

BUDDHIST EDUCATION SYSTEM AND ITS PEDAGOGIES

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Abstract

The Buddhist education system, which emerged in India during the 6th century BCE, represents one of the most influential educational traditions in human history. Developed as an alternative to the rigid and exclusive Brahmanical system, it promoted equality, moral development, wisdom, and spiritual enlightenment. This study aims to explore the pedagogical foundations of the Buddhist education system and examine its relevance to contemporary education. Employing the historical method, the study relies on secondary sources such as books, journal articles, and scholarly literature.

The findings reveal that Buddhist education was imparted mainly through monasteries (Viharas) and renowned institutions such as Nalanda, Vikramashila, and Takshashila. Its curriculum integrated both religious and secular subjects, including philosophy, logic, languages, mathematics, astronomy, meditation, and moral training. The system emphasized learner-centered pedagogies such as lectures, discussions, debates, question-answer methods, observation, memorization, and meditation. Strong disciplinary practices, close teacher-student relationships, and character formation were integral components of the educational process.

The study further highlights the continuing relevance of Buddhist educational principles in modern education. Values such as ethical conduct, holistic personality development, equality in education, critical thinking, mindfulness, and environmental consciousness align closely with contemporary educational goals. The paper concludes that the integration of Buddhist educational ideals can contribute significantly to the development of a balanced, inclusive, and value-oriented education system capable of addressing present-day educational challenges.

Keywords: Buddhist Education, Pedagogy, Holistic Development, Moral Education, Mindfulness, Ancient Indian Education, Teacher-Student Relationship.

Introduction

The Buddhist education system is one of the oldest education systems in India. This education system came in its existence against the supremacy of Brahmanism. In ancient India only the upper caste people i.e. Brahman was only entitled to enjoy the privileges of education. It was developed to help people in gaining knowledge, inculcating values, discipline and wisdom. It also helped disciples forming good character and understanding life better. Its scope not only limited to the India but across the many Asian countries also.

Objectives of the Study

The following objectives have been formulated for the present study

Objective I: To understand the pedagogies of Buddhist education system.

Objective II: To understand the implication of Buddhist education in the present-day education system.

Significance of the study

The Buddhist system of education in India mostly emphasized on a holistic approach in learning which led to integrate both the spiritual and practical aspects of life. It focuses on attaining ultimate wisdom and nirvana (salvation) through self-purification. The disciples of Buddhist education had to travel through a long schooling system. The objectives of Buddhist education still be followed in our present education system. That's why, the present study has it's a great relevance.

Origin of Buddhist education

The rise of Buddhist education was around 6 century BCE marked a turning point in the history of Indian education. Buddha's teaching brought a new perspective on education, which was more inclusive, practical and focused on personal liberation and enlightenment. It was more egalitarian than the Vedic system of education. The followed the principles of Lord Buddha in education which is regarded as the most neutral system of education.

Delimitation of the study

The present study is delimited only with the Buddhist system of education and its pedagogies only. The other intervening variables that affect while conducting the study will be ignored.

Review of the related literature

There are a good number of studies have been conducted on the Buddhist education system. The principles of education, method of teaching, aims of education, disciplines and its philosophy are attracting the scholarly interest to investigate on the holistic approach of the Buddhist education. Rahula, 1974; Ikeda, 2010 opined that Buddhism, with its emphasis on mindfulness, compassion, and ethical responsibility, provides a framework that resonate with contemporary educational goal such as social leaning. Wallace and Shapiro, 2006 argued that mindfulness practice bridges the gap between psychological wellbeing and academic performance by promoting emotional regulation, attention and resilience. Buddhist-inspired approaches encourage learners to cultivate awareness of their actions' impact on others, fostering inclusivity and ethical responsibility in diverse classrooms (Prebish & Keown, 2010). Such perspectives are particularly relevant in multicultural societies where education must support harmony, tolerance, and mutual respect (Ikeda, 2010).

Methodology of the study

Methodology helps to conduct the study smoothly. The methodologies for the present study are as follows.

Method used: As the present problem is related to the past, the researcher preferred to use historical method to conduct study.

Procedure and sources of data collection: To collect the relevant data for the present study researcher visited many libraries, went through many articles published in the renowned journals, books, and also from the internet. Hence the sources of data are secondary.

Nature of Data: Data mostly secondary in nature but sometime researcher used strong analytical approaches for achieving the objectives of the study.

Analysis and Interpretation

After collection of the relevant data researcher proceeds for analyzing and interpreting of the data.

Objective I: To understand the pedagogies of Buddhist education system.

Pedagogy means the art of techniques of teaching. To make the teaching learning process more effective it always directs the right principles, methods, disciplines, maxims, curriculum, TLM, environments in a particular education system. Taking in to consideration of Buddhist education system it was also a richer educational approach in terms of method of teaching, disciplines, principles and maxims. They also followed a strict disciplinary action throughout the educational years. Students had to leave the luxurious life and went for getting salvation in life just after completion of the course. They did not come to their own home and stayed bachelor in the rest of their life.

