

Quality Education in Buddhist Philosophy: An Integrative Approach to Holistic Development

Dr. Sudipta Mandal

Assistant Professor, Political Science, Silda Chandrasekhar College

Abstract

Education is a key defining the level of development of the individual and the society at large. To attain such development focus has to be given on quality education. Quality education aims at dissemination of knowledge that guarantees holistic development of the individual culminating into creation of a higher societal order. It entails individuals to completely realize their true potentials which empower them with the knowledge to understand their own existence and the world around them. It stands for comprehensive development encompassing all facets of life. The essence of this idea is predominantly reflected through the Buddhist philosophy lying within the Indian knowledge system. Buddhist philosophy is a vast area of study focusing on a pragmatic and rational understanding of life experiences. It aims at channelizing individuals to the path of ultimate realization and accomplishment of knowledge and wisdom. It propagates the paths, principles, practices and ideas following which an individual can attain intellectual along with mental, moral, ethical and spiritual development. Education in Buddhist philosophy is conceived as a lifelong process that continues till the individual attains the stage of enlightenment, reflecting the ultimate realization of purpose of life and self existence. In this context, the present research paper tries to delve into the different principles and ideas present in the Buddhist philosophy that highlights on the importance of acquisition of quality education as a fundamental prerequisite ensuring development of the self and the society. The paper also attempts to evaluate and bring forth the importance of the notions of holistic development and inclusivity ingrained within the Buddhist philosophy.

Introduction

Education is a fundamental prerequisite to development of a society and individuals constituting it. The term education has a wide range of meanings encompassing diverse elements within its scope. Traditionally, it is associated with the process of acquisition of knowledge, skills and values leading to cognitive development of the individual, ultimately, contributing to overall societal development. This process entails systematic learning through formal institutions like family, schools, workplace and similar settings that one becomes a part of in their life experiences. Education in the true sense is conceived as an idea that leads to fullest development of individual's all- round personality ensuring in realization and understanding of one's true potential and identity. It stands for holistic development of individual that could be attained only through quality education. Quality education is a subjective idea like liberty and justice which is difficult to define through a rigid specific meaning. It actually signifies an idea which equates the value of education not merely through achievement of individuals' personal academic excellence but evaluates their ability to correlate their personal growth with societal growth. It propagates an idea that facilitates individuals to learn and develop self- awareness and mindfulness

through training and acquisition of knowledge that makes them realize their actual purpose of life. The idea of quality education is integrally linked with holistic development of individuals which is found to be the cornerstone idea of Buddhist philosophy on education. Buddhism was a philosophy that emerged in ancient India which enumerated a new approach to education by laying the foundation for establishment of a harmonious world order. The main aim of Buddhist idea of education lied in training, cultivation and development of individuals' mental, moral, physical, intellectual and spiritual upliftment. It stood for ensuring freedom for mankind by development of responsible, compassionate, moral, non-violent, rational and wise individuals'. It propagated the paths and directions that an individual needed to follow to make their life free from sufferings and develop themselves to the fullest. Buddhism in the earliest phase had monasteries as their learning centers that imparted education to their members. But with the passage of time, it became open and accessible to all, embracing people from all walks of life. It strive for holistic development of individual through building virtues; character and traits that made them attain wisdom, well- being and true happiness. An individual to attain such level of development has to acquire knowledge about themselves and community. This source of knowledge can only be drawn through quality education that enumerates the idea of interconnectedness of experience and reality. This approach to education is different from the traditional view that takes a static and fragmented view of life. Quality education actually focuses on a dynamic and interconnected approach that views education as a mark reflecting the development of individuals', society and humanity. In this paper an attempt has been made to look into the idea of quality education responsible for holistic development of individuals' and society through the lens of Buddhist philosophy and highlight its importance in establishment of harmonious world. Further, the present study also draws attention to the valuable teachings of Buddhist philosophy that could transform and reorient the present educational system and facilitate the creation of wiser, mindful, responsible, compassionate, ethical and resilient learners capable of dealing with the challenges of growing complex reality.

