

Opportunities and Challenges of Buddhist Education –by Deepika Bhandari

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Abstract

“A review on Modern Buddhist Education: Opportunities and Challenges” is a study to review the Buddhist education. It is difficult to review the challenges and opportunities of overall Buddhist education; however, the review has started its research. It is a qualitative library research based on available resources. Thus it has not tested any hypothesis and visited field to collect data. In conclusion, there are many opportunities and challenges in Buddhist education in postmodern world. Thus everyone has to grab the opportunities and minimize the challenges as mentioned in the study.

Keywords: Buddhist Education, Challenges, Opportunities

Introduction

Buddhism is spreading all over the world from Lumbini Nepal, for the enlightenment of the entire humanity. So it is lighting or spreading the lights from Nepal and India to many other countries throughout Asia. It is a civilization. There are three general waves of Buddhism. One, the first wave, went to Southeast Asia, the so called Theravada Buddhism. It is found in Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Laos and Cambodia, a little bit in Vietnam. The second wave went through Central Asia to China and from China to Japan and Korea, and down to Vietnam. The third wave that went later from India to Tibet and from Tibet to Mongolia, and throughout Central Asia and to the various Mongol groups who came to Russia, so the Buryats, the Kalmyks and also a Turkic group the Tatars (Bodhi, 24). So Buddhism has a wide diversity, and that is a bit simplifying, because within that there were various waves.

In the twenty-first century, Buddhism has a great deal to offer at global level, which is not restricted to one culture, because Buddhism was never restricted to one culture. But in these areas of Buddhist science and Buddhist philosophy that it can offer, methods for developing concentration, methods for developing more discipline. How do we develop discipline? You develop discipline by seeing that there are many disadvantages not to have discipline, and seeing how actually it hinders

you not to have discipline. Deal with motivation and so on (Bodhi, 56). Why would you want to set limits on how often you look at your text messages – this sort of things? Certain limits have to be placed there, that type of discipline and the ethical discipline to take others seriously, not just as people that you can turn on and off with your machine.

The critical goal of Buddhist education is to attain wisdom. Buddhism believes that the ultimate wisdom is inherent in each person's nature, stating that everyone has the potential to achieve that wisdom. However, the majorities are distracted by misunderstanding and misconceptions, therefore, are incapable of being aware of this kind of potential. In this sense, Buddhism aims to teach us recognize the intrinsic part of human nature. Buddhist wisdom varies from individual to individual which is related to the degree of one's delusion and there is no inherent difference among all human beings. Buddhism helps us remove delusion and regain the wisdom to remove confusions of individual potential and achieve happiness. Buddhism considers deep meditation and concentration as the crucial factors in order to attain wisdom. Buddhism teaches the way of meditation and the mindfulness of concentration to attain the state of blissful wisdom.

Buddhism values first-hand experience higher than theory. Buddhist education is mainly concerned with handing over of the factual knowledge. The Buddha taught a path of personal inquiry to put an end to suffering, and that path depends on direct experience. Therefore, the traditional methods of Buddhist mind-training i.e. contemplation and meditation, could be taught at schools. The Buddhist view on the integral nature of human experience, where the intellectual and emotional sides of mind are equally appreciated, is highly relevant in the modern world, which is overly fragmented. Since the full meaning of the Buddhist texts and teachings is not fully understood before one has direct experience in meditation, meditation is an indispensable part of Buddhist education. In fact, Buddhist educational institutions, if they have not been tainted by the values of the West, could well define themselves as schools of mental training. The usefulness of mindfulness methods in developing the “seven factors of enlightenment” (such as peace, joy, concentration etc.) has been demonstrated even outside the context of Buddhist education (Bhikkhu, 78). It has been found indispensable for realizing true education in general.

The development of the mind is central theme in terms of Buddhist Education which helps one to discriminate, for example, between wholesome and unwholesome thoughts and actions. In terms of practicing and internalizing the Dhamma, the affective domain of learning and training is without question an essential ingredient and is linked to harnessing the pool of information and

facts in the Dhamma that is to be relied upon for one to arrive at sound conclusions, decisions and actions in our daily life.

