



# Role of Buddhism in the Development of Indian Education

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## ABSTRACT

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In India during the time of Buddha, there was a racial discrimination in the society. This discrimination was according to profession of man and according to birth. In the society there were four divisions of whom Brahman was superior. They enjoyed rights for religious training and education. But other category of people deprived of their religious and educational rights.

It should be observed that it is “the life of holiness” which Buddhism emphasizes much more than the philosophy of life, speculations concerning the mysteries of life and death and such ultimate truths. The entire system of Buddhist education must be rooted in faith (saddhā)— faith in the Triple Gem, and above all in the Buddha as the fully enlightened One, the peerless teacher and supreme guide to right living and right understanding. Based on this faith, the students must be inspired to become accomplished in virtue (sīla) by following the moral guidelines spelled out by the Five Precepts. Students should come to appreciate the positive virtues these precepts represent: kindness, honesty, purity, truthfulness, and mental sobriety. They must also acquire the spirit of generosity and self-sacrifice (cāga), so essential for overcoming selfishness, greed, and the narrow focus on self-advancement that dominates in present-day society.

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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 the mass, even lay people got scope to have education in those institutions. In modern days Buddhist Education became wide open and embraced people of all walks of life. The aim of Buddhist Education is to change an unwise to wise, beast hood to Buddha hood.

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**Keywords:** Triple gem, Five precepts, Monasteries, Enlightened, Buddha hood.

The most important contribution of ancient India not only for India but also for the world is in the field of education. It may also be remembered that education is not an abstract term. It is manifested in the cultural economic, individual, philosophical, scientific, social and spiritual advancement. In other words, education is the means for developing the mind for the betterment of the individual and society. Seen from this perspective, the following views of great scholars and thinkers deserve mention.

**Albert Einstein:**

*"We owe a lot to the Indians who taught us how to count without which no worthwhile scientific discovery could have made."*

**Mark Twain, an American Writer:**

*"India is the cradle of the human race. Most valuable and the most instructive materials in the history of man are treasured up in India only."*

**Lancelot Hagen, in his publication Mathematics for the Millions:**

*"There has been no more revolutionary contribution than the one which the Hindus made when they invented zero".*

In India during the time of Buddha, there was a racial discrimination in the society. This discrimination was according to profession of man, and according to birth. In the society there were four division of the society of whom Brahman was superior. Brahmanism dominated the society and established their supremacy in the country. They enjoyed rights for religious training and education. But other category of people deprived of their religious and educational rights. At that time there were 62 heretical doctrines in existence and priesthood got upper hand. In this background a religious revolution started in ancient India in 600 B.C. and a new doctrine or system developed which is called Buddhist doctrine or Buddhist philosophy. It is to be said that on the foundation of Buddhism a new and special Education System originated in ancient India. Buddhism made a tremendous movement which played a valuable role in the development of Education System in ancient India or ancient Buddhist world. It is well-known that with the rise of Buddhism in India there dawned the golden age of India's culture and civilisation. There was progress in all aspects of Indian civilisation under the impact of Buddhism. There arose many centres of learning which did not exist before.

**Buddhist Education Purely Monastic**

The history of the Buddhist system of education is practically that of the Buddhist order or *samgha*. Buddhist education and learning centred around monasteries as vedic culture centred

round the sacrifice. The Buddhist world did not offer any educational opportunities apart from or independently of its monasteries. All education, sacred as well as secular, was in the hands of the monks. They had the monopoly of learning and the leisure to impart it. They were the only custodians and bearers of the Buddhist culture.

### **Its Rules**

The rules of Buddhist education re those of the Buddhist order. The ceremony of *initiation* into the Buddhist order follows closely the lines of the Brahmanical initiation of studentship. The Bodhisattva himself is represented by in tradition to say to *uddaka*, the Brahman teacher whom he approached for instruction in attaining knowledge: "I desire, O friend, according to thy teaching and thy direction to walk into *Brahmcharya*". As the Buddha he inaugurates his order by admitting his first disciples in the following words: "Come hither, O monk, the doctrine is duly preached; walk in the brahmcharya to put an end to all sorrows." Thus the Buddhist monastic order began as a union of the master and his disciples. This process is called as *Upasampada* or ordination. The teacher of the disciple is called as *Upadhyaya*.