The system of education

The system of Buddhist education developed mainly in ancient India and later spread to many parts of Asia. It was closely connected with monasteries and focused on both religious training and practical knowledge. Buddhist education was mainly imparted in **MONASTERIES (VIHARAS)** and in the large universities like: Nalanda University, Vikramashila University and Takshashila (Taxila) University. The curricula were both religious and secular both. Mostly the education was imparted through PALI language but SANSKRIT was also an associative language as well.

Aims of education

Buddhist education mostly focused on moral development, acquiring knowledge and wisdom, spiritual growth, formation of character, discipline, non-violence, self-control, simple living and high thinking etc. besides these learning on Buddhas principles, meditation are also the aims of education.

Curriculum of Buddhist education

Diversified curricula were introduced in Buddhist system of education for all round development of the students. Religious books like TRIPITAKA, (Vinaya Pitaka, Sutta Pitaka, Abhidharma Pitaka), language and literature including PALI and SANSKRIT, philosophy, debate, logical reasoning, astronomy and mathematics, and meditation and moral training are the prime curricula of Buddhist education in ancient India.

Method and maxims of teaching

The method of teaching during Buddhist period were very rich. Lecture method, discussion, debate, question-answer method, meditation, practice, memorization and observation are some of the main methods of teaching during Buddhist period.

From known to unknown, from simple to complex, from concrete to abstract, from particular to general and learning through practice are some of the maxims of teaching were followed in Buddhist education. Buddhist education used logical principles and practical teaching methods to develop knowledge, discipline, and spiritual growth.

Disciplinary action

Disciplinary actions were considered to be most important during this education system. As the education was imparted in monastic schools and SANGHAS they followed strict rules based on the teaching of Buddha. Students (Disciples were taught about moral values like truth, non-violence and self-control. Guru always gave warning to the students and also encourages to admit their mistakes and took promises of not repeating that again. They were given simple tasks to correct their behaviour. On the basis of their behaviour provision were also there either for temporary isolation or permanent removal from the monasteries. In short, Buddhist education gave importance more on self-control and correction than harsh punishment.

Relation between teacher and student

The relationship between teacher and students were very close, respectful, and spiritual. Education system was residential and the teachers were monks. They strictly followed the teaching of Lord Buddha. Teachers took parental care of the students and the students also very obedient toward them. Both teachers and students lived simply together. Personal attention was given to the students according to their level of abilities.

Role of GURUS (Teachers)

In Buddhist education the Gurus were not only a teacher but also a guide, mentor and moral example for the students. They played role as a spiritual guide, instructor of knowledge, moral trainer, model of ideal life, maintainer of discipline and guide in meditation and practice.

Role of SISHYAS (Students)

In the Buddhist education students expect be living in a disciplined life in monasteries and to learn teaching of Gautam Buddha. They were obedient to the Gurus, dedicated to learning, and spreading Buddhist teaching. Apart from these they also helped their teachers in daily tasks, showing respect and gratitude. They not only gained knowledge but also develop moral character, discipline and spirituality.

Objective II: To understand the implication of Buddhist education in the present-day education system.

The principle of Buddhist education and its moral teaching has its vital implication in present day education system. Its discipline, holistic approach, morality are still relevant to the present education system too.

Following are the implications of Buddhist education in the existing education system.

Moral and ethical development: Buddhist education emphasized on morality, honesty, non-violence, right conduct. They encouraged truthfulness, discipline, respect and reduced violence. In present day education system too all these moral and ethical values are being taught.

Holistic personality development: This education system aimed to develop a sound mind, body and character. Mindfulness practice is always important for students' overall development. In the present-day school system too personality development is one of the important aims of education.

Equality in education: Buddhist education allowed people from different social background to receive education. The system was actually emerged against the supremacy of Brahminism in education during those days. The present Indian school system also opens for all. Without discriminating on the basis of caste, creed, religion and language students get the opportunity to enrolled in education system.

Learning through discussion and debate: Buddhist education promotes questioning, discussion and logical thinking. The present education system also strictly follows these with an aim to develop critical thinking, encourage active participation in classrooms and to improve communication and reasoning ability among the students.

Simple living and harmony with nature: Buddhist philosophy teaches simple living and harmony with nature. It encourages sustainable lifestyle, promoting environmental awareness and reduces materialistic attitude.

Conclusion

The Buddhist education is one of the oldest education systems in the world. Its holistic approaches and principle gave it a unique nature and still relevant to the present education system. Its principles provide a valuable guidance for modern education. It emphasized on morality, mindfulness, equality, discipline, peaceful and balanced education system. Integrating these values into present day education system can contribute to the overall development of individual and society.

References

- Buddhist Philosophy of Education – Discusses the educational ideas found in Buddhist teachings and monastic education.
- The Buddhist Tradition in India, China and Japan – Explains the development of Buddhist educational traditions across Asia.
- “Buddhist Education: Its Relevance in Modern Education” – discusses moral education, discipline, and holistic development in modern schools.
- Education in Ancient India – Contains detailed discussion on Buddhist monasteries and ancient Indian education.
- Buddhism and Education – Explores Buddhist educational philosophy and modern educational relevance.
- “Implications of Buddhist Philosophy in Modern Education” – focuses on mindfulness, ethical values, and learner-centered education.
- The Heart of the Buddha’s Teaching – Useful for understanding values like mindfulness, compassion, and moral education.