The ultimate goal of Buddhist education is to destroy ignorance, the root cause of suffering. Specifically, education in a Buddhist sense should seek to eliminate from the students' mind a variety of wrong views, which form the theoretical basis of ignorance. These purely conceptual contents of the mind comprise the so-called "imputed ignorance" (parikalpita-avidyā), as opposed to the "innate ignorance" (sahaja-avidyā). It is "conceptual" or "acquired" ignorance. Innate ignorance cannot be accessed until there is conceptual ignorance (or misconceptions), so first one has to eliminate the "imputed" ignorance, i.e. wrong views (Baruwa, 98).

Problem Statement

The quality of the curriculum or dedication to learning about ourselves, in the world, is not a consideration. The education system becomes increasingly dominated by 'market considerations'; the work of academics is measured in terms 'customer satisfaction' offered. For example, large multinational companies can sponsor courses, which raise significant questions about the objectivity and value of the final diploma. Students are less concerned about the skills they obtain, but more with the diploma they receive. Pioneering and critical thinking (Bhikkhu, N. 34), the traditional driving force in educational establishments is costly, time-consuming and dangerous since it challenges the status quo. Is there not then, a contradiction between the ultimate goal of Buddhist education, i.e. to attain liberation from the misconception of a permanent self, and the purpose of modern Western education, which is to strengthen and secure one's mistaken sense of identity? How can we resolve this contradiction in the context of modern Buddhist education?

Objective:

The study aims to offer four interlinking approaches to solve the dilemma: Transforming students' motivation, presenting formal education as skillful means, Emphasizing the role of meditation, and opening up new vistas of learning.

Methodology:

Methodologically the study is a literature review based on library method. It is general review of available literature in different sources.

Results

Transforming students' motivation, Formal education as skillful means, the importance of meditation, opening up new vistas of learning, The Challenges and Opportunities of Modern Buddhist Education have been identified from literature review for discussion.

Discussions

Transforming students' motivation

Modern society may put great stress on students to obtain some definite goal in life, such as a good job, social status, career, etc. These social expectations will inevitably affect students, even if they are well-motivated and genuinely interested in Dharma. Many of them will wonder how to integrate their Buddhist learning with survival in modern society. Though there are different means to address this question, one important aspect of the solution is to transform students' motivation. Relying on the basic Buddhist truths of impermanence, 'suffering' and selflessness— students' minds should be turned towards higher values: contentment, spiritual liberation and kindness to others – so that, rather than trying to conform with the expectations of modern society in order to gain something in return, they might begin to think about how they can contribute to well-being in their society. Their self-concern may thus be transformed into concern for others (Baruwa, 34).

Formal education as skillful means

One of the ways to counterbalance the modern view of education as life investment is to emphasize its traditional Buddhist use as skillful means. Buddhist institutions and forms of education may appear in conformity with the world, but their main function is to provide the opportunity for studying the Dharma, which is beyond this world. Any formal qualification (such as a diploma in Buddhist studies) is merely a by-product of one's study rather than an end in itself. Competence in matters relating to the Dharma does not depend on any formal recognition, nor does a diploma obtained in 3-5 years of formal study guarantee such competence. Advancement in the higher trainings of morality, concentration and wisdom cannot be objectively measured or evaluated by the quantitative standards of modern education. While maintaining humility to the Buddhist tradition, Dharma studies should be pursued in the spirit of free inquiry and free from the competitiveness that often characterizes mainstream education. UNESCO's work encompasses educational development from pre-school through to higher education, including technical and vocational education and training, non-formal education and literacy (Schumacher, 77). The

Organization focuses on increasing equity and access, improving quality, and ensuring that education develops knowledge and skills in areas such as sustainable development, so through emphasizing the role of Buddhist education as skillful means, we can safeguard students against over-expectation and encourage them to use their precious study opportunity to the best of their abilities.