Review of Literature

In this study a considerable number of books, articles from journals and materials on the subject on different web pages were consulted for framing the subject. Among these a few are being stated here:- The book titled "Buddhist Philosophy" by Arvind Diwedi explores the grandeur of Buddhist philosophy and illustrates explicitly the different facets of this religious philosophy. It enumerated the core principles, the idea of ethics and morality, the different schools of Buddhist thought, the terminologies on the subject and along with enumerating of the idea of materialism of Buddha. This is a comprehensive book on the subject. Another book titled "Buddhism: Philosophy and Teaching" by Prof. Poonam Srivastava also provides insight into the subject through a detailed discussion on the major areas of this philosophical doctrine. It is a book that offers an overview on the subject as whole with an explanation on the idea of education encompassing the philosophy. Several research articles were also consulted on this subject. A few among them include paper titled "Role of Buddhist Religion in Development of Indian Education System" by Dr. Laxmi Rani and Mrs. Puspa Kumari published in IJRE which illustrated the ways Buddhism in ancient India developed a systematic and organized method of acquiring knowledge with the pursuit of facilitating holistic development of individual. Another paper that is worth mentioning is titled "Role of Buddhism in the Development of Indian Education" by Anita Masih and Vidyapati in International Journal of Educational Technology dealing with the same subject. On holistic development attained through quality education there are many paper

among them a few are “Holistic Education: An Approach for 21st Century” by Sirous Mahmoudi, Ebrahim Jafari, Hasan Ali Nasrabadi and Mohmmad Javad Liaghatdar published in International Education Studies and “The Dynamic Holistic Development of Human Potential and Wellbeing: Implication on Educational Policies” by Rosadah Abu Majid, M.M Ali, N.M. Salleh, A.Alias, R. Kanapathy and K.S.Hashim published in ICSAR were consulted in this study.

Objectives

The primary objective of this research paper is to examine, explore and assess the potential benefits of integrating the different principles and values embodied in Buddhist philosophy into education to facilitate the holistic development of individual and society. Through exploring the different empirical research and relevant literature on this subject the present research paper tries to throw light on the following aspects:

- To examine and evaluate the different principles and concepts in Buddhist philosophy that solely concentrates on educating individual with their real life situation and circumstances along with the different facets of the philosophy.
- To enumerate and critically evaluate the paths recognized in Buddhism through which individuals attains quality education contributing to their holistic development and the society.
- To evaluate and assess the extent to which the different facets of Buddhist philosophy could provide the foundation to re-orientation and re-framing of the traditional educational system making it conducive to dealing with the complexities of real life conditions.

Methodology

In this study, taking into consideration the nature of subject qualitative method of analysis was followed. In it content analysis method of study was applied that involved systematic analysis of textual and visual data, like books, research papers, newspapers and interviews to understand, identify and assess the means through which Buddhist philosophy could form the basis to attainment of quality education, a prerequisite to holistic development of self and society.

Buddhist Concepts and Principles: A Guide to Comprehend the Reality

Buddhism is a religious philosophy that emerged in ancient India at a time when the Indian society was fragmented by the caste system. It is in this background, Buddhism emerged as a new philosophy that opposed all sorts of discrimination and exploitation and spoke of liberating mankind from all types of sorrows and sufferings faced in reality. It took a pragmatic and rational understanding of real life situations. The core principles of Buddhism provided guidance to understand the nature of human existence, the causes of human sufferings and ultimately guided them to the path of liberation. These principles are embodied in the four noble truths that reveal the origin and reasons for sufferings in human life (Mandal, 2023). The noble truths are:

- Dukha (Suffering) - This truth acknowledges that suffering is a fundamental and inherent part of human existence; it can be both physical and mental. Along with it, the truth also reveals impermanence of things.
- Samudaya (Origin of Suffering) - This noble truth exposes the reasons responsible for emergence of all sorts of sufferings. It identified craving or desires for material possessions or pleasure as the cause for all types of sufferings.

