

The Roles of Buddhist Monks on Monastic Education in Mandalay, Myanmar

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ABSTRACT

Buddhism an education leads learners gain a proper knowledge to understand the reality of life. Buddhist education has focus on the three sources of education; 1) associate with good teacher or good friend, 2) listening or learning, 3) wise attention or thinking and practicing or training. Educational systems are dependent on the system of knowledge. This knowledge cannot operate without wisdom. And then, wisdom becomes the principal goal of the education system. The goal of Buddhist education is to attain “wisdom” (paññā). The Buddhist monks have many roles in Theravāda Buddhism and Mandalay, Myanmar society. The roles of Buddhist monk on education are associated with two kinds of duties (dhūra) which are grandadhura (teaching and learning to Tipiṭaka) and vipassanādhura (practicing and training to threefold training).

Keywords: Roles of Buddhist monks; Monastic education; Mandalay.

Introduction

Buddhist education is more exceptional than other formal education systems because it is not only about knowledge but also Buddhist education emphasizes training people with their behavior covering physical, verbal and mental acts. Buddhist education is the most significant approach which makes a perfect person develop and be a responsible adult in society. The primary aim of Buddhist education is the development of the individual and the development of society.¹ The significance of Buddhist education can be seen after students graduate where it reflects in students' attitudes through behavior.

Buddhist education leads learners to gain proper knowledge to understand the reality of life. Education in the early Buddhist age was not dependent upon written literature. But, it was depended on memorize of the Buddha's teaching. The goal of Buddhist education is to attain "wisdom" (paññā).² The education in Buddhism is wide open and available to the people of life. Buddhist education must focus both in moral and mental, knowledge and wisdom, theory and practice accordingly.³ The main stress is given to have clear idea of Tipiṭaka. The word Tipiṭaka is the name given to the Buddhist sacred scriptures which means "three baskets".⁴ It consists of Sutta- the conventional teaching, and Vinaya- the disciplinary code, and Abhidhamma-the ultimate teaching.⁵

¹ Ratanasara. Havanpola, *Buddhist Philosophy of Education*, (Kelaniya: Vidyalyanka University, 1995), p. 17.

² Chin Kung. Master, *Buddhism as an Education*, (Singapore: Buddhadharma Education Association Inc, 1999), p. 4.

³ Nguyen Quy Hoang, *The Journal of International Buddhist Studies College (JIBSC)*, vol 1, "Higher Buddhist Education in Vietnam: Challenges and Solutions", (Ayutthaya, Thailand: Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, 2015), p. 56.

⁴ Narada, *The Buddha and His Teachings*, (Kula Lumpur: Publication of the Buddhist Missionary society, 1977), p. 272.

⁵ Sri Dhammananda. K. (ed.), *What Buddhists Believe*, (Taipei: The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation, 1993), p. 63.

The Meaning of Education

The word education is derived from the Pāli word “sikkhati” which means to learn, to train oneself, to practice i.e. “sikkhā” which means to study; “sikkhana” means learning, training.⁶ “Ugghaha” mean learning, “ugganhāna” means studying.⁷ The definition of education is to learn, to study, to train oneself. Buddhist education means bringing knowledge and skills to a person, enabling him to translate such knowledge and skills to appropriate situations in life, finally developing discipline, insight and wisdom.⁸ The meaning of Buddhist education is to outline the best life for people and to develop their faculties. It is to foster the highest degree of peoples’ excellence. It aims at all-round development of individuals. Education in Buddhism means to learn about Buddha’s teachings, understand themselves and make themselves most useful to society.

The word education is derived from the Latin word educare which means to bring forth. The word education means “the process of receiving or giving systematic instruction,” especially at a school or university i.e. a course of education. Education means the theory and practice of teaching.⁹ It means the development of habits, attributes and skills which help a man to lead a full and worthwhile life. Education means as a child who has received most of his education at home. Myanmar is a country which places great importance on education. Students need to increase the quality and quantity of education in schools. Education is used to transmit knowledge from the teachers to the learners. Education is what survives when

⁶ Buddhadatta Mahāthera, A. P, *Concise Pāli – English Dictionary*, (Aggārāma: University of Ceylon, 1955), pp. 296- 297.

⁷ Rhys Davids T. W. and William Stede (eds.), *The Pāli Text Society’s Pāli – English Dictionary*, (Oxford: PTS, 2009), p. 783.

⁸ Nandasena Ratnapala, *Buddhist Sociology*, (Delhi: Sri Satguru Publication, 1993), p. 117.

⁹ Judy Pearsall and Patrick Hanks (1st eds.) and Catherine Soanes and Angus Stevenson (2nd eds.), *Oxford Dictionary of English*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

what had been learnt has been forgotten.¹⁰ The ordinary meaning of education is a knowledge of letter.¹¹

The System of Buddhist Education

Theoretical Buddhist education and practical Buddhist education were the first system of Buddhist education in Theravāda Buddhism in Mandalay, Myanmar. Theravāda Buddhism in written form on palm leaves was introduced to Bagan district in the Mandalay region by Mahāthera Shin Arahan and King Anawrathā in the 11th century, Buddhasāsanā (Buddha's teaching) spread throughout the kingdom and Buddhist education developed in the entire territory. Buddha's doctrine and Buddhist literature was the principal role.¹²

Theory and practice are regarded as absolutely different and distinct. Theory is pure thought, while practice is the act of the person. Theory is essentially universal, practice is individual. Theory is thought, which discloses being or essence. Practice is action, which gives us real existence. The basic function of theories is to determine the direction of society. The results arrived at through practice become theory which finds application in the practical actions of the people.¹³

The basis of practice is learning and the benefit of practice is insight wisdom (vipassanāpaññā), knowledge of path (maggañāna), knowledge of fruit (phalañāna), happiness (sukha), peace (saṅti) and realization (nibbāna). This benefit can get only practice and training.

