

# Significance of Buddhist Education and its Role in Modern Society

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**Abstract:** *Buddhist education is a system for establishing a perfect society. This topic will mention a number of issues related to the significance of Buddhist education and its role in improving contemporary social and ethical life. We can create a good society and solve the problems of the spirit, that is, the improvement between the material and the spiritual, when society develops, it means a change in all aspects of human such as personality, psychology, philosophy, ethics, etc. However, for this modern life, most people will be inclined to material values rather than spiritual values, and from there will be appeared disputes, jealousy, selfishness and greed. That is the source of divisions from selfishness, greed that leads to consequences such as social evils, gambling, theft, truancy, etc. these are despite being condemned all over the world on social networks as well as newspapers, but also cannot eliminate them. In order to improve people's living ethics, so the teachings in the Buddhist education system have been formed, these are from the words of the Buddha that have been cultivated and gained experience. When it comes to the role of Buddhist education, we must refer to a long history of Buddhist education. From the founding of the Sangha by the Buddha to the formation and development of Buddhist monasteries in ancient India that they functioned as centers of education, teaching, scriptures, Vinaya, and other studies. And to this day, Buddhist education systems have also been formed to maintain human values of truth, goodness and beauty. We can say that Buddhism is a school of psychology, philosophy, art, a study of equality, ethics and human rights, etc. The role of Buddhist education is to serve all subjects and especially to bring people to overcome suffering and improve morality by means of precepts, Eightfold Path, meditation, etc.*

**Keywords:** Buddhist Education, Ethics, Meditation, Discipline

## 1. Introduction

Buddhist education was traced back to the time of the Buddha, after the Buddha attained supreme enlightenment; he imparted his teachings to everyone. From the admission of *Bhikkhus*, *Bhikkhunis* and lay disciples, the Buddhist Sangha was formed. Thus, a new education system, new philosophy, and new path were appeared, which has eliminated the old - fashioned views on class distinctions, skin color, gender, etc., and replaced it with equality, harmony, without distinction of race, class or gender. Until later Buddhist education centers were established such as the university of *Nālandā*, *Valabhī*, *Vikramasīlā*, *Odantapurī*, *Somapura*, *Jagaddala*, etc.<sup>1</sup> These educational centers not only impart knowledge from the Buddha's teachings but also impart skills and mundane disciplines. Especially in the Indian society at that time, there was a segregation of the male and females, most of the women were not allowed to participate in religious and educational activities. But in the spirit of equality of Buddhism, women, as well as people of low rank, participated in learning in schools, which were mostly belonged to Buddhism at that time. Because of the popularity of these universities, many domestic and foreign students have come to participate.

From the formation and development of monasteries to becoming great educational centers, these are major breakthroughs in the monastic system of Vihara. In modern society, Buddhist monasteries are growing up and developing strongly, and of course with education, each monastery has its own training system for monks, nuns, and lay followers, but still based on the basic principles of

Buddhism. Many monasteries have also become centers of teaching, meditation, etc. Besides, in some Buddhist countries today, many Buddhist universities have sprung up to meet the learning needs of the seekers about the liberated teachings of the Buddha.

Moreover, today many universities have integrated Buddhist studies into their teaching, and are considered a major in the education and training system. Modern education is no longer mere theories or philosophy, but it has adopted practical training methods such as vocational training programs, which have become more essential to people's lives. But when people want to seek liberation, it must be through the study and practice of the teachings that the Buddha attained and experienced. Therefore, the education system of Buddhism, in any era, plays an important role in human life, it is an ethical path applied in the teaching and leading to happiness and equality, freedom, and liberation.

## 2. Ethical Principals of Buddhist Education based on Disciplines

Certainly, Buddhist education is the foundation of an ethical society. It set out goals and directions, tasks, objects, contents, methods and organization of education. It is based on the principles of educating people and social principles to create a materialist, idealistic person free from mystical and dogmatic thinking. Buddhism clearly favors stable societies over progress.<sup>2</sup> Like other educations, they also have their principles, such as animism, realism, idealism, empiricism or other theories, etc. The definition of education is to direct

<sup>1</sup>J.B.Barua, *Ancient Buddhist Universities in Indian Sub-Continent*, Published by Fulton, 2016, p.14.