- Nirodha (Cessation of suffering) - This truth points out that through letting go or detachment from cravings or desires one can attain liberation from sufferings.
- Magga (Path to the Cessation of suffering)- The fourth truth illustrates the path to liberation through eight-fold path known as Astangik Marg. These eight fold path consists of eight practices that help to liberate the individual and develop healthy body- mind relationship. These are-
 - Right View
 - Right Intention or Resolve
 - Right Speech
 - Right Conduct or Action
 - Right Livelihood
 - Right Effort
 - Right Mindfulness
 - Right Samadhi

These four noble truths along with the eight fold path provides a profound understanding about the nature of human existence, about the problems they encounter in real life situations and also states the code of conduct that needs to be followed to end their life of misery or sufferings (Thero, 2017). These core concepts educates an individual to become mindful, compassionate, ethical and self- reliant to understand, tackle and overcome any situation in life. It liberates individuals from negativity, enables personal growth and helps to cultivate wisdom and empathy for development of themselves and society.

Buddhist Education: A Path to Holistic Development and Enlightenment

Buddhism ushered a new era in the development of culture and civilization in ancient India. During this time under the influence of Buddhism there emerged many centers of learning. These centers or Sanghas as they were called imparted sacred and secular education (A.Masih & Vidyapati, 2018). In the beginning, Buddhist education was limited to their members in monasteries. But with the passage of time it became accessible to all. This inclusive nature of Buddhist education made it possible to have its deep lasting value in society. The main aim of Buddhist education was to guide people to the path of acquiring knowledge or wisdom about their self and existence. In Sanskrit, Buddhist wisdom was known as- Anuttara-Samyak-Sambhodi meaning perfect ultimate wisdom (Laxmi Rani & P. Kumari, 2019). Buddhism advocated that to acquire and develop such wisdom, an individual needed to go through training that involved three steps, Sheel Skiksha, Samadhi Skiksha and Prajna. In Buddhism, Sheel Skiksha stands for developing higher virtue in individual, Samadhi Skiksha stands for cultivation of higher mind and Prajna stands for gaining higher wisdom. The word Sheel means abstaining from all kinds of sins and Samadhi signifies concentration on good things and the completion of these two training guides an individual to attain Prajna that is wisdom. To channelize individuals' to these three stages of learning and training there is a need for them to be disciplined and cultivate virtues and pattern of behavior that lead to fullest development of their personality. Buddhism, unlike other religious teachings, concentrated on development of all round personality of individual and not only on mere spiritual elevation. It stood for physical, mental, moral and intellectual development with particular attention to building of moral virtues like right code of conduct, integrity, humility, empathy and mindfulness in behavior. The sole objective of this philosophy centered on creating educated, mindful, compassionate, rational, ethical and humanist individuals' capable of building a society reflecting the principles of equality and justice.

