

**Relevance Of Buddhist Education In The 21st Century Society**  
Running title: Relevance Of Buddhist Education In The 21st Century Society

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**Abstract**

For the first time in the whole world, education was open to all sections of people only at the emergence of Buddhist education system. This is the most significant characteristic of Buddhist Education System which was originated in India. Bhagawan Buddha tried to bring out social transformation by raising the living and spiritual standards of all sections of people through education. Therefore, He established that System of Education which aims at regaining of our own original spiritual and moral values of India. Purpose of the present paper is to make people understand about the Buddhist System of Education and to appraise the relevance of it for the 21<sup>st</sup> century society. Because, our Society in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is fully dominated by cultural plurality, complexity and unhappiness condition of people. Therefore, present education should foster universal and eternal values among children which are found in Buddhism and it can only reorient the unity and integration of all in this 21<sup>st</sup> century. Over and above, one must realize that Buddhist Education System has a profound positive content which is based on our original universal perceptions. If educational programmes are restructured, and reorganized, keeping in view the aspects outlined, it surely will deliver valuable outputs for the children in 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**Keywords:** Buddhist education, Relevance, 21<sup>st</sup> century

**Introduction**

In talking about the history of Indian education, it is very natural to discuss the concepts of Vedic education and Buddhist education. Gurus were the earliest teachers in India who taught in their own Guru Grihas or in Ashrams during Vedic period. Individualistic effort of Guru to Sishyas was the most significant characteristic of Vedic system of education. Over the time, students' learning process got institutionalized and later on Buddhist education mainly gave emphasis on institutional organization. In Indian education, Buddhist period covers about (1200) twelve hundred years ranges roughly from 600 B.C. to 600 A.D. Buddhist education was based on the teachings of Gautama Buddha and these were so important that they remained as a source of inspiration for individual as well as social development in India. During the time of Buddha, there was a racial discrimination in all the places of the India society. Such type of discrimination was according to profession of man and according to birth. In the society there were four divisions – *Brahman, Kshatriya, Baishya, Sudra* among which Brahman was superior. They enjoyed rights for religious training and education. But other category of people deprived of their religious and educational rights. In such situation, a religious revolution started in ancient India and a new doctrine called Buddhist doctrine or Buddhist philosophy developed. In this regard, it is to mention that on the foundation of Buddhism, a new and special Education System originated in ancient India which gave opportunity to learn of all sections' people through institutionalized learning without any caste bar. This new education system made a tremendous movement in ancient India and as a result, it played a valuable role in the development of all aspects in society. It is well-known that with the rise of Buddhism in India there dawned the golden age of India's culture and civilization. His teaching mainly covered three major points- discipline, meditation and wisdom. Buddha's whole educational philosophy was actually related to these three teaching points and had lots of educational significance. In the science and technology oriented society of 21<sup>st</sup> century, people have property but no peace, people have wealth but no discipline, they have knowledge but less wisdom - the relevance of Buddhist education is highly discussed and therefore, present study has been emphasized on the ***"Relevance of Buddhist Education in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Society."***

**Objective**

Objective of the present paper is to make people understand and analyze about the relevance of Buddhist education system in the society of 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**Concept Of 21<sup>st</sup> (Twenty-First) Century**

Twenty first century is the current **century** of the Anno Domini **era** or Common **Era**, in accordance with the Gregorian calendar. The time span of this century began on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2001, and will end on 31<sup>st</sup> December, 2100

### Research Approach Undertaken

Present study deals with Buddhist Education system which is exclusively historical in nature. Therefore, as per the nature of the topic historical method along with analytical approach has been undertaken in the present study. Different writings of books and research articles are studied as secondary sources of data and 3 Buddhist monasteries located in Assam (Primary source) have been visited to get data regarding the present relevance and to have the authenticity of the writings. So both primary and secondary sources are used in the present study.

### Buddhist Education System

Attainment of wisdom and spread of Buddhist religion was the principal goal of Buddhist education system, which was developed by Buddha Shakyamuni. Originally, at the time of its inception it was completely a religious and monastic system. Actually religion caused the establishment of monasteries or “Viharas” and eventually these monasteries turned into the centers of learning and education. The chief aim of Buddhist education was the spread of religious principles of Buddha and attainment of ‘Nirvana’ through it. Buddha taught that the main purpose of all practices in our life was nothing but achieving the ultimate wisdom. Buddhist educational philosophy lays emphasis on both the conceptual and practical aspect of knowledge. This system of education was established giving emphasis on the development of physical, economic, social and moral values. According to Buddhism, education means true knowledge and because of the pursuance of this true knowledge an individual’s emancipation from sorrows, pain is possible which lead to attainment of salvation. Buddhist education system of Ancient India has been discussed as follows-

**Aims of Education:** Buddhist education system plays a vital role in modern society also only because of its in-depth goals or aims. Aims of education were- All round development of Personality, Moral Development, Cultural development, Social and vocational development, personal development and attainment of Salvation. The main focus of Buddhist Education was to make a free man, a wise, intelligent, moral, non-violent & secular man. Students became judicious, humanist, logical and free from superstitious. The very purpose of education in this system was to make Students free from greed, lust and ignorance. Buddhist Education was too wide open and available to the people of all walks of life. The principal goal of the Buddhist Education was – to transform an unwise to wise, to change a beast to priest, to convert an aggressive person to a calm and peaceful minded people. Education of Buddhism always aimed at transformation of a personality into highest form of humanity and it could be possible through the three faculties of perfection of human life- ethical, intellectual and spiritual perfection.

