

The practice of Pedagogy in Buddhist Mahaviharas of Ancient India

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Spiritual education played an important role during the period of Buddhism, and this education was based on basic principles of Buddhism like four noble truths, an eight-fold path, etc. In addition, education was becoming the key tool for individual growth. It plays a vital role in transforming the unlettered child into a mature and responsible man.

Further, the foundation of Buddha's teaching includes three major points discipline, meditation and wisdom. According to Buddhism, the world is full of sorrow and suffering. Hence, the only aim of life was considered to be the realization of salvation (Nirvana) by deserting the world. Buddhism prepared a wonderful movement that played a precious mission in the growth of the Education System in the earliest Indian or Buddhist world. It is recognized that the increase of Buddhism in India was the first light of the golden age of Indian culture and society. There was progress within all portions of Indian civilization under the influence of Buddhism.

In this research paper, we will try to examine the practice of pedagogy in Buddhist Mahaviharas from ancient times to the present time in India. However, the main focus will be on research of five major Mahāvihāras in ancient India, i.e. Nālandā Mahāvihāra, Vikramashila Mahāvihāra, Odantapuri Mahāvihāra, Jagadala and Vallabhi Mahāvihāras.

. The proposed paper will elaborate on these points in detail

Key words: Pedagogy, Buddhist Mahaviharas, Education, Ancient, India

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The earliest phase of Buddhist Monasteries and the soon after Buddhist Universities played a major role in developing the Buddhist Education system. The chief aim of Buddhist Education is to create a free man, an intellectual man, a judicious, decent, talented and non-violent. Buddhist Education makes a person sensible, humanist, reasonable and free from superstition. The main give emphasizes a clear idea of Tripitaka which consists of Sutta Pitaka, Vinaya Pitaka and Abhidhamma Pitaka. While the entire Tripitaka consists of Buddha's teachings, message, philosophy and rules for the Bhikkhus and Bhikkhunis. The core curriculum was mainly spiritual in nature. However, the main aim of education was to attain liberation. Therefore, the study of religious books was mainly significant. That type, of course, was proposed only for the monks.

With the passage of time, Buddhist Education has crossed Indian Sub-continent and extended up to Sri Lanka, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, Singapore, China, Japan, Tibet, Mongolia and Myanmar, among the growth and progress of Buddhism in those countries. In addition, Buddhist Education has made tremendous progress with the inclusion of modern subjects in the syllabus. The literature of ancient India was very huge and magnificent. Historians have different opinions, which there did Indian literature, however, the various invaders ruined it. While, the renovation of ancient Indian historic Buddhist Mahāvihāras, there are a variety of sources available that are divided into Indigenous Sources, Foreign sources and Muslim sources.

According to Buddhism, the history of education begins with the creation of the Buddhist Saṅgha and Gautama Buddha was not simply a social reformer, but also a teacher. After the attainment of Mahapratinirvana, his teachings were interpreted and the purity of the Buddhist Saṅgha was ruined. Because of this, the Saṅgha was divided into various sects known by different Buddhist schools. After the passage of some time, that school transformed into Mahāvihāras. The term Mahāvihāra means the great Saṅgha or University where thousands of monks study and follows the teachings of the Buddha. In the words of R.K. Mookerji, *"the pilgrimage of Chinese scholars like Fa-Hien (Faxian) and Hiuen Tsang (Xuanzang) testifies to the tribute paid by China to the sovereignty of Indian thought and culture which made its influence felt beyond the bounds of India itself in distant countries which might be regarded as then constituting a sort of a Greater India"*¹.

When Faxian comes to India that Buddhism was embraced a large area of ancient India. Xuanzang illustrated different Buddhist monasteries in his

travelogue “Si-Yu-Ki” While, the great Buddhist Mahāvihāras of the earlier period were Takshashila Mahāvihāra, Nālandā Mahāvihāra, Vikramashila Mahāvihāra, Odantapuri Mahāvihāra, Jagddala Mahāvihāra and Somapuri Mahāvihāra.

