



Educational and Ethical Values of Buddhism

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Abstract: *The present paper is an attempt to deal with the axiological aspect of Buddhist philosophy with respect to Educational and Ethical values. The purpose of this study is to extract the educational and ethical values enshrined in Buddhism. In this regard, the researcher has opted for a qualitative technique study and has undertaken a content analysis based on primary and secondary sources of information to ascertain those values. After a detailed study, the researcher was able to deduce various educational and ethical values from the Buddhist Education System and Buddhism as a whole and focused insight into their significant relevance in the present system of education and society as a whole.*

Key Words: axiological, Buddhist, philosophy, Educational, Ethical values, ethical values, enshrined.

In the mainstream of the West, education is viewed simply as gaining knowledge, skills, or other forms of human capital that will assist one in earning a living sufficient to buy human security. This perspective will not get us very far-although it is a truism that everyone has the right to an education and training. But the matter does not simply rest there. What kind of education are we talking about? Is literacy merely measured by the ability to read and write? To be able to see an atrocity as an atrocity and to realize less violent futures may require something radically different from the education presently offered in the mainstream.

Buddhist Education System is one of the most prominent among ancient Indian education systems. Buddhism in India came into existence as a means to reform the deteriorating form of Hinduism. The philosophy of Buddhism was founded by Siddhartha Gautama, who later on comes to be known as Buddha (the awakened one). The Buddhist philosophy is considered one of the most valuable ancient Indian philosophies of India that inscribe a lot of values like spiritual, social, ethical, educational, political, and economic values that have significant importance for the welfare of the human race. Among these manifold sets of values of Buddhism, paramount importance is given to Educational and Ethical values. Educational

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values in Buddhism imply those ideals that are practiced by the Buddhist System of Education in their teaching-learning process while ethical values imply moral ideals uphold by Buddhist philosophy for regulating man's thought and conduct. An alternative perspective has been put forward by some creative Western minds. Adam Curle, for instance, has suggested that "Education is a learning process that pulls out the hidden potentials in each person, that facilitates self-creation through self-realization." Similarly, a fundamental objective of Buddhist education is to pull out the hidden potentials in each person so that each individual might realize his or her full potential, or what is often referred to as Buddha-nature. Buddha-nature is something that cannot be realized atomistically. Rather, it requires collective action or social engagement. And perhaps most important, it requires nonviolence. Nonviolence may be considered the master precept of Buddhism. As such, a proper Buddhist education would foster a culture of peace, which entails, among others, subduing the rising tide of human insecurity, structural violence, and terror through compassion, humility, generosity, mindfulness, and wisdom.

Buddhist Education and Value- The Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen suggested once at a Human Security Conference that Prince Siddhartha's



story is one of the first recorded instances of humanity's interest in human security. Like the young Prince Siddhartha, we should try to understand how the suffering we experience is linked to our view or assumptions of the universe and consequently how our invented social structures and economic systems perpetuate our pain. This opens up space for cognitive diversity, for different forms of knowledge which may be equally valid. For instance, certain forms of knowledge are needed to get men to the moon, while others are needed to foster environmental sustainability. Certain forms of knowledge are needed to build super-bombs, but certain forms of knowledge are needed to make peace. This is sheer commonsense, and lots of examples may be drawn from daily life. If modern medicine cannot heal my backache, then I visit an acupuncturist. Our problem may be that we too uncritically accept the so-called established knowledge. When a doctor fails to cure the sickness of a patient, he or she rarely questions the medical body of knowledge. Rather s/he questions his or her own expertise. The modern form of education posits a dumb learner and a smart body of established knowledge. From a Buddhist perspective, it is time that we question some of the fundamentals of the Enlightenment in order to be enlightened.

To this end, we explore a proper methodology needed to "educate ourselves". Four themes central to Buddhist approaches to education can be drawn: (1) suffering (*dukkha*) exists; (2) *dukkha* finds its source in ignorance (*avidya*), (3) ignorance can be resolved, and (4) there is a methodology to help us resolve ignorance.