<sup>2</sup> Nghia, Tran Thi. *Dhamma as the Force to Guide an Ideal Society: A Study in Teachings of the Buddha*, Praxis International Journal of Social Science and Literature 4(2), p.4

people to truth, goodness and beauty. It is not only philosophical in nature but also imbued with humanism. Today, each country may have a different style of education, but that is the common purpose and perfection of human society. For Buddhism, education is the most basic foundation of manners, speech, attitude, those things were rigorously educated by the Buddha for monks, nuns and laypeople. Like the monastic way of life through harmony, the practice of the precepts, or the Buddha's teaching on the duties of the layperson mentioned in the *Nikāyas*. Furthermore, the path to the transformation of suffering is by means of the eightfold path, dependent origination, Bhramavihara, and the Paramita. Buddhist education promotes equality between man and man, as well as human and animal rights. These small animals are also protected and have the same right to live as humans. In Dhammapada, the Buddha taught that: "Not to do evil, to cultivate merit, to purify one's mind – this is the Teaching of the Buddha."<sup>3</sup>

For lay people, the Buddha gave a standard of morality in his education through the five precepts: <sup>4</sup> 1. Refrain from taking life means not killing any living being, this includes animals; 2. Refrain from taking what is not give means not stealing from anyone; 3. Refrain from the misuse of the senses means not having too much sensual pleasure. For example, not looking at people in committing adultery; 4. Refrain from wrong speech means not lying or gossiping about other people; 5. Refrain from intoxicants that cloud the mind means not drinking alcohol or taking drugs.<sup>5</sup>

The life philosophy of Buddhism is an ethical foundation suitable for Humanity. Buddha's mission is to secure profits and welfare of the many. It appears with a definite problem, a definite goal, and a path that exists between the two. The problem is the suffering of humanity; the goal is to attain a state where there is no suffering at all; and that path is the middle path or the Eightfold Path, which can be called the humane path, which includes a lot of humanistic and ethical values such as right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right mindfulness, right concentration.<sup>6</sup>

In addition, some questions point out: What is a perfect society? How it was built? and how to maintain it? Therefore, the Buddha is considered as a great educator of human ethics, society, culture, economy etc. Thereby, we see that, if we want to go to a perfect society, we must perfect each individual, if each person has a moral behavior and knows how to recognize right and wrong, then we can

perfect the humanity of people and society, so good or bad society is man - made.

### 3. Buddhist Education through practicing Meditation for society reform

Buddhist education has led people to peace of mind through the practice of meditation. In particular, today many Buddhist meditation centers are opened in many parts of the world; in which they use Samadha and Vipassana meditation to train the mind, as a way of energizing for the healthy body and thereby transform greed, hatred, delusion and suffering in this life.

Buddha said that all sentient beings have Buddha nature and can become a Buddha in the future, so all can improve themselves to become a good and perfect person. In this modern society, human life develops rapidly, so it is always accompanied by a serious crisis between material and spiritual life. With the decline in morality in the family, school, and society, the social managers are worried about the future of the country. Therefore, Buddhist ethics and education play a significance role in establishing people's spiritual life. In SamyuttaNikaya Buddha taught to his disciples, saying, "Wander forth, O bhikkhus, for the welfare of the multitude, for the happiness of the multitude, out of compassion for the world, for the good, welfare, and happiness of devas and humans."<sup>7</sup>

Nowadays, some Western countries have taken the practical applications of meditation as a cure for diseases, meditation masters of Buddhism consider it as the foundation for training the mind to improve life some problems such as greed, hatred and delusion, conceit, doubt, etc. In addition, meditation will lead people to the ultimate goal of enlightenment. It will help people transform all suffering in this life. In the Foundation of mindfulness, the Buddha mentioned four foundations of mindfulness: "What are the four? Here, monks, a monks abides contem - plating body as body, ardent, clearly aware and mindful, having put aside hankering and fretting for the worl; he abides contemplating feelings as feelings...; he abides contemplating mind as mind he abides contemplating mind - objects as mind - objects, ardent, clearly aware and mindful, having put aside hankering and fretting for the world."<sup>8</sup>

Practicing meditation is to remove bad psychology, purify the mind according to a positive lifestyle. As mentioned above, meditation is the elimination of the five hindrances.<sup>9</sup>

- 1) Sensory desire (*kāmacchanda*): seeking for pleasure through the five senses of sight, sound, smell, taste and physical feeling.
- 2) Ill - will (*vyāpāda*; also spelled *byāpāda*): feelings of hostility, resentment, hatred and bitterness.
- 3) Sloth - and - torpor (*thīna - middha*): half - hearted action with little or no concentration.