The layman under twenty years of age seeking admission in the monastery or *vihara* of his choice approaches there with a suit of yellow robes of the monks in his hands and presents himself before an elder of the monastery for the first initiation called as *pabbajja*. *Upasampada* is the higher ordination that can be attained only after reaching the age of twenty while *pabbajja* is the lower ordination where a monk leaves his home towards the *vihara* generally after attaining his puberty. A monk is known as a *bhikku*. The next step is – the elder then invests him with the yellow robe and calls upon him to take the following oath of three refugees (*saranattaya*) three times:

*"Buddham sharnam gacchami  
Dhammam sharnam gachhami  
Sangham sharnam gachhami"*

Next, the following ten commandments are administered to him (*dsasikkapadani*): *abstinence from*:

1. Taking life
2. Taking what is not given
3. Impure practices
4. Telling a lie
5. Intoxicating drinks
6. Eating out of time
7. Dancing, singing and seeing shows

8. Using garlands, scents, ornaments and finery
9. Using of high or large couch or seat
10. Receiving gold or silver

The ceremony is over and the novice is committed to the care of his elder or preceptor who brings him up till he is fit for the higher ordination.

## BUDDHIST CONCEPTS

### Samsāra

Within Buddhism, samsara is defined as the continual repetitive cycle of birth and death that arises from ordinary beings' grasping and fixating on a self and experiences. Specifically, samsara refers to the process of cycling through one rebirth after another within the six realms of existence, where each realm can be understood as physical realm or a psychological state characterized by a particular type of suffering. Samsara arises out of *avidya* (ignorance) and is characterized by *dukkha* (suffering, anxiety, dissatisfaction). In the Buddhist view, liberation from samsara is possible by following the Buddhist path.

### Karma

In Buddhism, Karma is the force that drives samsāra—the cycle of suffering and rebirth for each being. Good, skillful deeds (Pali: “kusala”) and bad, unskillful (Pāli: “akusala”) actions produce “seeds” in the mind that come to fruition either in this life or in a subsequent rebirth. The avoidance of unwholesome actions and the cultivation of positive actions is called *sīla*. Karma specifically refers to those actions of body, speech or mind that spring from mental intent (*cetana*), and bring about a consequence or *phala* “fruit” or *vipāka* “result”.

### Rebirth

Rebirth refers to a process whereby beings go through a succession of lifetimes as one of many possible forms of sentient life, each running from conception to death. The doctrine of *anattā* (Sanskrit *anātman*) rejects the concepts of a permanent self or an unchanging, eternal soul, as it is called in Hinduism and Christianity. According to Buddhism there ultimately is no such thing as a self independent from the rest of the universe. Buddhists also refer to themselves as the believers of the *anatta* doctrine—*Nairatmyavadin* or *Anattavadin*. Rebirth in subsequent existences must be understood as the continuation of a dynamic, ever-changing process of *pratītyasamutpāda* (“dependent arising”) determined by the laws of cause and effect (*karma*) rather than that of one being, reincarnating from one existence to the next.

## SUFFERINGS, CAUSES AND SOLUTIONS

### The Four Noble Truths

The teachings on the Four Noble Truths are regarded as central to the teachings of Buddhism, and are said to provide a conceptual framework for Buddhist thought. These four truths explain the nature of *dukkha* (suffering, anxiety, unsatisfactoriness), its causes, and how it can be overcome. The four truths are:

1. The truth of *dukkha* (suffering, anxiety, unsatisfactoriness)
2. The truth of the origin of *dukkha*
3. The truth of the cessation of *dukkha*
4. The truth of the path leading to the cessation of *dukkha*

### Noble Eightfold Path

The Noble Eightfold Path—the fourth of the Buddha’s Noble Truths—consists of a set of eight interconnected factors or conditions, that when developed together, lead to the cessation of *dukkha*. These eight factors are: Right View (or Right Understanding), Right Intention (or Right Thought), Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration.