The Buddhist literature gives full past knowledge of Ancient India and Buddhism. While the Buddhist literature has three main branches specifically “Jataka”, “Pitakas” and “Nikāya” literature. *The Tripitaka* conserved the doctrine of Buddhism in the Pāli language and separated into three divisions as Vinayapitaka, Suttapitaka and Abhidhammapitaka. Other books are available in the Pali literature such as Milindapanha, Dipavaṃsa, Mahāvaṃsa etcetera, which are helpful from the historical viewpoint.

In this research paper, we take today's perspective or in the context of ancient times, actually, things are fulfilled in both the times through suitable arrangement of funds and other essential things. We find that Mahavihara had been flourishing by royal support from the kings given to the religious places and Mahāvihāras in that period. Now Buddhist education has been running in various institutions and universities with the support of the government in many places in India and abroad. During ancient times, various kings provided royal patronage to provide the necessities of wealth and other necessities as needed in the Mahāvihāras. These were the kings as Gupta, Vardhana, Maukhari, Pāla, Sena, etc. had given royal patronage to Buddhist Mahāvihāras.

The Buddha has taught a path of individual inquiry to put an end to misery, and that pathway depends on straight knowledge. Hence, the traditional methods of Buddhist mind-training, contemplation and meditation could be taught at the educational institute in present times. The Buddhist sight of the basic nature of individual experience, where the logical and expressive sides of the mind are uniformly appreciated, is extremely significant in the modern world, which is overly fragmented. Buddhism presents a pathway of Mind-training, and teaching is nothing but that path. The efficacy of mindfulness methods in developing the “seven factors of enlightenment” (such as peace, joy, concentration, etc.) has been confirmed even outside the context of Buddhist education. It has been found indispensable for realizing factual education in general.

With the progress of the mind and modern technologies, and the system of ancient education later on altered into the big educational centralized system and in other terms, controlled by a cooperative number of teachers. Therefore, the after that on Buddhist monasteries converted into great monastic residential Mahāvihāras (Universities). With the rise of Buddhism in India, many well-known institutes of

Buddhist Studies sprang into existence that give rise to the organization of Mahāvihāras in ancient India i.e., Nālandā, Vikramashila, Odantapuri, Somapuri, Jagadala and Vallabhi Mahāvihāras. These Mahāvihāras attain solid fame all over the globe and left a vast imprint of their valuable knowledge along with Indian as well as foreign minds.

The procedures of admission during an early period in the Mahāvihāra were very hard. Those who wish to attain higher education provided the entrance test in the Sanskrit language and the basic knowledge of all the Vedas and Buddhist Philosophies was compulsory. It has a wide academic outlook and grammar, logic and idealism, moreover, other branches of humanities and sciences, are taught with enthusiasm and dedication in the Sanskrit language². The basic Buddhist education intended for the purification of the mind and body

As per Buddhist Education, the main aim of education is sanctified growth, development, and self-realization of students. The Buddhist Education provides importance on pious perfection from knowledge and practices of religious philosophy of Buddhism, knowledge of Upanishads, Vedas, etc. During the practice of concentration and meditation, students study to control wandering mental faculties and obtain knowledge through lectures, discussion, creative activities and debates. To study intensely inspect and chase the qualities and character of teachers and their right understanding.

Admission to Buddhist Sangha was very simple, However, the entry of admission of a novice in the Mahavihara through an entrance test by the Dwārapandita in the Sanskrit language, While Sanskrit was the only medium of language during this period. The process of admission to the Mahāvihāras was allowed by oral examination in the Sanskrit language conducted by professors at the Entrance Hall of the Mahāvihāra. The syllabus of the entrance test to pass the examination is defined, whereby a student should have a precise knowledge of all the four Vedas and a variety of sorts of earliest historical facts and thoughtful knowledge.

