buddha and his educational institutions.

➤ Objective:

To find out Buddhist Education and Knowledge System for the Social Development.

II. METHODOLOGY

The researcher followed a historical and Philosophical approach to research. The researcher has collected information from various books and the biography of Gautam Buddha.

III. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The goal of Buddhist education is to gain wisdom. In Sanskrit, the language of ancient India, the Buddhist wisdom was called *Anuttara-Samyak-Śambhod* meaning the perfect ultimate wisdom. The Buddha taught us that the main objective of our practice was to achieve this ultimate wisdom. The chief aim of Buddhist education is the round development of a child's personality. This includes his physical, mental, moral and intellectual development. The other aim of Buddhist Education is to make a free man, a wise, intelligent, moral, non-violent & secular man.

Buddhist Education was wide open and available to people from all walks of life. The system of Buddhist education aimed at regaining our intrinsic nature. It also teaches absolute equality which stemmed from Buddha's recognition that all sentient beings possess this innate wisdom and nature. Buddha's teaching helps us to realize that innate, perfect, ultimate wisdom. With wisdom, we can then solve all our problems and turn suffering into happiness.

During the period of Buddhist king in India, 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 and education served as a means to achieve liberation or Nirvāṇa. Preparation for life, there was a provision for imparting worldly and practical knowledge along with religious education so that when the students entered normal life they may be able to earn their livelihood.

In the early period, Buddhist Education was limited within the monasteries and only for the members of the monastery. But later on, it was open to all; even lay people got the scope to have an education in those institutions. In modern days Buddhist Education has become wide open and embraced people from all walks of life. Buddhist Education made a revolutionary change in the society. The Buddhists in the world first made Education open to all.

The Core of Buddha's teaching contains three major points i.e. discipline, meditation and wisdom. Wisdom is the goal and deep meditation or concentration in the crucial process toward achieving wisdom. Discipline through observing the precepts, is the method that helps one to achieve deep meditation; wisdom will then be realized naturally. Buddha's entire teaching as conveyed in the sutras never really departs from these three points.

The Buddhist Education system developed based on some basic principles. This education emphasised moral, mental and physical development and also to divert the students towards the Saṃgha rules and guide them to follow them. The main stress was given to have a clear idea of Tripiṭaka which consists of Sutra Piṭaka, Vinaya Piṭaka and Abhidharma Piṭaka. The entire Tripiṭaka consists of Buddha's teachings, message, philosophy and rules for the Bhikkhus and Bhikkhunis. The curriculum was chiefly spiritual. It was because the chief aim of education was to attain liberation.

So, the study of the religious books was most important. This type of curriculum was meant only for the monks

Buddhist education, deeply rooted in the teachings of the Buddha, is a transformative system that seeks to harmonize intellectual, ethical, and spiritual development. This holistic approach to learning not only aims to cultivate wisdom and moral integrity but also equips individuals with practical skills to contribute meaningfully to society. Central to this educational tradition are the **Five Major and Five Minor Fields of Study**, a comprehensive framework encompassing diverse areas of knowledge essential for a well-rounded education. The five majors are: philosophy, logic, art, medicine, and grammar. Conversely, the five minors are astrology, poetry, lexicography, dramaturgy, and semantics. Together, these ten fields reflect the breadth and depth of Buddhist educational philosophy, integrating theoretical knowledge with practical expertise.

IV. FIVE MAJOR FIELDS OF STUDY

➤ *Philosophy (Inner Science):*

Inner science, or the study of the mind and consciousness, is the cornerstone of Buddhist education. This field focuses on understanding the nature of reality, the workings of the mind, and the path to liberation. Meditation practices, ethical discipline, and the cultivation of wisdom are central to this discipline.

Through the study of inner science, practitioners explore profound concepts such as impermanence (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*), and non-self (*anattā*). The goal is to achieve a direct realization of these truths, leading to the cessation of suffering and the attainment of Nirvana. Inner science integrates theoretical knowledge with experiential practices, making it the most transformative field of Buddhist education.

➤ *Logic (Hetuvidyā):*

Logic is an indispensable discipline in Buddhist education, primarily used to refine reasoning and critical thinking. This field helps scholars develop the ability to discern valid arguments from fallacious ones, ensuring that their understanding of the Dharma is grounded in rational inquiry.

