



Educational Philosophy of Lord Buddha

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The educational philosophy of Buddhism is for the benefit of all sentient beings irrespective of colour, caste and creed. The main motto of this philosophy is to remove the sufferings of the world. According to Buddha, suffering is the main reason behind the cycle of life and death.

If we discuss about the philosophies of Buddhism as propounded by Buddha, it is way to use the method of education for the eradication of sufferings of the society. According to Buddhism Ignorance is the primary reason behind the sufferings of the world and in order to get remove ignorance, education is necessary.

The term “Education” been defined by different scholars in different ways. Etymologically the term “Education” has been taken up from Latin terms, namely: ‘Educere’ which means ‘to bring up’ or ‘to nourish’ and ‘Educatio’ which means ‘the act or process of educating’. In general education can be defined as a plan that is intended to bring in the development of any sentient being.

In Indian context education also includes in itself the spiritual aspect as a part of the development. Indian philosopher Shankaracharya said “education is that which leads to salvation”.¹

¹Report to UNESCO of the International - Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century, UNESCO publishing, 2010, p.3.

In general, some of the characteristics of Education are:

- i. It is a life-long process which starts from birth and continues till death.
- ii. It is about gradual unfolding of things and understating.
- iii. It is about individual as well as social development.
- iv. It is about overall development of an individual and society, be it physical or spiritual. This overall development is self-realization.

In order to understand the Educational philosophy of Buddha we also need to analyse the historical background of the period when Buddha lived. As per G.C. Pande, the sixth century B.C.E, was a period of several religious reforms in India. There were several social changes as well as political developments taking place. Rigidity in the Varna system, inequality amongst the classes came up, in the political sphere several Mahajanpadas came up. This period also saw change in the agrarian mode of production which helped in having surplus agricultural produce. This was also the period when the metallic currency came into existence.

Social, economic and political factors play a very pivotal role in the growth and spread of any religious movement. Buddha's main goal was guide the sentient beings on the path of morality and lead them towards enlightenment. Buddha was quite concerned with the misery and pain of the world. Besides, Buddha also worked for the spread of his education in a political and economic set-up. Therefore, even though he was more concerned about the philosophy of the four noble truths and the theory of Dependent Origination, he also had to deal with the social, political and economic issues of the world.

In the Buddhist Sanghas all the sentient beings were treated equally irrespective of the class to which they belonged. Buddha used to say that just as the waters of rivers from various directions flow down to the ocean and is known by the name of sea water, those who entered the Buddhist sangha from whatever class would be known as a recluse.

In Buddhism, the society has been divided into two parts, namely: the laity (Upāsakas/Upāsikās) and the Bhikkhus/Bhikkhunis. For the Bhikkhus and Bhikkhunis, rules have been laid down in the Vinaya-piṭaka in order to regulate their lives and help them to lead their life according to the Dhamma and guide them to attain Nibbāna. For the lay people, Buddha had ordered his disciples to educate and guide them to walk on the path of the Dhamma.

Buddha and His Teachings

For Buddha, the entire world is full of sufferings so one should not waste his time in the futile efforts and questions related to the metaphysical world or on any speculative thoughts. Rather, one should emphasize on the realization of his own suffering and ways to end that suffering. Thus Buddha's teachings focusses on the four fundamental themes caeled the Four Noble Truths, namely-

i. Dukkha (Suffering)

According to this truth, the world is full of suffering. Sentient beings are a combination of mental and physical constituents called *nāma-rāpa* (which means name and form) or *pañcakkhandhā* (the five aggregates). As these mental and physical constituents are conditioned they are subject to change and decay which leads one to suffer.

ii. Samudaya (Causes of Suffering)

It says that ignorance is the cause of suffering. Attachment, greed, thirst to have more and more causes suffering. In other words one cause conditions other to arise and thus becomes the reason of suffering (Theory of Dependent Origination or *Pratityasamutpada*).

iii. Nibbana (Enlightenment)

Buddha says that suffering can be stopped by eradicating Ignorance. By eradicating ignorance one can attain Nibbana and can be free from all the sufferings of the world. Nibbana can be described as a state of complete bliss. In other words it can be termed as enlightenment.

iv. Magga (Ways to End Suffering)

Magga emphasizes that by avoiding the two extremes i.e. self-indulgence and self-mortification, and by following the middle path one can attain enlightenment. It therefore discusses about the noble eightfold path, which involves eight practices to be followed by the sentient being.

This, therefore, was one of the main reasons due to which people accepted Buddha and his teachings which he realized through his own efforts and wisdom. Buddha assured to the people that everybody can attain Nibbana by walking on his path which made a huge impact on the entire humanity.

Buddha's View on the Concept of Education

Education is a process of illuminating the world. It guides, develops wisdom and equips one with deeper insights. Buddha always used to teach what he had experienced in his life and also used to encourage others to develop themselves through experiences, education and guidance.

