

Teacher-Student Relationship in the Light of Buddhist Concept of Education (With Special Reference to Vinaya Pitaka)

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Education is one of the basic activities of people in all human societies. The continued existence of societies depends upon the transmission of culture to the young.¹ A.W. Green writer "Historically, it has meant the conscious training of the young for the later adoption of the adult roles."²

According to the modern concept of education, the significant functions of education are:-

- i. To complete the socialization process
- ii. To transmit the cultural heritage
- iii. For the formation of social personality
- iv. Reformation of attitudes
- v. For the occupational ability

Every society has its own ways and means of fulfilling these needs. Education has come to be one of the ways of fulfilling these needs.⁴

It would be fit to mention the Aristotelian concept of education here, which states that the aim of education is "to development's faculties, especially, his mind, so that he may be able to enjoy the contemplation of the supreme truths, goodness and beauty in which perfect happiness essentially consists".⁵

Since the time of Shakyamuni, Buddhism has long been fulfilling this aim of education through its unique and distinctively original system of education still prevalent in various parts around the Buddhist world.

It seems that it was probably for the first time in 'Bharatvarsha' that those people who were considered 'Shudras, Chandals, Mlecchhas' etc. by the contemporary post-vedic society, were not only admitted to the Buddhist 'Saigha', but were also given high status and regards on the vesture of their wisdom and learning. Phadant Upali can be quoted as the striking example of this social transformation due to Buddhism.

Historically speaking, the educational institutions like 'Gurukuls' and its teachers, directly influenced by religion, were engaged in transmitting a particular way of thought to the students. According to the famous sociologist U.N. Shankar Rao, the teaching in ancient times was more a *means of social control than as instrument of social change*.⁶ This traditional 'Gurukul' system of education was meant for an unchanging, static society, not marked by rapid changes in thought and philosophy.⁷

Buddha, probably for the first time in Indian History, has introduced rational and logic-based scientific studies and welcomed new concepts and ideas in teaching as well as learning. These ideas were considered revolutionary, and eventually helped in branding him an iconoclast.

Before his sermon, Buddha used to create its background by citing the importance of Dhamma, Charity, discipline, character, bad after-effects of an immoral life and the ways to lead a happy life. This method of logical teaching so adopted by him was easy enough to be clearly understood by every layman, without any of the difficulty they used to counter with the preachers of other faiths.

The teachings of the Buddha can broadly be divided into three groups. They are:-

- i. Adhishil Sikkha
- ii. Adhichitta Sikkha
- iii. Adhipragya Sikkha

These are, in fact three large groups which can be termed as the teaching of discipline and chastity, teachings of inner peace and tranquillity, and the teachings of concentration, wisdom and supreme knowledge respectively.⁸

Compiled by Bhadant Upali after Buddhas 'Parinirvana' in order to present authentic 'Buddha Valars' (Buddhas Words), it almost exclusively deals with Buddhist monastic laws and discipline. That is why it is popularly known as 'Constitution of the Buddhist Sangha'.¹⁰

Buddha, The Greatest teacher of humanity, always stressed the liberty of thoughts and free expression, though within the limit of 'sila', especially among the teachers and students for giving the right knowledge of Dhamma. While answering to the question once asked by Alar Kalam, he said that one should not believe in words just because it is said by a high spiritual authority, or out of one's tradition, or because it sounds good. Instead, one must rationally and logically analyse those words, and without being partial towards them (out of devotion or hatred), one must also think whether the things said are beneficial for him as well on the society as a whole. One then one should accept them, be it the words of the Buddha Himself.¹¹

In Vinaya Pitaka, we come across four methods of learning¹² by students and scholars. They are:-

- i. Suggahitari - To receive the knowledge properly
- ii. Sumansiktani – To keep then in mind properly (be mindful)
- iii. Supdharitari – To remember then properly
- iv. Kalyariyasi – They should possess a clear voice, use the language which has a simple meaning, and is eerily understood by others.

Apart from being taught by a teacher, 'Vinaya Pitak' lay particular stress on self-study¹³ also. This method has been adopted to make them able to examine and analyse the philosophical complexities of Buddhist scriptures themselves. As stated previously they were open to discuss over any point of Dhamma with their teachers within the limits of Vinaya.

Pupils used to stay with their teacher at his place during the course of their studies. Teachers, who were usually monks and priests, used to do arrangements in the Buddhist Ministries for their accommodation, with the assistance of 'Upasaks' and 'Upasikas' of nearby cities and villages.