**Functions of Education:** Reformation of society along with salvation of individual from all kinds of sorrows was the main function of education during Buddhist period. For that purpose, the whole education system was dominated by religion, but the thing is that there was a provision for imparting practical knowledge in all the *Mathas or Biharas*. Students had to do the activities like Spinning, Weaving, Drawing etc for performing the various functions of day to day life.

**Curriculum:** In Buddhist education system, two types of education were found- one was primary and the other was higher education. At the primary level, reading, writing and arithmetic were taught and in higher education level, religion, philosophy, Military training and Vedas were included. Among the four Vedas, Ayurveda was given special emphasis because of the medicinal value. Curriculum of both the level mainly stressed on giving a clear idea of Tripitaka which consists of Sutta pitaka, Vinaya pitaka and Abhidhamma pitaka. Vocational education was also included in the curriculum of higher learning which included the subjects like spinning, weaving, drawing, medicine, printing of the clothes, tailoring, accountancy, surgery and coinage. Everyone was given freedom to choose own interested subject of curriculum in higher level.

**Methods of Teaching:** In order to propagate the teachings of Lord Buddha, teachers used the methods like- Lesson method (In this method, a teacher used sandal slate for a child to make him capable to write. Here, alphabet and numerals were taught by speech and writing), Lecture method, Question answer method, seminar method, Discussion and Analysis method, Comparison method, Self-study method. The medium of instruction was folk language. Later it included Pali & Prakrit and in the following days Sanskrit. One example is cited here. Nagarjuna, Asanga, Vasubandhu, Shantideva, Aryadeva and Chandrakirti were renowned scholars of Buddhist period and they made tremendous contribution to philosophy and literature through Sanskrit language.

**Concept of Discipline:** Service to the teacher with all devotion was the main disciplinary concept during Buddhist period of education. The students had to prepare themselves at any time to receive education whenever the teacher wished. Since the curriculum of Buddhist education was spiritual in nature, so the students were very much responsible to the rules of monasteries or the Buddhist order.

**Women Education:** In many researches, Buddhist system of education is criticized from the view point of women education perspectives. Actually, in the early period, Women were considered as the source of all evils by Lord Buddha. So, the picture of women education during the early Buddhist period was not so much of encouraging. Women were not allowed to be admitted in the monasteries. But later on due to the request and insistence of Anand who was a dear student of Buddha, about 400 women were permitted along with his step-mother for admission in the Viharas.

**Duration of Education:** The duration of education was 22 years in total which comprised of 12 years as *Pabbajja* and 10 years of *Upasampada*. The word *Pabbajja* refers to 'going out'. In this ceremony, the student after being admitted to a monastery had to give up all his worldly and family relationship. An individual belonging to any caste could be admitted to a monastery and after being admitted his caste identity is deleted. Just after admission, the student had to change his old clothes and all old ways and life styles of living. For the *Pabbajja* ceremony the minimum age was eight years. After receiving twelve years education, the student had to undergo for the *Upasampada* ceremony. This ceremony was very much democratic in nature. The student had to present himself before all other monks of the monastery. One could be eligible for the *Upasampada* ceremony only when the majority of the monks voted in favors of the same. After the *Upasampada* ceremony is completed successfully, then the *Shraman* was regarded as a full-fledged member of the monastery. At the completion of this occasion all the worldly and family relationship is totally ended.

**Educational Institutions:** In the early period of Buddhism, the scope for Education was very much limited. At that time, it was limited within the monasteries and only for the members of monastery. Later on it was open to all and all common people got scope to have education in those institutions. A large number of universities spread across the length and breadth of India were there during the period of Buddhist education. The oldest one excavated was Takshashila, which is dated to the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC. Others prominent were Nalanda, Jagaddala, Odantapuri, Vikramasila, Somapura, Baranashi, Mithila, Ujjaini, Kanchipuram. Even today, archaeologists are coming across the remains of ancient universities of Buddhist period close to the already excavated ones. But getting admission in Nalanda or in Takshashila was not everybody's 'cup of tea'. Only about 20% of students who applied in Nalanda got admission. "Foreign students had the toughest time in passing the entrance test unless they were deeply versed in old and modern learning. And yet, the university had as many as 8,500 students and 1,500 teachers." (Singh, S. Pp.10, 2017)

**Role and Responsibilities of Teachers:** In Buddhist system of education, teacher means a practitioner who traveled some territory ahead of students. That's why he is called "**spiritual guide**". In other words, he knows *methods* and *principles*, and so he can teach others. There were two categories of teachers – Acharyas and Upadhyayas. The duties of teachers were imparting education to the students, writing books, propagation of religion, discussion, arrangement of debate for clarification of serious subjects. Actually, in Buddhist system, the teacher himself must spend as a monk at least for ten years duration and necessarily must have the purity of character, purity of thoughts and generosity. Teachers and students, both the parties of were fully responsible to the monastery. But regarding teaching-learning system, clothes, food and residence of the student monks, the teacher was fully responsible for all these things.