The importance of meditation

In contrast with modern education, Buddhism values first-hand experience higher than theory. Buddhist education should be concerned with more than just handing over factual knowledge. The Buddha taught a path of personal inquiry to put an end to suffering, and that path depends on direct experience. Therefore, the traditional methods of Buddhist mind-training – contemplation, meditation – could be taught at schools. The Buddhist view on the integral nature of human experience, where the intellectual and emotional sides of mind are equally appreciated, is highly relevant in the modern world, which is overly fragmented. Buddhism presents a path of mind-training, and education is nothing but that path. Since the full meaning of the Buddhist texts and teachings is not fully understood before one has direct experience in meditation, meditation is an indispensable part of Buddhist education. In fact, Buddhist educational institutions, if they have not been tainted by the values of the West, could well define themselves as schools of mental training (Bhikkhu, B. 334). The usefulness of mindfulness methods in developing the “seven factors of enlightenment” (such as peace, joy, concentration etc.) has been demonstrated even outside the context of Buddhist education. It has been found indispensable for realizing true education in general.

Opening up new vistas of learning

Finally, to encourage active Buddhist engagement in everyday affairs, we must open up new vistas of learning. Harkening back to spirit of the great Indian Buddhist universities such as Malanda, we should try to apply the Buddhist principles in all walks of life, testing their truth in different disciplines. Just as Buddhist philosophy in India developed in constant dialogue with other schools of philosophy, we should also try to be at constant dialogue with science and the other religions. The Buddhist wisdom of dependent origination can bring new perspectives to many social, economic and ethical issues that humanity faces today. Moreover, it has been shown that scientific notions of cause and effect in the natural world agree with the Buddhist understanding, which can potentially enrich the natural sciences with an ethical dimension. (Waldron) Buddhist education

therefore should not be concerned with simply transmitting the knowledge and methods of the past, but should also be creative in the application of Buddhist principles. It is mainly the task of Buddhist institutions of higher education to keep the spirit of Buddhist wisdom alive and turn it to the benefit of humankind. Viewed from this perspective, Buddhist education has a practical role to play in the modern world (Bhikkhu, N. 45).

So, Buddhism has a great deal to offer in terms of its insights into the mind, and hence into its development through education. With its emphasis on ‘things as they are’, it provides a path, an individual and collective means of inquiring into our minds, and the arising conditions that are invaluable in these days of global chaos. In this way, it can enable young people to work towards wisdom rather than knowledge, and find a way of working together harmoniously, co-creating institutions based on compassion rather than greed. With new motivation, meditation, and an emphasis on skillful means, Buddhism needs to find new forms for helping break through ignorance and open up new vistas of learning.

The Challenges and Opportunities of Modern Buddhist Education

Buddhist Education for Sustainable development

Education for Sustainable Development allows every human being to acquire the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values necessary to shape a sustainable future. Education for Sustainable Development means including key sustainable development issues into teaching and learning; for example, climate change, disaster risk reduction, biodiversity, poverty reduction, and sustainable consumption. It also requires participatory teaching and learning methods that motivate and empower learners to change their behavior and take action for sustainable development. Education for Sustainable Development consequently promotes competencies like critical thinking, imagining future scenarios and making decisions in a collaborative way. Education for Sustainable Development requires far-reaching changes in the way education is often practiced today. UNESCO is the lead agency for the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development.

The modern economic notion that more production of goods would make people happy is misplaced. The Buddhist economy is based on the motto of happiness and welfare of maximum number of people (*bahujanahitāya bahujanasukhāya*). Buddhist Economics does not necessarily see unbridled modernism and westernization as a positive phenomenon as it is responsible for

many of the major problems that we face today. A modern Buddhist scholar, for instance, has pointed out that “Modernity is rejected because it is seen as a form of life that has in a short period of time despoiled the landscape and done irreparable damage to the environment. That is, karmic effects sometimes catch up with people via their environment. It is thus said that, if a king and his people act unrighteous, this has a bad effect on the environment and its gods, leading to little rain, poor crops and weak, short-lived people. This message is also strongly implied by the Aggañña Suttanta of the Dīgha Nikāya, which shows how in the beginning nature was bountiful, but it became less so when humans began to take greedily from it.