<sup>3</sup>Daw Mya Tin, (tr.), *The Dhammapada – Verses and Stories*, Central University of Tibetan Studies Sarnath, 2014, p. 70.

<sup>4</sup>Getz, Daniel A. *Precepts*, in Buswell, 2004; Robert E. (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, Macmillan Reference USA, 2017, p. 673.

<sup>5</sup>Harvey, Peter, *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics: Foundations, Values and Issues* (PDF), Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 67; Ledgerwood, *Buddhist practice in rural Kandal province 1960 and 2003*, in Kent, Alexandra, 2008; Chandler, David (eds.), *People of Virtue: Reconfiguring Religion, Power and Moral Order in Cambodia Today*, Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, p. 152.

<sup>6</sup>Brekke, Torkel, *The Religious Motivation of the Early Buddhists*, Journal of the American Academy of Religion, 1999, p. 860.

<sup>7</sup>Bhikkhu Bodhi, (tr.), *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, Boston – USA: Wisdom Publications, 2000, p.198.

<sup>8</sup>Maurice Walshe, (tr.), *The Long Discourses of the Buddha*, Boston - USA: Wisdom Publications, 2012, p.335.

<sup>9</sup>Traleq Kyabgon, *The Essence of Buddhism*, Shambhala, 2001, p. 26.

- 4) Restlessness - and - worry (*uddhacca - kukkuccha*): the inability to calm the mind.
- 5) Doubt (*vicikicchā*): lack of conviction or trust.<sup>10</sup>

Especially instead the five factors of meditation and pointed - one focus on the object for self - purification, which are the great benefits of meditation for purifying the mind. These five hindrances are hindrances to the spiritual process. Those hindrances are the enemies of meditation. Therefore, removing obstacles not only enters the realm of meditation, but also makes human progress and harmony in spiritual and secular life perfectly, and finally towards peace and happiness. In SamyuttaNikaya, the Buddha taught to Young householder as follows: “*Young householder, it is by abandoning the four defilements of action, by not doing evil from the four causes, by not following the six ways of wasting one’s substance through avoiding these fourteen evil ways - that the Ariyan disciple cover the six directions, and by such practice becomes a conqueror of both worlds, so that all will go well with him in this world and the next, at the breaking - up of the body after death he will go to a good destiny, a heavenly world.*”<sup>11</sup>

Therefore, Buddhist education always focuses on meditation, because only meditation can really transform the unwholesome mind and bring peace and freedom. Human life has many afflictions and sufferings, so people always aspire to a holy life to have peace and happiness. Many scholars and intellectuals of society have come up with advanced scientific theories and lifestyles to help people. However, these theories and arguments cannot satisfy and solve the necessary needs of people, because they are limited by their own perceptions and prejudices and are also constrained in the time frame and space, i. e. relinquishment of lust and sensuality, which is a pure state of mind. Faced with this, we find in the Buddha's teachings there are many very basic suttas. If we apply them to our present life, we can solve the problems of suffering and come to true happiness. “*A man may conquer a million men in battle, but one who conquers himself is, indeed, the greatest of conquerors.*”<sup>12</sup>

#### 4. Conclusion

Buddhist education is an indispensable foundation of moral education in all times. it was derived from the time of the Buddha to the establishment of educational centers later. Today, many educational centers of Buddhism have been established and strongly developed. It can be said that Buddha's education has formed a philosophical school imbued with humanity. The Buddha is considered as a great teacher in education, his teachings can improve people's lives towards the beauty of people in particular and society in general. On the other hand, through Buddhist education can help people to come to true happiness and achieve

liberation from all suffering. To be sure, in the Buddhist educational system, it is impossible not to have laws as well as rules and meditation, which are indispensable in all areas of life. In any age, especially today, but the normative principles and meditation in the Buddhist system play an important role in transforming suffering and bringing happiness in life and improve society to become more perfect. Buddhist education can make a great contribution to the modern world in guiding the search for meaning in life. With today’s society, Buddhism has made many contributions in guiding people to live the truth, moral values and laws of society.

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<sup>10</sup>Wallace, B. Alan, *The Attention Revolution*, Wisdom, 2001, pp. 158–159.

<sup>11</sup>Maurice Walshe, (tr.), *The Long Discourses of the Buddha*, Boston - USA: Wisdom Publications, 2012, p. 461-462.

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