### Aims of education

The goal of Buddha’s teaching—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 chief aim of Buddhist education was all round development of child’s personality. This included his physical, mental, moral and intellectual development. The aim of Buddhist Education is to make a free man, a wise, intelligent, moral, non-violent & secular man. Students became judicious, humanist, logical and free from superstitious. Students became free from greed, lust and ignorance. Buddhist Education was wide open and available to the people of all walks of life. The principal goal of the Buddhist Education is to change an unwise to wise, beast to priest.

### The nature of mass education

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 scope to have education in those institutions. In modern days Buddhist Education became wide open and embraced people of all walks of life. Buddhist Education made revolutionary change in the

society. The Buddhists in the world first made education open to all. Students irrespective of caste, creed, religion got opportunity to have 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.

### **Women education**

Women education during Buddhist period was at its lowest ebb, as the women folk were despised in the sense that Lord Buddha had regarded them as the source of all evils. So he had advised during his life time not to admit women in monasteries but after some time due to the insistence of his dear pupil Anand, Buddha had permitted about 500 women along with his step mother for admission in the Vihars with many restriction and reservations. When Buddhist monasteries had developed into colleges of international reputation, women did not receive any education because of their early marriages. In the early history of Buddhism, however the permission was given to women to enter the order and gave a fairly good impetus to female education, especially in aristocratic and commercial sections of society. Large number of ladies from these circles joined the order and became life-long students of religion and philosophy.

### **Qualities and Responsibilities of the teacher**

The teacher himself must spend at least ten years as a monk and necessarily must have the purity of character, purity of thoughts and generosity. Both the teacher and student were responsible to the monastery. But regarding education, clothes, food and residence of the student monk, the teacher was fully responsible. The teacher was also responsible for any treatment of the student whenever he fell ill.

The duties of the teachers were imparting education to the students, writing Book, propagation of religion, discussion, and arrangement of debate for the clarification of serious subjects. The teachers were responsible for physical, mental, spiritual and moral development of the students. Teachers loved the students and helped them in every affair. They also took care of them during their diseases and agony. The teachers were responsible for their food, accommodation and other necessities of livelihood. They kept eyes on the all round development of the students. Specially they were serious about the obeying of the Sangha rules, meditation and concentration to their learning.

### **Concept of Student**

The teachers were highly qualified. Students became judicious, humanist, logical and free from superstitious. Students became free from greed, lust and ignorance.

The student was expected to serve his teacher with all devotion. On rising in the morning the student will arrange everything for the daily routine of the teacher. He will cook his food and clean his clothes and utensils. Whatever he acquired through begging alms, he would place before teacher. The student had to prepare himself to receive education at any time whenever the teacher required him.

### **Discipline**

The Core of Buddha's teaching-the Buddha teaching contains three major points 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 depart from these three points.

After getting education in the Buddhist schools, colleges and universities one cannot do any injustice, tell a lie, commit theft, cannot kill, cannot be addicted in wine and make himself free from moral turpitude. In this way students become free from greed, lust, enmity and ignorance. They followed eight fold path vigorously.

### **Curriculum**

Buddhist Education system developed on the basis of some basic principles. This education gave emphasis on the moral, mental and physical development and also to divert the students towards the Sangha rules and guide them to follow it. The main stress was given to have a clear idea of Tripitaka which consists of Sutta Pitaka, Binoy Pitaka and Abhidhamma Pitaka. The entire Tripitaka consists of Buddhas teachings, message, philosophy and rules for the Bhikkhus and Bhikkhunies. The curriculum was chiefly spiritual in nature. It was because the chief aim of education was to attain salvation. So the study of the religious books was most important. This type of curriculum was meant only for the monks. Besides these spinning, weaving, printing of the clothes, tailoring, sketching, accountancy, medicines, surgery and coinage were the other subjects of Buddhist education. At the initial stage medium of education was mother tongue, later it included Pali and Prakrit and in the following days Sanskrit also included as a medium of instruction. In later period, according to the demand of the society and professional education, art, sculpture, architecture, medicine also included in the syllabus. Buddhist Education came out from the religious arena and went out for the benefit of the mankind.