In thus Buddhist approach to social and economic development, the primary criterion governing policy formulation must be the well-being of members of the society as a whole. Production must serve the real needs of the people, not the demands of the economic system. In such a system, economic development would be guided not by maximum consumption but sane and rational consumption furthering human well-being. Buddhism promotes a wide distribution of basic necessities so that no one has to suffer deprivation as deprivation is the root cause of social conflict. Thus, talking about the cause of social conflict, the Buddha pointed out that, “goods not being bestowed on the destitute poverty grew rife; from poverty growing rife stealing increased, from the spread of stealing violence grew apace, from the growth of violence, the destruction of life became common”. Hoarding wealth in any form is looked down upon in Buddhism and if a wealthy person were to enjoy his wealth all by himself only, it would be a source of failure for him. In fact, pride of wealth or economic snobbery is given in Buddhism as a cause of one’s downfall. As pointed out by Fromm, the present system generates greed and selfishness in which personal success is valued more highly than social responsibility.

By pointing out that the vulgar chase of luxury and abundance is the root-cause of suffering, Buddhism encourages restraint, voluntary simplicity, and contentment. “The cultivation and expansion of needs is the antithesis of wisdom. It is also the antithesis of freedom and peace. Every increase of needs tends to increase one’s dependence on outside forces over which one cannot have control, and therefore increases existential fear. Only by a reduction of needs can one promote a genuine reduction in those tensions which are the ultimate causes of strife and war”. Thus, Buddhist economics based on ideals such as being content with little, avoiding wastefulness, voluntary simplicity i.e., fewness of desires (*appicchata*), and contentment (*santutthi*) aspires to

pave the road to peace and happiness. Contentment is the mental condition of a person who is satisfied with what he has or the position in which he finds himself (*santussamāno itarītarena*).

From the Buddhist point of view, economic and moral issues cannot be separated from each other. From the Buddhist point of view mere satisfaction of economic needs without spiritual development can never lead to contentedness among people. Just as poverty is the cause of much crime, wealth too is responsible for various human ills. In the consumer society wealth is merely seen from a materialistic point of view. Moreover, wealth must be earned only through righteous and moral means. Generosity (*dāna*) and liberality (*cāga*) are always linked in Buddhism with virtue. Moreover, by doing so one gets rid of selfishness and becomes more acceptable to others because “one who gives makes many friends”. It is not necessary to have much to practice generosity because giving from one’s meager resources is also considered very valuable. Generosity is one of the important qualities that make one a gentleman. The Buddha compares the man who righteously earns his wealth and shares it with the needy to a man who has both eyes, whereas the one who only earns wealth but does no merit is like a one-eyed man. To build up a healthy society, therefore, liberality and generosity have greatly to be encouraged.

Challenges and Opportunities of Buddhist Education in Europe

Buddhism has become quite widespread and well-established in Europe. There are a large number of Buddhist centers in almost all countries, extensive study and practice programs, including online study with written, audio and video teachings, as well as retreat facilities, publishing houses, programs for children, hospices, and so forth. Study and practice materials are available to a varying extent in most of the European languages. The various Buddhist organizations cooperate among themselves, with most countries having Buddhist Unions, as well as a European Buddhist Union to coordinate their efforts.

This is not the occasion to document everything that has developed over the last decades. Suffice it to say that more can be done in all these areas. Let me focus, instead, on some of the challenges that Buddhism will need to address in the decades to come, both specifically in Europe, as well as worldwide. Let me also outline the opportunities these challenges present for the further development of Buddhism in Europe through the use of Internet technology. Many of the suggestions I shall offer are based on features we have developed to meet these challenges and already implemented on my website.

The Large Amount of Information Available

With an ever-increasing amount of translations and teachings available in books and online, students have difficulty in evaluating them. Especially baffling for newcomers is the question of where to begin. If one Googles a Buddhist topic such as karma, not only do millions of items come up, but a large number of them have nothing to do with Buddhism will also appear on the screen. This makes it extremely difficult to find reliable information through the major online search engines. Moreover, all traditions of Buddhism are now readily available and students often study with more than one. This often results in confusion because of mixing everything together without understanding the distinctive features of each tradition.