Three-fold Training (Tisiksha)- Of course, this process of education requires the cultivation of both the intellect and the emotions or sentiment. Put differently, in Buddhist education the intellect and the emotion/sentiment must develop concurrently, and praxis must be in congruence with society, facilitating an understanding of life and the world that is not marred by prejudices, selfishness, etc. This is the essence of education for liberation.

For Buddhists, the objective of the highest stage of training is liberation from the ignorance that enshrouds human beings. This liberation opens the way to wisdom; that is, understanding the Truth ('the way it is') of everything without prejudices or attachments. At this stage, understanding would blend with compassion. Thinking and emotion are inclined towards compassion. Helping other human and sentient beings becomes an endless personal mission. One must inevitably observe, understand, and solve individual and social problems. This constitutes *siksa*, or education that seeks to combine wisdom and ethics.

At no other time in history is the importance of *siksa* in applying ourselves to resolving social and political failure more urgent than today. For centuries mankind has exhibited magnificent aptitude at manufacturing all sorts of interesting little things but never have we stopped to ask ourselves whether these things make us more secure or less secure. As Martin Luther King Jr. stated: "our scientific activity actually has outrun our spiritual power. We have guided missiles and misguided men."

Buddhism emphasizes ethics with education, while western educational systems struggle to do so. G.E. Moore writes in his *Principia Ethica* that Western thinking not only cannot be used to teach ethics, it also cannot define morality or goodness. Buddhist education cultivates morality (*sila*) alongside wisdom (*pañña*): the one guiding the way for the other. Before wisdom can be grasped and ultimately used to benefit humanity one must have a proper perspective of the world (right view). Thus, the highest training in the Buddhist system is liberation from ignorance. At this stage understanding blends with compassion. Thinking and emotion are inclined towards compassion. To know or understand does not mean to dominate or possess others or contain their singularities. Helping other sentient beings becomes an endless personal mission.

Siksa or training entails developing oneself



so that one is able to lead a life in a beautiful and correct manner-- pursuing the Path (magga) that will lead to the cessation of suffering. Siksā and magga thus can be seen as one. At times the Buddha would use the word patipada (mode of progress) interchangeably with magga. Ultimately the path leads to a noble and celibate way of life. I feel that tertiary education for liberation must start with the concept of the Right Understanding, and then proceed down the Noble Eightfold Path.

The Noble Eightfold Path is also called the Middle Way-- the Path towards liberation from the extremes of sensual indulgence and self-mortification. On the one hand, structural injustices in society are perpetuated by violence. On the other hand, they are also held in place by our selfishness-- our tacit consent. Social and individual sufferings result from the interpenetration of external and internal causes.

As mentioned above, to overcome individual and collective forms of suffering, a Buddhist practitioner can resort to socially engaged Buddhism. At the individual level, Buddhism seeks to transform greed, hatred, and delusion into loving-kindness and compassion. But to overcome individual suffering one must also be aware of the suffering emanating from social injustices, from structural violence. And to overcome social suffering, one cannot act as an island unto itself: one must cooperate with others. In other words, one must avoid the Scylla of hermetically sealed personal liberation, and the Charybdis of social transformation without cultivating loving-kindness and compassion.

The training of the mind and morality will help students to develop knowledge in tandem with goodness. As Wittgenstein mentioned, goodness and beauty are in fact one. If "ethics is transcendental" then it is also supramundane. And once students develop training in wisdom, they will understand things differently; different, that is, from what has always been taught in mainstream education. The training that constitutes the Noble Path is the three-

fold training (tisikṣā): morality (sīla), mindfulness (samādhi), and wisdom (pañña).

Wisdom (pañña)- Wisdom is the recognition of the interdependence of things and of reality 'that which is.' This is the origin of the Right Understanding, which is the beginning of the Noble Eightfold Path. Conversely, with the Wrong View, one's thought processes and beliefs will always be wrong such as the mainstream value system that induces the tyranny of the "I" and its many offshoots.

The Buddha taught that Right Understanding has two main dimensions: external and internal. Externally are the voices of or warnings raised by others, especially those of virtuous companions. Internally is critical reflection-- the ability to think, contemplate, analyze, etc. without prejudices, without personal attachments, resulting from mental training. With proper internal and external understanding, we are better equipped to tread softly in the world.