There were two types of education primary and higher education. In primary education reading, writing and arithmetic were taught and in higher education religion philosophy

Ayurveda, military training was included. Everyone was free to choose his subject without any restriction.

Vocational education was not ignored during the Buddhist System of education. The monks of Vihar were taught spinning, weaving and sewing in order that they meet their clothing requirement. They were taught architecture as well. Education in architecture enabled them to build up new Vihars or repair the old ones. Similarly the householders following Buddhism but living outside Vihar were given training in different type of and also earn their livelihood. It is to be mentioned that Buddhist Educational Syllabus included Vedic subjects also. In this way difference of Buddhist & Vedic Education wiped out and united. This was a historic development in the history of Education in India.

### **Merits of Buddhist Education**

1. Well organized centres- Buddhist education was imparted in well organized centres, monasteries and Vihara which were fit places for the purpose.
2. Cosmopolitan-Buddhist education was free from communal narrowness.
3. Simple and austere-Bhikshus led a life of austerity and simplicity.<sup>36</sup>
4. Total development- Buddhist education laid much emphasis on the physical mental and spiritual development of the students.
5. Disciplined Life- both the teachers and students led disciplined life.
6. Ideal student teacher relationship.
7. International importance- Buddhist education helped to gain international importance it also developed cultural exchange between India and other countries of the world.

### **Demerits of Buddhist Education**

1. Buddhist education could not give the proper attention to the occupational, industrial and technical education.
2. It gave severe blow to the social development because it derided family ties. Leaving their family life Buddha Bhikshus devoted their whole lives to sangh and Buddhism.

### **Role of Buddhism in the Development of Indian Education**

- ❖ With the rise of Buddhism in India, there arose many centres of learning which did not exist before. Buddhist monks could opt for a life of meditation in the forests, or a life of teaching, preaching, propagating the Dharma as a result of the activities of the teaching monks, seats of learning arose. These seats of monastic learning (Pirivenas) gradually developed and some of them became full-fledged universities. As a result Buddhist

India came to have five major universities which achieved wide fame. These five were 1. Nalanda, 2. Vikramasila, 3. Odantapuri, 4. Jagadalala and 5. Somapur.

- ❖ The Buddha's teachings on ethics and living a good life also extended to the realm of the social and political. He was ahead of his time in many ways; considering all people as equal, he rejected the caste system and did not completely discourage the women education. He taught that governments have the responsibility to lead by example to teach people ethics and to eliminate poverty by providing opportunities for the people to become prosperous.
- ❖ As mentioned above, the Buddhist Education did not completely discontinue the vedic education. The main essence of Buddhist education was based on vedic education where spirituality was the main focus. With this the difference between vedic education and Buddhist education was wiped out and this was the historic development of education in India.

## CONCLUSION

So the Buddhist education played a major role in the development of Indian Education. It was Buddhism which for the first time broke the dominance of Brahmanism which was prevalent in the society at that time. Buddhism brought all the other castes to the main stream to attain education equally with Brahmans, thus attempted in breaking the tough clutch of caste system prevalent in India. They also did not completely discourage the education of women. They admitted bhikkunis in their viharas and thus brought women out of their house to get education and worked for their upliftment. Moreover it was Buddhism that worked on to construct world class universities to develop and spread education as well as propagated their religion with its help. India became a centre of learning for the foreign students as well owing to the high quality of these universities. Buddhism also made a balance with the Vedic education as it did not completely outclass it and hence it made a sweet relation between Hinduism and Buddhism.

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