These challenges provide an opportunity for the Buddhist Unions in each European language region to prepare websites and apps containing lists, with short resumes, of published and online written, audio and video Buddhist materials in their languages, together with their prices. These need to be arranged by both general and specific topics and levels of difficulty, for instance sutra, tantra, mahamudra, dzogchen, Theravada, Zen and so on, and within sutra, for instance, karma, bodhichitta, voidness, etc. The website could operate like a Wikipedia, overseen by an editorial staff. The technical staff could also create online search engines that locate terms only in specifically Buddhist websites.

The Large Number of Dharma Centers

Similarly, with so many Dharma centers from so many Buddhist traditions, not only Tibetan, available in many major European cities, it is also difficult for newcomers to decide where to go. It would be helpful if the Buddhist Unions in each country could provide online, in both website and app form, not just a list of the Buddhist centers in their countries and websites available in their languages, but also a description of the types of programs each provides and the costs for each. Because the expenses at many of these centers and websites are high, Dharma study has become increasingly more expensive. Despite reduced fees for those who are unable to pay in full, many people still cannot afford to take full advantage of the facilities offered. They need to be able to easily find programs that are free of charge.

The Wide Variety of Translations of Buddhist Terms

Perhaps the greatest challenge Dharma students face is the wide variety of translations used in each language for Buddhist technical terms, such as ye-shes. Because of this, students are unable to put together what they read or hear from various teachers and translators. Also, when students

encounter technical terms, such as “wisdom,” without also having the definitions, they often misunderstand them. The Tibetan glossaries and dictionaries presently available online are arranged according to the Tibetan terms and designed to provide translators information about how others have treated the specific terms. They are of little use to Buddhist students who don’t know Tibetan.

To meet this challenge, Buddhist teachers and translators into European languages need to provide in their written works the Tibetan and, if possible, also the Sanskrit for the major translation terms they use and they must try to use these translation terms consistently, also in their oral presentations. They also need to compile glossaries of these terms, together with the Tibetan and Sanskrit, plus their definitions (Schumacher, 35).

On the basis of these glossaries, an enormous online database of Buddhist technical terms and their definitions in the major European and Asian languages can then be created, both as a free-of-charge website and a free-of-charge app. It is important that all the major European languages are included in one database – English, Russian, German, French, Spanish, Portuguese and Italian – since many Europeans get a better understanding when they look at terms in several languages. By linking in the database each of the translation terms to the Tibetan original, it will then be possible for a user to key in a term they read in the work of one translator and then click to find how another translator translates and defines the same term. In this way, they can put together what they read in the works of both these translators and learn that they are discussing the same thing.

Multiple Languages

Although many Buddhist prayers, *sāadhanās* and *pujās* are available in most European languages, most study material is available in either only one or sometimes two European languages. The challenge is to make these study materials available in all the major European languages. If all the language versions are available online in one website, multilingual readers can toggle between languages to gain greater clarity (Badal, 2020).

Further, by making online transcripts of audio files accessible with a stationary audio player, listeners for whom the language spoken is a second language can follow the talks more easily. An additional benefit of providing online transcripts is that they are searchable with search engines, whereas audio and video files are not. Moreover, transcripts make the oral teachings available to deaf students and can more easily be translated into other languages.

Religious Harmony

To promote religious harmony, His Holiness the Dalai Lama emphasizes making correct information about each tradition available to the others. As a multi-religious, multilingual continent with many Middle Eastern and Asian immigrants, Europe can lead the way in fulfilling this aim. We need to prepare more translations of Buddhist works into the languages of the various Islamic countries and into the languages of the Southeast and East Asian countries in which the various other Buddhist traditions flourish. These translations need to include not only Indian scriptural texts and Tibetan commentaries, but also the teachings of modern masters, since these are often easier for lay people to understand.