Buddhist logic, as expounded by thinkers like Nāgārjuna and Dharmakīrti, is deeply philosophical and serves as a tool to dismantle misconceptions about reality. Through the study of logic, students learn to question dogmas, engage in intellectual debates, and strengthen their meditative insights.

➤ *Arts and Crafts (Śilpavidyā):*

The study of arts and crafts is a unique aspect of Buddhist education, showcasing its holistic approach to learning. This field includes architecture, painting, sculpture, music, and other creative endeavors. Arts and crafts serve as mediums for expressing spiritual ideas and enhancing the aesthetic appreciation of the Dharma.

The development of Buddhist stupas, monasteries, and intricate mandalas reflects the profound influence of this field. These artistic creations are not only visually appealing but also imbued with deep symbolic meanings, making them essential tools for meditation and contemplation.

➤ *Medicine (Cikitsāvidyā):*

The inclusion of medicine in Buddhist education highlights the tradition's concern for the physical and mental well-being of all beings. Buddhist medicine is deeply intertwined with compassion, emphasizing holistic healing and the interdependence of mind and body.

Buddhist medical teachings, such as those found in the **Bhaiṣajyaguru Sūtra** (Medicine Buddha Sutra), provide guidance on the prevention and treatment of illnesses. Practitioners are trained to diagnose ailments and prescribe remedies based on principles like the balance of the three humors: wind, bile, and phlegm. This field demonstrates the altruistic application of knowledge to alleviate suffering, a core tenet of Buddhism.

➤ *Language and Grammar (Śabdavidyā):*

Language plays a pivotal role in the transmission of Buddhist teachings. The study of language and grammar ensures that the sacred texts, such as the Tripitaka, are accurately preserved and interpreted. In ancient times, scholars studied Pali, Sanskrit, and local dialects to articulate and disseminate the teachings effectively.

Buddhist education emphasizes linguistic skills not only for the comprehension of scriptures but also for engaging in debates and discussions. Correct understanding of grammar and semantics enables practitioners to avoid misinterpretations, ensuring that the teachings maintain their authenticity and relevance across generations.

These field of studies were primarily taught in monastic institutions and renowned centers of learning in ancient India. Prominent among these were Nalanda, Vikramaśīla, and Taxila, which became hubs for the dissemination of knowledge. Nalanda, for instance, was renowned for its comprehensive curriculum, where scholars from various parts of Asia studied these disciplines alongside Buddhist doctrines. These institutions served as not only spiritual centers but also as universities where subjects like medicine and logic were explored in depth. The monks, who were both teachers and students, played a crucial role in preserving and advancing these fields of knowledge. This integrative educational approach allowed the Buddhist tradition to thrive and significantly contribute to broader intellectual and cultural developments in Asia.

At the initial stage medium of education was the mother tongue, later it included Pali and Prakrit and in the following days Sanskrit was also included as a medium of instruction. Especially the Mahāyāna Teachers achieved distinction in practising Buddhism in Sanskrit. A special Sanskrit Buddhist literature developed. Mention may be made here that at the hands of Nāgārjuna, Asaṅga, Vasubandhu, Śāntideva, Āryadeva and Candrakīrti Buddhist philosophy and literature

made tremendous progress through Sanskrit. In the later period according to the demand of society and professional education, art, sculpture, architecture, and medicine were also included in the syllabus. Buddhist Education came out from the religious arena and went out for the benefit of mankind.

V. CONCLUSION

In the ancient period Buddhist Monasteries and the later period Buddhist Universities played a major role in developing Buddhist Education. The main aim of Buddhist Education is to make a free man, an intelligent man, a wise, moral, talented, non-violent and secular man. Buddhist Education makes man judicious, humanist, logical and free from superstitions.

It is a matter of great pride that Buddhist Education crossed the Indian Sub-continent and expanded up to Sri Lanka, China, Korea, Japan, Tibet, Mongolia, Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodian, Laos, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Singapore, with the rise and development of Buddhism in those countries. In those countries, Buddhist Education has made tremendous progress with the inclusion of modern subjects in the syllabus.

Our discussion will focus on the contemporary Buddhist education system, social system, human psychology and other related issues. The contribution of Buddha made human beings through knowledge and education fly wandering the whole world as a flying bird.

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