

Inclusive Buddhism and Holistic Education in Early South India: a Historical Analysis

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Introduction

Buddhism has often been considered as an inclusive faith in India and South India in particular for more than a millennium, which seemed to have left a profound influence on the history, culture and identity of its people. It is significant to note that of the eighteen sects of Buddhism in India, nine had their base in South India and Andhradesa in particular. The trajectories of Buddhist monastic education and the ways in which its prominent scholars such as Acharya Nagarjuna, Bhavaviveka, Dinnaga and Buddhaghosha made an incredible mark on the educational institutes such as Nagarjunakonda and Amaravati, socio-cultural and intellectual life of the people of India as well as South India, need to be revisited largely due to the changing dynamics of historiography of Buddhism and its education. The Buddhist educational rituals or saṃskāras such as Pabbaja (initial ordination) and Upasampadā (final ordination) demonstrate how the acquisition of absolute knowledge, development of personality and formation of character became inalienable parts of Buddhist monastic education.

Literature Review

In the Samantapasadika text, Andh and Tamil people together, were referred to as Mlecchas. The Suttanipata story of Bavari mentions Assaka as an Andhra janapada. The Kumbha and Samkicca Jatakas refer to the Andhakas as Andhra country. The Bhimasena and the Serivanija jatakas describe the Bodhisattva's journey to Andhradesa.

P. V. Bapat's (1956) book titled as "2500 years of Buddhism", gives a short account of Buddhism in the last 2500 years, from its origin, the life and teachings of Buddha as well as modern revival of Buddhism. It reflects the intellectual life of the monasteries.

Sukumar Dutt's work (1962) entitled "Buddhist Monks and Monasteries of India", provides a vast amount of material concerning the institutional history of the Sangha.

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Significance

The basic difference between the Vedic and Buddhist education is that in the Vedic concept of life and education, the salvation comes through successful completion of life's mission, i. e. Chaturāśrama by discharging duties and responsibilities. But the sole aim of Buddhist life and education being the attainment of Nirvāna, there is little value attached to family life.

Methodology

This study argues, Buddhist monastic educational teaching methods, most notably, oral method, self-study, debate and discussion, question and answer and many other methods reveal how the relationship between the teachers and the students through direct, cordial and intimate relationship, played a crucial role in making the Buddhist monastic education inclusive and holistic.

Results and Discussion

The present research study comprehensively investigates the Buddhist monastic education in South India, with the historical perspective and particularly in the ancient period. The Buddhists have been the first to establish a well-organized and world-renowned monastic community in early South India. The main aim of monastic monks is to follow the footsteps of Buddha. One cannot attain the enlightenment with an empty mind, so it is necessary to be knowledgeable. The monastery not only imparts religious education but also teaches medicine, fine arts, Tibetan grammar, philosophy, logic, Maths, geography, science and astrology. Besides getting education, the monks also perform many administrative as well as religious duties of the monastery.

The ancient Buddhist education in India, can be equally well applied to ancient education in Ceylon. Nagarjunakonda and Abhayagiri are prime educational institutes and great monasteries. The Abhayagiri Vihara Complex is situated about 85 metres above mean sea level to northward from the ancient city of Anuradhapura. The Pali commentaries of the fifth century the term Mahavihara was never used for any place other than the Great Monastery at Anuradhapura. The Abhayagiri Vihara was established by the King Vattagamini Abhaya (103 BC and 89 -77 BC). Towards the 7th century AD, this Vihara had developed as a national and international centre consisting of four Mulas (faculties), namely, Uttara Mula, Vahadu Mula, Kapara Mula and Mahanetpa Mula, with branches established in South and Southeast Asia.

Nagarjunkonda, yielded more than thirty Buddhist monasteries and vihars of different sects, some monasteries were directly established by Sri Lankan

Mahayana sects. Inscriptions have provided the names of at least four Buddhist sects inhabiting here viz., Aparā-mahāvīnaseliya, Bahusrutiya, Mahīśasaka and the Mahāvihāra-vasin. The Mahīśasakas and Mahāvihāra-vasins, a sect from Sri Lanka, both were represented the orthodox tradition.

Buddhist Educational Samskaras

The Buddhist period was also characterized by numerous educational rituals or samskaras. While dealing with this educational samskāras, we find that these samskāras had its own importance. It purifies and regulates the life of a student. The main Buddhist educational rituals are Pabbaja (initial ordination) and Upasampadā (final ordination). The Pravrajyā or going forth were the preparatory ordination for education in Buddhist system of education. After the twelve years of education, a novice was allowed to perform the final ordination. He was now learned competent bhikṣu, who had completed twelve years of education. So, he must enter in to the Saṅgha as a Monk to continue his education. The Upasampadā was performed before the entire Saṅgha. The student himself announced absolute submission to the Order. He had to face a volley of questions. The house gave a verdict and the eligible candidate was declared a graduate. In this way the Buddhist Upasampadā or final ordination was completed.

Educational Methods

Oral, debating and discussion methods were very popular in the Buddhist system of education. So, during that period, oral device was main method of teaching. Later debating and discussion and other methods are also become popular. The Buddhist education system tries to make their students of sound mind with developed personality. That means, the student should be well-behaved, respectful towards their teachers and above all the students should know duties and responsibilities. Besides, they should respect the culture and heritage and try to preserve the same.

Conclusion

The monasteries were the only source of education for the people of early South India in the ancient times. Presently, the region has school, colleges and universities, which has affected the Buddhist monastic education in the region. They work for the monastic centre without any expectations from the management or authorities or from the students. Although students and their families help these monks financially and attaining religious merit in return.

Keywords: Buddhism, Inclusive Education, Samskāras, South India, Viharas

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