The Buddhist education cemented the technique for all round development of the child and students or every follower who experienced the Buddhist philosophy. *The Subhasutta*³ of the *Majjhimanikāya* clarified the right principle of education which is by providing education to live a joyful and calm lifestyle through high-

quality moral conduct. Living is based on the concept of “*maximum good to maximum people*” (*bahujana hitāye bahujana sukkhāye*), the Buddha devoted his life to the welfare of every humanity apart from caste, creed, race and gender bias. According to the *Dhammika Sutta of the Suttanipata*⁴ the Buddha explained the rules and regulations for monks and lay disciples in the outline of Dasasīla and Pañcasīla. The Buddha sermonized the significance of Pañcasīla to the general people for the betterment of human beings and society.

The heart of Buddha’s teaching contains three main points discipline, meditation and wisdom. Wisdom is the objective and deep meditation or concentration in the vital process in the direction of achieving wisdom. Buddha’s whole teaching as expressed in the sutras never really departs from these three points. Once receiving education in the Buddhist schools, colleges and Universities one may not perform any injustice, tell a lie, commit stealing, can not murder, cannot be addicted to wine and build himself liberated from moral turpitude. In this teaching students develop into free from greed, desire, enmity and ignorance.

At the early stage medium of education was the mother tongue, afterward, it was included Pali and Prakrit, and in the subsequent days, Sanskrit also included as a medium of teaching. Especially the Mahayana Teachers get peculiarity in practicing Buddhism in Sanskrit. A unique Sanskrit Buddhist literature developed. Education was divided into primary and higher education during this period, in primary education were being taught reading, writing and arithmetic and in higher education, Ayurveda, religious philosophy and military training were included. Everyone had the right to choose his subject without any interference. While Vocational education was also preferred in the education of the Buddhist system.

Spinning, weaving and sewing were taught to the monks of Bihar, whereby they met their clothing requirements. Besides, the education of architects was taught in Mahaviharas, education in architecture made it possible for them to build up new Viharas or repair the old Viharas. In the same way, the householders following Buddhism however living outside Vihara were given training in different types, whereby they also earn their livelihood. It is to be confirmed that the Buddhist Educational Syllabus also included Vedic subjects. Whereby the

difference between Buddhist & Vedic Education was wiped out and unified. That was a remarkable development in the history of Buddhist Education in India.

The arrival of Buddhist Education and the Pāli language of the Buddha in India is closely linked with the Buddhist revival movement obtainable by Anāgārika Dharmapāla in 1891. Moreover, the University of Calcutta was the first Indian University, where the Department of Pali was established. The University of Delhi also established the Department of Buddhist Studies on the occasion of the 2500th Buddha Jayanti celebrations in 1956. Whereby Prof. P.V. Bapat from Poona was the first Chairman. Enough facilities nowadays are present in Buddhist education and teaching Pāli in various other Universities, whereby Madhya Pradesh, Andhra, Allahabad, Baroda, Banaras Hindu University, Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh, Gujarat Vidhyapith, Ahmedabad, Lucknow, Magadha (Bodhi Gaya), Nagpur, Patna, Marathwala, Sanskrit University, Varanasi, etc. Now not only every person can explain the teachings of the Buddha in the modern world. However, some scholars, monks and other faculty of Buddhist studies have special linguistic skills and knowledge which help the common people to practice the teachings of the Buddha in their everyday life for happy living.

Now, the Buddhist Education has crossed the Indian subcontinent, and has been established in several countries like Sri Lanka, Korea, Japan, China, Mongolia, Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, Singapore, Malaysia, Tibet, et cetera, and made remarkable progress in the field of Buddhist education along with the insertion of modern subjects.

Buddhist Education System played a significant contribution to the field of Buddhist Literature. A huge and wide-ranging treasure of literature was produced in various languages several times. While Pāli is an archaic *Prākṛit* and it was the local language of the Magadha and neighboring⁵ areas during the Buddhist period.