These pupils were called 'Saddhiviharik' in Tripitaka, while those few local students who were not staying in the Monastery were called 'Antevas'. Apart from the knowledge of Buddhism, the master used to impart the essential knowledge of arithmetic, economics, physics, chemistry, anatomy, astronomy, medicine, surgery etc. They were honoured as 'Upajjhaya' in Pali cannons. In some special cases if he is absent for a long time, his pupils were looked after and educated by another master known as 'Acharya'.¹⁴

One thing which is quite unique in Buddhist system of education is that not only the rules and norms for students towards their teacher are stated, but it is also emphasised as to how a teacher should behave with his pupils. Various texts of Vinaya Pitaka like Mahavagga, Chullavagga, Pachittiya etc. elaborate on the true of teacher student relationship. It is stated in chullavagga that on 'Uppajjhaya' should always be in mind a fatherly attitude towards his pupils. Likewise, it is expected from the pupils to regard the teacher as their own father.¹⁵

Pupils are responsible for the maintenance of the monastery they live and study in. Apart from learning and putting things in place, they have to look after their master, thus getting the valuable training to become a sincere and responsible citizen in society afterwards.¹⁶

Vinaya Pitak describes the five qualities of a good student as under:-

- i. Having a loving attitude towards his teacher
- ii. Honour and respect him
- iii. Regretful after committing a mistake
- iv. Accomplish works which brings honour
- v. Practices concentration and meditation.¹⁷

Tathagat Buddha had clearly laid down many important rules to be a good teacher. He said that a teacher should first establish self-control over himself. Firstly, he should do what he teaches others to do. So if he has to train others, he should be well-controlled himself.¹⁸

Buddha also emphasised for a teacher to recognize what was proper and what was not, because after going that ability he would be able to instruct and guide his pupils properly.¹⁹

The knowledge imparted by a 'Sadguru' i.e. a good teacher leads to prosperity, whereas that by an 'Asadguru' (i.e. a bad teacher) leads to misery and destruction.²⁰ The qualities stated in chullavagga about an able teacher are:-

- i. Well-educated in every respect
- ii. Dharma-lover
- iii. 'Vinayadhar' i.e. one who possesses the knowledge of Vinaya and also implements it in his deeds.
- iv. Who thinks about the ways to spread others' prosperity
- v. Having a high moral conduct
- vi. Spreads knowledge without discrimination
- vii. Having a calm and patient attitude
- viii. Who has studied and analysed well
- ix. Who is hailed by everyone²¹

At the time of pupil's illness, it was the duty of his teacher to look after him and arrange for his proper medication. Recalling Buddha's attitude and Philosophy, Bhudart Upali has written in Vinaya Pitaka that once in Sravasti, he saw an ailing monk in a very bad and dirty condition. Buddha at once ordered Ananda to bring fresh water and clean 'Chivara' (Monastic robe). He himself washed the body of that monk and changed his attire. Thus, by doing the task himself, he presented a striking example to others about the responsibilities a teacher must bear towards his pupils and followers.²²

Buddhist educational system also prescribes the rules for the expulsion of a pupil in the extreme cases of indiscipline done by him. Before expelling, 'Upadhyaya Acharya' used to counsel and guide him on the right path, failing in which a pupil was debarred from his teacher's guardianship²³ and consequently, from the monastery.

There were five other ways also by which the teacher student relationship cease to exist. They were:-

- i. If the 'Upadhyaya' has gone somewhere
- ii. If he has changed his previous ethics and philosophy
- iii. If he has died
- iv. If he has changed his religious ideologies
- v. If he has permitted the pupil to go to another teacher²⁴

Hardly any of the points has been left in the Buddhist concept of education as far as teacher-student relationship is concerned. In a nutshell, we can say that the devotion of students were replied generally by their teachers in the form of imparting the knowledge to them. Thus, there existed a mutual co-relation between them.

While comparing that kind of ancient Indian academic structure of 6th – 5th century B.C. with the modern one, we come across sharp decline in values, especially in respect, regards and gratitude both of them used to have towards each-other. Probably this deterioration is due to the absence of any sort of personal bonds teacher – student used to have in Buddhist era. It is a pity that our modern academic planners have not given the Buddhist educational system its due place despite its need today.

In the posse of resaving our historical values and traditions, which is going momentum nowadays, it would be very opt to bring Buddhist concept of education to light because the modern academic environment has yet to learn a lot from this valuable legacy of ancient India.

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