Right Understanding will also help us see the flaws in traditional perspectives. For example, binarisms have long been utilized as useful tools for classification, for making sense of the world. But the problem is that there are few neutral binary oppositions: one pole is often privileged over the other. Say, white/non-white, modern/traditional, upper-class/lower class, us/them, developed/underdeveloped, and so on.

Shunning or being mindful of dualistic thinking, Buddhism can well take part in healing these oppositions that serve as sources of great suffering in the world. To Buddhists, our minds are not simple mirrors that reflect the world. Rather we take part in constructing 'reality'. This does not mean that there is no world "out there", that everything is in our heads. It simply means that the "out there" does not have meaning in itself. We must give it meaning, and we often do so narcissistically. A rock, for instance, is not simply a rock. It can be a national boundary, a work of art, a prized geological formation, etc. Our processes of representing, ascribing meaning to, or relating to



the "out there" are marred by greed, hatred, and delusion-- with serious consequences. Buddhism urges us to be quick in recognizing and taking care of the prejudices involved in our knowing/knowledge of the world. At the very least, Buddhism urges us to reduce our prejudices, which are rooted in self-attachments and self-preservation. We must seek to understand the root causes that have created these effects.

Morality (sila)- Although the Buddha taught that sila consisted primarily of right speech, right action, and right livelihood, I will for the sake of time encapsulate all three of these within the Buddha's teaching on generosity.

Generosity, or *dana* in the Pali language, may be seen as the foundation of education shared by every religion. And it is a subtle way of reducing self-attachments. We can say that generosity at the most rudimentary level means giving money or things. It requires helping the badly off by means that would not jeopardize the well-being of the better off. Such acts of generosity may be for particular ends--earning praise or goodwill, reserving a place in heaven, etc. Or it may be a completely selfless act. This level of generosity may be equated with primary education. Generosity at the level of secondary education means giving knowledge or truthfulness to a society that is full of lies. It entails speaking the truth to power, which may be basking in ignorance or prejudices.

Applying the concept of *dana* to contemporary society, we may cultivate a consciousness that stresses giving more than taking. Humility, simplicity, and sufficiency-self-reliance--may consequently follow. And if one has an inclination for generosity and cherishes simplicity and humility-- that is, stressing compassion and solidarity more than competition--one may begin to reclaim human dignity. In this case, it comprises having pride in local cultures and traditions, which are being overwhelmed by consumerism, modernity, and globalization. This is a Buddhist vision of a prosperous life.

Mindfulness- The training of the mind will contribute to mindfulness; one will be quick in taking care of one's feelings, especially greed and hatred, and will have a concentration in leading life. With mindfulness, one may learn to become less attached to oneself. Moreover, mindfulness contributes to happiness in the present. It enables the mind and the heart to operate synchronically and may bring about internal peace. Additionally, mindfulness enables one to grasp the realities of the past, the present, and the future. And lastly, mindfulness enables one to overcome mental defilements, thereby contributing to liberation.

Unfortunately, the cultivation of mindfulness is a dimension missing from contemporary education. Mindfulness increases the capabilities or potentials of the mind, making it stronger, more stable, more courageous, more persistent, more diligent, and more responsible. And mindfulness helps increase virtue by fostering loving-kindness, compassion, altruistic joy, and equanimity-- all these, even at the moment when one is being exploited or oppressed. In other words, mindfulness entails cultivating the capability, value, and health of the mind, which are indispensable in modern society.

To conclude, Buddhist education shows us how to act ethically with wisdom and mindfulness. Such education is valid not only in our personal affairs but also in how we interact with the world. This means that we must confront those causes that are linked to the abuses of capitalism and consumerism. To profess faith in the sciences and industrial technologies without questioning their ethical value or our moral responsibility could have serious consequences in our immediate future.

Conclusion- The ethical and educational values of Buddhism and the Buddhist Education System discussed above throw light on how Buddhism with respect to its axiological aspect holds a front seat among different Ancient Education Systems. The present-day educational and social system is in dire need of Buddhist values in its



struggle to attain a balance between science on one hand and morality or ethics on the other.

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