Pāli is the primary language of the Tipitaka (Sanskrit: Tripitaka), and that of the sacred Script of the Buddhists. The most vital legendary works are the Tripitaka and Jātakas stories written initially in Pāli, thereafter huge literature has been created in Pure Sanskrit, Hybrid-Sanskrit, Tibetan, Chinese and several other languages

Nalanda Mahavihara was a very old Buddhist monastery and during that time education also imparted there. While Magadha was a very encouraging place for the starting point and development of Buddhism⁶

During the sixth and seven century⁷, the Chinese travelers Yuan-Chwang also known as Hiuen-Tsang(Xuanzang) visited here in 630-455 CE and his follower Hwui Li also studied at Nalanda Mahavihara. Hiuen-Tsang writes thoroughly descriptions regarding Nālandā Mahāvihāra in his work “Si-Yu-Ki”.

There were many renowned scholars who played important works and contributions to the Buddhist Mahaviharas during different periods. Whereby, Āchārya Nāgārjuna was a very popular Buddhist philosopher during that time. According to the Xuanzang, Āchārya Nāgārjuna was the chief of Nālandā Mahāvihāra and accumulated a variety of texts. Mūlamādhyamika-Kārikā (fundamental verses of the Middle Way) was the big works of Nāgārjuna⁸. While Āryādeva was a reputed teacher at Nālandā Mahāvihāra . According to the Tāranātha, Āryādeva dwelled at Nālandā Mahāvihāra during the period of King Chandragupta. Further, as per the Boston, the works of Āryādeva are separated into two parts, the first four texts connected to Sūnyavāda and further six texts associated with Tantric-shastra⁹. B.N. Mishra in his book title, Nālandā mentioned that Sāraha Rāhulabhadra was a teacher of Āchārya Nāgārjuna. He was the predecessor of Nāgārjuna in the abbot’s chair of Nālandā Mahāvihāra. Whereas, Rāhulabhadra was born in a Brahmin Family and a renowned scholar and teacher of Buddhist philosophy under the sovereignty of King Chandanapala of the Prachya¹⁰.

While Āchārya Ratnakara Santi was born in about 915 CE. He was the contemporary of the monk Prajñākaramati and also joined Vikramashila. He was invited by the king of Ceylon, After that he paid a visit to the Island to propagate the Buddhist faith¹¹. Similarly, another scholar Prajñākaramati was one of the best Pandits of Vikramashila Mahāvihāra. He was appointed as the southern gatekeeper of Vikramashila Mahāvihāra in the tenth century C.E¹² during the period of king Canaka¹³. While the Mahāvihāra has six gates and every gate is presided over by renowned scholars, those who test the knowledge of the students coming here for higher studies. In a similar way, Buddhajñāna or Buddha-Jñānapada was one of the oldest teachers of the Vikramashila Mahāvihāra. He was related to the Mahāvihāra the near the beginning stages of its development. After the death of Āchārya Haribhadra, Āchārya Buddha-Jñānapada has been appointed the royal priest of king Dharmapāla . In the same way, another Scholar Ratna Śrījñāna was born in Samantakoota on the beach of the Southern Sea in Ceylon. Ceylonese monks used to reside in an important place in the Vikramashila Mahāvihāra during the time of the Pala dynasty. He was a great Buddhist philosopher and his scholarly understanding of Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika Śāstra is referred to in his designs of Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika sutras.

In the same way, many renowned scholars played significant works and contributions in the field of Academics in the Ancient Buddhist Mahaviharas which are very significant for the modern universities of the world. We are mentioning the names of renowned scholars who played significant works and contributions in the field of education of Buddhist Mahaviharas; these are Āchārya Asaṅgh, Vasubandhu, Āchārya Shāntarakshita, Vimuktisena, Buddhaphalita, Dignāga, Guṇaprabhā, Bhāvaviveka, Chandrakirti, Shāntideva, Sthirmati, Chandragomi, Āchārya Shāntarakshita, Padamsambhava, Dharmakirti, Śīlabhadra, Xuanzang, Kamalasīla, Naropa, Buddhaghosa etcetra.