Buddhism is more of a philosophy rather than a religion which is based more on logic and reasoning. It preaches that the person himself is responsible for his salvation. It preaches all the sentient beings to know the ultimate truth internally and to reason and not have faith blindly. Buddhism rejects all dogmas, ceremonies, sacrifices etc. Buddhism says that the state of bliss and happiness can be achieved by replacing ignorance with wisdom.

Buddhist education is the process of teaching and learning from the experiences and wisdom of our elders and the teachers. We should implement those learning to build harmony and happiness in the world. If they are not in sync with the teachings of the Buddha should refrain from following those teachings. Buddhist education equips one with the spirit of self-cultivation and helps us to lead a life of the truth and goodness for all. Therefore, education in Buddhism is about developing discipline, insight and wisdom.

The Buddhist Educational Purpose

Buddha's main goal is to lead all to enlightenment. The Dhamma teachings should be followed to attain enlightenment. Buddha propounded his teachings for the welfare and happiness of all the sentient beings. Buddha preached about life that is free from greed, hatred and ignorance. Buddha's teachings have the following main aims:

i. Growth of Intelligence-

In Buddhism there are four basic factors that help in the growth of intelligence of the practitioner, namely:

- a. The company of good people,
- b. Listening to the Dhamma talks,
- c. Paying attention to the Dhamma teachings with a purpose and
- d. Treading on the path of the Dhamma.

It is also believed that the elements of initiative, practice and perseverance are considered as essential on part of an individual to grow up in intellect.

ii. Acquiring Knowledge-

In Buddhist perspective, knowledge is of two types, namely:

- a. Lokiya or Secular- This enables the sentient beings to live free from all blame and wrong behavior.
- b. Lokuttara or transcendental- This knowledge is an aim of who wants to lead a spiritual life or the life of a monk. In this form one has to adhere to a strict code of conduct.

The main aim of acquiring education is to have a refined moral behavior. Our learning should lead us towards this goal.

iii. The Hierarchical Scale of Values

Buddhism says that wealth should be acquired and utilized for the service of the mankind. The way in which we need to utilize this wealth, as prescribed in Buddhism is quite peculiar. Buddhism preaches to treat Earth as Mother since we get a lot of wealth from her. It also says that we should not over exploit her and should get only what is required and necessary for our survival. Buddhism says that no one has the right to exploit Mother Earth. It therefore focusses on developing compassion even for Mother Earth.

iv. The Utilitarian Aim-

This signifies putting Buddha's teachings into practical use. Buddha's Dhamma is self-realized and timeless. It is for the benefit of all. Buddha says that happiness can be achieved through the righteousness of our body, speech, and mind.

v. The Cultural Aim-

Buddha lays great emphasis on the cultural aim of education. In order to develop culture, Buddha emphasizes on the middle path of life, which is to leave aside the two extremes of materialism and self-torture. As per the Buddha, culture plays a very pivotal role in the development of each individual's persona. Buddha's teaching is a right way to life which can be followed for self-realization. An individual's culture can be judged by the quality of mind which is reflected in his day to day conduct.

vi. The Harmonious Development of One's Personality-

Harmonious development of an individual's personality is another goal of education that the Buddha advocates. According to Buddha, every sentient being has an inherent capacity that can ensure him a happy life and this can be manifested through the harmonious development of his potentials through course of training. According to Buddhism, a perfect life consists of three characteristics, namely: morality, spirituality, and wisdom. For this one has to tread on the path of noble eightfold paths.

vii. Preparation for Complete Living-

In order to ensure that the disciples are ready to face all the grim realities of life, Buddha formulated his teachings in a way that could prepare one to adjust with their immediate surroundings for complete living. Buddha's preaching about the nature of momentariness, pain and selflessness of all existing things are very important. Buddha believed that to enjoy life is to face the reality of life. It is, therefore, important for an individual to grasp the nature of reality.

viii. Moral or Character building Aim-

As per Buddhism, an individual cannot attain any spiritual progress if his life is led by immoral acts. Buddha considered moral behaviour as the foundation of a perfect life on which human mind is based.

ix. The Sociological Aim-

Buddhist Sangha was open for people of all classes and was a complete democratic organization in which all the members were entitled to express their opinions. "Be your own light, be your own refuge. Let the truth be your light and your refuge" was the slogan of self-dependence in the Buddhist Sangha. Thus, the Buddha wanted to build an ideal society which was based on the concept of egalitarianism and discipline.

x. Peace-making Aim-

Buddha's preaching aims at global peace building. Peace can be termed as the total absence of war and conflict not only in action but also in our thoughts. It is the aspiration of all the sentient beings and the society to develop a peaceful world. According to the Buddha, peace is

a state of perfect rest where an individual's mind is completely self-possessed and free from lust, hatred and delusion and therefore it can be termed as the highest state of bliss.

Overall, the Buddhist philosophy of Education is about developing consciousness, contemplate in the moment and control the mind for the well-being of all. The present day development has somewhere increased the insecurity and competitiveness as well as tensions of an individual. Buddhism shows a simple and very efficacious way to handle that. The preaching of the Buddha is no doubt relevant even today.

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