#### **Discussion On The Relevance Of Buddhist Education In The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Society**

Asoka, one of the great Indian emperors of the third century B.C., stopped all wars and conquests, drained swamps, built wells and carried out other acts of public welfare only because of his conversion to Buddhism. In the subsequent time, other Buddhist rulers have also followed this example. Citation of this example of Buddha carries a lot of significance of the teachings of Buddhist philosophy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The very purpose of Buddhist system of education was all about the removal of greed, anger, delusion and suffering from the life of people. At the end, teachings for these primary goals naturally lead to a social ethical life of all. Here also lies the significance of the teachings of Buddhist education system for modern world and it has been observed that all the modern guiding agencies are emphasizing on this aspects.

According to Buddhism, education is the right of every individual. So, all racial differences should be kept aside to give an opportunity for education to everybody. Such principle of right to education is still relevant in India and therefore in the year 2009, Right to Education Act was passed by the Government of India and education is now considered as one of the fundamental rights of citizens in India.

Again, Buddhism emphasizes that we should purify our own mind and should try to develop love, kindness and compassion for all living creatures. In this context also, importance of Buddhist education system or the study of

Buddhism as a discipline and its role in the Education of 21<sup>st</sup> century gets priority. Therefore, the concept of environmental education, inclusive education etc. emerged.

Vocational education was also included in the curriculum of higher learning which included the subjects like spinning, weaving, drawing, medicine, printing of the clothes, tailoring, accountancy, surgery and coinage. These subjects are still relevant for skill generation as well as for reducing unemployment problem in the society. So, in this aspect also, reflection of Buddhist education system is reflected in modern education system of 21<sup>st</sup> century society.

Practical training was an important component of University learning in this system. As for example, in order to impart the thorough knowledge of medicinal plants in the course of medicine, students were bound to do nature study. Nature study was considered to be the best means of awakening a healthy curiosity among the students which is still very essential for the students of modern period.

Above all, the Buddhist education system was the combination of psychological principles and practices with the help of which at present also an individual is benefitted for his own spiritual advancement as well as for his emotional wellbeing. Thus, the prime value of Buddhism in the modern world is that it shows one a way to happiness and peace of mind regardless of political and social environment.

### **Conclusion & Summary On The Educational Implications Of Buddhist Philosophy**

Change is inevitable in this world and Buddhist philosophy accepted the rule of change in this universe. So, by nature this philosophy had pragmatic viewpoint to impart education to all being free from communal narrowness. Being cosmopolitan in nature, Buddhist education was free from all kinds of favouritism on the basis of caste and creed in the centres. Much more emphasis was given on total development of personality for which Buddhist education focused on physical, mental and spiritual development of novice. Another implication of this education system was Positivism. The philosophy behind the Buddhist education was positivistic and had a very careful logical analysis of systematized ideas. To a large extent, it was also democratic in nature as it believed in exercise of freedom of enquiry.

All the entire techniques of Buddhism advocated for providing directions to develop good conduct and which is also the essence of a sound system of modern education. Also its belief in Karma laid stress on the necessity to be constantly on the vigil to maintain one's conduct in the present life. So, emphasis was given on Manual skills. Training of manual skills like spinning and weaving was emphasized to enable men to earn for living. Method of teaching mainly was oral. Preaching, repetition, exposition, discussion and debates were all used. Buddhist council used to organize 'seminars' to discuss the major issues. Learned conferences, meditation and educational Tours were highly encouraged in this system which reflect its the present day relevance of this ever modern education. International recognition as well as impact is also be mentioned as the relevance of Buddhist education system. It helped India to gain international importance which was proved by the visit of Heuen Tchang, a Chinese pilgrim. It also developed cultural exchange programme between India and other countries of the world. Above all these, Value education & Character development being a part of moral education attracted all kinds of humans during that time. For the purpose of moral development within all disciples, special emphasis was given the Buddhist education centres. Accordingly, it was made compulsory for all that being a student of these respected education centres, one must follow noble path, means eight fold path as preached in Buddhism provides guidance for moral education and peace. After all, the entire techniques of Buddhism provide directions to develop good conduct which is also the essence of sound system of education.

The system of Buddhist education was successful in development of spirituality, development of personality, promoting the social efficiency and happiness in life. After getting education either in Buddhist schools or in Universities of that period, students could not do any injustice, commit theft, could not kill and addicted to alcoholism. All the students could be able to become free from greed, enmity, ignorance and lust. That's why today also, regular discussion, seminar, lecture programmes are arranged everywhere in the world regarding the relevance of Buddhist education system in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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