According to historians, the Nālandā Mahāvihāra controlled the entire world's knowledge and subjects were kept from every field of learning similar to Science, Astronomy, Medicine, Logic, Metaphysics, and Philosophy of different sects, Sāṃkhya, Yoga-sāstra, the Vedas and the Scriptures of Buddhism. During the period of Xuanzang, he personally visited Nālandā Mahāvihāra where there were ten thousand students and fifty hundred teachers living in this Mahāvihāra that time. He also mentioned that the entire teachers and students of Buddhist Mahāvihāra were men of great knowledge and capability, highly respected and renowned and they were very stern in observing the precepts and regulations of Mahāvihāra¹⁴. At that time very big library situated in a unique area has known as the *Dharmaganja*¹⁵ consisted of three vast libraries namely- *Ratna-Sāgara*, *Ratna- Nidhi*(*Ratnadadhi*), *Ratna- Rañjhikā*. While the libraries also used an essential catalog to effortlessly locate books associated with all subjects. The libraries offer a wider and deeper knowledge of diverse disciplines and educate the students for higher studies in different subjects.

The Vallabhi Mahāvihāra was also a great center of Theravada Buddhism at that time. While the Brahmanical teachings along with the doctrine of Buddhism are taught in this Mahavihara. A variety of subjects included in the curriculum of this Mahāvihāra were as the Tripitaka, Vedas, and the Upanishads, Political Science, Business Studies, Agriculture, Administration, Theology, Law, Economics and Accountancy etceteras. During the seventh century CE, the Chinese traveler, I-tsing visited and stated that the Vallabhi Mahāvihāra was a large center of education. While Jagadala Mahāvihāra was a great educational center of Vajrayana Buddhism. According to the book titled, *An Introduction to Buddhism*

*Esoterism*¹⁶ expressed that the teacher trains his student in the way in which he must practice the Vajrayana teachings.

At that time Āchārya Abhayakaragupta was appointed as the Āchārya of Vikramashila and Nālandā Mahāvihāra. During the tenure of king Rāmapāla, there were a thousand monks and students, and about one hundred and sixty teachers permanently dwelled in Vikramashila Mahāvihāra. While, the library of Vikramashila had a wealthy collection of enormous texts and manuscripts in Sanskrit, Prakrit and Tibetan language¹⁷.

However, the Vikramashila Mahāvihāra was a great thinker and learning center of Tantric Buddhism during the eighth century CE. During those times various Tibetan scholars visited Vikramashila Mahāvihāra and provided an arrangement of hostel facilities there. While the methods of teaching, selection procedure of teacher and students, rules and regulations and administration were followed the same as of the Nālandā Mahāvihāras

Further, the teachings of the Buddha have much significance in the modern world since we can see his teachings is still appropriate and encourage millions of people around the world yet during the present time. Buddhist Education guides us to identify our responsibilities for each relationship of our life. We learn the values, skills and discipline required to fulfill our roles in society in the family. While the entire relationship can be developed by generosity, kindness and moderate speech and responsive quality of the mind. Buddhism also provides insight into the very nature of human beings. Buddhist education can become the pillars of both the household and spiritual life. Now alcohol consumption, smoking and using drugs are the most common problems in modern society, however, these problems can be resolved by practicing Buddhist Education. Buddhism thought always puts stress that true pleasure got through meditation without drinking alcohol, smoking and using drugs.

The Ancient Buddhist Education System can become an example for the present generation in particular and give imperative rare material for the present generation and posterity. Now the Buddhist Education has crossed the boundaries of the Indian- subcontinent, and established in several countries approximating China, Mongolia, Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, Singapore, Malaysia, Tibet, Srilanka, Japan etcetera, and made tremendous progress and development with the insertion of many modern subjects related to Buddhism.

Lastly, we can say that the pedagogy and the teaching tools implemented and practiced in the ancient Buddhist Mahāvihāras (Universities) are still significant in the modern world.

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