Buddhism through its different concepts laid the path for the individuals to acquire education that facilitated healthy development of their mind, body and spirit. It illustrated a comprehensive learning technique that stressed on personal transformation. The Buddhist concept like Pratitya- Samputpaad and Karma and Karmaphal stated that the sufferings and sorrows that individuals face are a result on their own actions. Thereby, individuals being guided by right conscience, awareness and knowledge could arrest such situations from happening. Both the principles explained that everything exists in relation to each other. Pratitya-Samputpaad is a doctrine on dependent origination. Karma and karmaphaal on the other hand advocates that one suffers as a result of one's deeds. All these concepts actually educates an individual to learn the means through which one can become self- aware and self- reliant to transform their own existence, which will thereby, facilitate a change in society. In Buddhism, it is said that moral man cannot exist in immoral society and vice-versa. To bring about an all round development of individual personality there was a need to cultivate moral virtues, positive behavior, cultural sensitivity, emotional intelligence, critical thinking, rationality, empathy, non- violence and a secular mindset. All these qualities and traits will become a part of human personality only through strict rigid training, discipline, self- restraint, meditation and focus for attainment of ultimate purpose of life, namely enlightenment. Buddhism through many of the concepts and principles illustrated the means and paths to be followed to free individuals from ignorance, greed, superstition, insensitivity and irrationality to judicious, rational, wise, moral and ethical human beings. The quality of education imparted in Buddhist study reflects openness, inclusiveness and a humanistic approach to progression of society and its parts. In Buddhism, everyone irrespective of their caste, religion, gender and class had equal access to education. The idea of discrimination and segregation in society that existed in the Vedic period was severely opposed and all lines of hierarchy were condemned. It stood for establishment of an egalitarian society which necessitated the creation of enlightened individuals' guided by wisdom and higher values in life. The way to creation of such society and individuals was extensively laid down through the philosophy that focused on receiving quality education which would contribute to holistic development of individuals' and the society as a whole.

Buddhist Education: An Integrative Approach to Mindful Learning

Buddhist education, unlike the traditional education system, primarily concentrated on character building and development of responsible individuals. To attain it, the philosophy laid down a system of education with defined curriculum and strict guidelines that needed to be followed for teacher and students. Teachers had to have purity of character and mind along with leading a life of monk for ten years. The teachers were entrusted with the duty of not only explaining the subject matter but also encouraging students to do mindful thinking, develop concentration, practice meditation and build a problem- solving approach to life and situations. The Teachers concentrated on holistic development of students, including mental, intellectual, moral, physical and spiritual. Buddhist education included primary, higher and vocational education. At the primary stage reading, writing and mathematics was taught while at higher stage Ayurveda, military training and spiritual education was given utmost importance. In addition to it, vocational training was also given to empower individuals with skill to be self- sufficient in life like spinning, weaving and others. It had a comprehensive and integrative approach to education which equipped individual with character, strength, capability and consciousness to understand themselves and the world around (Mahmoudi et al., 2012). It focused on development of improved attention, cultivation of compassion and empathy, growth of interpersonal relationship,

building emotional intelligence, reducing stress, creating responsible citizens with ethical values, enhancing physical strength and expanding the horizons of thinking. It sort to elevate individual to a higher stage of existence through constant learning that facilitated the growth of wisdom culminating into attainment of enlightenment or Nirvana, the state of perfect bliss. The Buddhist educational system could provide the basis for re-framing and reorientation of the traditional education system ingrained in a mechanistic, fragmentize and static way of learning. The holistic education system proposed in Buddhism should be given attention and needs to be considered for building an educational system connected to reality and its needs. In contemporary times and in this complex world situation individuals' are immersed in stress, anxiety, fear and negative thought resulting from living a highly materialistic life. To equip individuals with skills and education to dealing with these issues the educational system needs to be re-framed keeping the essence of Buddhist teachings within its framework. Therefore, the spirit and ideas of the Buddhist educational system are to be guiding principles for reorientation of the existing educational system into a dynamic, interconnected and comprehensive educational system.

Conclusion

The Buddhist philosophy revolved around its idea of education that played an important role in expanding the frontiers of knowledge. It propagated an organized and systematic way of learning connected to real life experiences. It is this interconnectedness with experiences and reality that made learning experience intriguing and fascinating. It stressed on a balanced approach to learning based on development of mind, body and spirit. The basic goal was facilitate a holistic development of individuals' who would be empowered with ability and skill to realize their true meaning of life. Buddhist education basically inculcated the ideas and principles that facilitated the attainment of wisdom within individual. The sole purpose lied in creation of conscious, mindful, ethical, compassionate, wise and responsible individual entrusted with social commitments. Therefore, the Buddhist education system stood for creation of a dynamic, active, participatory and critical learning experience rooted to reality which should provide the foundation for contemporary learning experience.

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