But when we consider Buddhism as a religion, it can be basically studied in two ways: from within, or from without. Non-historical religions, in the European sense, those not rooted in the European culture are traditionally studied from without – that is, scientifically, objectively – without any emotional or personal involvement. As Europeans started to become fascinated with the [East] about two or three centuries ago, the eastern cultures became objects of scientific investigation.

Consequently, European universities developed the tradition of oriental scholarship, focusing mainly on the study of texts. Insofar as these texts are Buddhist, we may speak of the study of Buddhism in those institutions. However, these studies come under the rubric of linguistics or philology, or history of religion, and thus cannot be considered as examples of Buddhist education in the traditional sense – with textual studies as only part of the training. More recently, based on the study of various Buddhist sources and combining methods of philology and cultural anthropology, the science of Buddhology developed, which aims to study Buddhism in its historical context. Though these studies may greatly enhance our understanding of Buddhism, they do not go beyond the academic style of objective inquiry and, hence again, cannot rightly be characterized as Buddhism education. Individual development in a mental or spiritual sense, which is the ultimate goal of traditional Buddhist training, is clearly outside the scope of Western academia, which, thus cannot be expected to host Buddhist educational programs (Schumacher, 27). Now, about why it should exist. First, a fully qualified Buddhist education in Europe must meet two quite different sets of criteria: one set by the Buddhist tradition and another by western scholarship.

These two are not easy to bring into line. Generally speaking, Western standards are based on the objective measurability of one's knowledge and skills in a certain area, without much concern for

the rest of the person's demeanor. In the Buddhist sense, however, the development of skills and understanding goes hand in hand with personal advancement with morality, concentration – and these mental skills are not easy to measure. But more significantly, academic commitment demands impartiality towards one's object of study which is in striking contrast with what is expected in a traditional Buddhist school. So the basic difference between these two sets of expectations seems to lay in their respective understanding of the use of knowledge, that is: what knowledge is good for – that is, why we study. In Europe, it is shown by some post-modernist thinkers that knowledge is power, in the first place; so, it is a means to control and manipulate the world around us, ourselves, and the environment, and by objectifying one's field of study – rendering it manageable. Also, we define ourselves in relation to that object. Learning in the Buddhist sense is something quite different. It cannot be used to control or manipulate. (Quite on the contrary, it reveals the futility of these human concerns.)

All of this goes to show that Buddhism does not conform to our western categories and expectations of what a religious or scientific discipline should look like. This distinction between science and religion is a European cultural heritage, which can be traced to a split in between reason and faith – as Christian dogma failed to accommodate the findings of scientific observation. As the scientific method proved more and more successful in predicting the behavior of objects in the natural world, religious modes of understanding came to be discredited or relegated to a transcendent world. These two seem to have no relation to each other. This characteristically western duality is reflected in the epistemic compatibility between objective scientific study and subjective religious experience.

Conclusion

From the study, in general Buddhist Education is a practical, clear-cut, tried and tested holistic training programmer to be followed in one's daily life. It encompasses a method and technique of living to help one to meet the problems and challenges in life as well as to make the best of the limitless opportunities that life has to offer. When Buddhism is considered as a religion, it is reduced to a belief system; when it is treated as a science, it tends to be divested of its devotional aspect. So, institutionally speaking, the challenge for Buddhist education in Europe, in the 21st Century, seems to be to develop an institutional framework, which is free from the academic/religious distinction, and we should also devise programs which avoid one-sided emphasis on either intellectual or spiritual training, thus helping to restore the integrity of human

experience. In this sense, Buddhist Education is a holistic education programmer, based on the practice and practical application of the Dhamma. It is far from being an academic study to satisfy one's intellectual gratification. On the contrary, Buddhist Education calls for resolute self-effort and a firm self-commitment to not only learn but to also skillfully train oneself in the Teachings of the Buddha. As such, Buddhist Education engages all of one's faculties – the emotions as much as one's intellect and will. This is one of the main messages is: let us try to get rid of this duality! Spiritually speaking, our main challenge seems to be to heal.

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