¹⁰ *Cambridge International Dictionary of English*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 442.

¹¹ Shriman Narayan (ed.), *The Basic Work: The Selected Works of Mahatama Gandhi*, vol 4, (Delhi: Navajivan Publishing House, 1968), p. 181.

¹² Nyo Me Aung and Nwe Nwe Yi, *The History and Development of Monastic Education*, (Yangon: University of Yangon, 2016), p. 26.

¹³ R. C. Pandeya and S. R. Bhatt (eds.), *Knowledge, Culture and Value; World Philosophy Conference*, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1989), pp. 224- 231.

Buddhist Education According to Tipiṭaka

Buddhist education literature or the “Pāli Canon” has three divisions called three baskets (Tipiṭaka). As the name suggests they are written in the pāli language. The baskets individually are called the Vinaya Piṭaka, the Sutta Piṭaka and the Abhidhamma Piṭaka.¹⁴ According to Tipiṭaka, there are two factors of Buddhist education. 1) External condition (paratoghosa- the teaching of others) and 2) Internal condition (yonisomanasikāra- wise reflection). There are three sources of wisdom with regard to Buddhism as follows:¹⁵ The three factors of Buddhist education are the basic roots 1) learning (suta), 2) thinking (cinta) and 3) training (bhāvanā) to help to develop knowledge and to attain wisdom. Sutamayapaññā: wisdom stemming from listening, learning and reading. Cintāmayapaññā: wisdom stemming from reflection and contemplation. Bhāvanāmayapaññā: wisdom stemming from further spiritual cultivation, practicing and training. The four factors of Buddhist education are the basic roots 1) good teacher (kalyānamitta), 2) listening (suta), 3) thinking (cinta or yonisomanasikāra) and 4) practicing (bhāvanā) to help to develop knowledge and to attain wisdom.

Monastic Education for Monks and Lay People

The term “monastic” means relating to monks or relating to monasteries or connected with monks or monasteries. The unit of the monastic educational system was thus the organization of young bhikkhus or monks living under the Principle of monasteries of a common teacher or ācariya or upajjhāya. Monks in Myanmar have a long tradition of providing education for rural young monks and novices. Monastic education was the norm in the sixth period and to promote monastic education.¹⁶ Monasteries were the only places where people

¹⁴ Pragati Sahni, *Environmental Ethics in Buddhism; A Virtues Approach*, (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2008), p. 7.

¹⁵ Thittilla. Ashin (trans.), *Vibhaṅgha: The Book of Analysis*, (Oxford: PTS, 2002), p. 410.

¹⁶ International Crisis Group, *Buddhism and State Power in Myanmar*, (Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2017), p. 21.

could send their children for education. Education at that time in principle meant the study of morality as understood in the Buddhist religion; it was about “the development of moral and spiritual character” here and hereafter.¹⁷ Educational systems are dependent on a system of knowledge. This knowledge cannot operate without wisdom; consequently, wisdom becomes the principal goal of the education system. A system of Buddhist education was changed by Venerable Mahārathasāra and that pedagogy or system was regarded as the best instructions for learners until now. Parents sent their sons to a monastery to receive education, usually aged six to ten and the exam was when they were 13 years old. These boys were known as kyaung thar, “student” (though this term applies only to “temple boys” nowadays). Students received instruction in reading and writing in Myanmar.

Buddhist monastic education centers teach fundamental Buddhist teachings such as 1) Maṅgalasutta, 2) Siṅgālovadasutta, 3) Sīla. These fundamental Buddhist teachings focus on personal development in cultivating morals, educational and behavioral management. This education gives emphasis to moral, mental and physical development and also diverts the students towards and guide them to follow it.¹⁸

According to Miṅgalasutta, the Buddha delivered all moral virtues into thirty-eight rules. The Pāli word “mingalar” is a very beautiful sound to Buddhist people’s ears. It is well known throughout the world today as a term of greeting by the people of Myanmar. If these maṅgalas are practiced, one can become a good human being for learner’s country, family and society, and also for learner’s present and future life. Should lay people learn the Vinaya? The Buddha teaches that one should be well-versed in Vinaya (vinayo ca susikkhito).

Siṅgālovādasutta includes the avoid fourteen evil ways are the most important factor to evaluate social behavior form that lay people have done various factors or Buddhist ethics. The Buddha explained what was actually meant by worshipping different directions: The way to worship different directions was to fulfil one’s duty and responsibility towards

¹⁷ Dhammasami (Khammai), *Between Idealism and Pragmatism: A Study of Monastic Education in Burma and Thailand from the Seventeenth Century to the Present*, (Oxford: Oxford University, 2004), p. 42.

¹⁸ Roger Bischoff, *Buddhism in Myanmar: A Short History*, (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1995), p. 105.

different people in society.

This morality (sīla) is not concern with social life but only for purification of mind. It prevents one from doing immoral actions and unwholesome things. There are two kinds of morality (sīla) in the Buddhism: They are cāritta sīla and vāritta sīla. 1) cāritta sīla means abiding by the rules of conduct (carana) and performing one's duties and responsibilities. They are many rule concerned with respecting of old aged people and polite manner. The morality (sīla) can bring harmony between human beings and can maintain the good in social community. 2) virattī sīla is called five precepts are instructed to practice and apply in daily life.

Curriculum of Buddhist Education

Curriculum means a course of study in a school, university, college and temple. This curriculum includes subjects such as student's development, learning theories, and practical subjects of Buddhist education. In Mandalay, the fundamental content of Buddhist educational curriculum is the same in all education centers with educational theory, practical experience and teaching methods. The curriculum and learning processes of every subject are integrated with Buddhist principles and utilized to continuously develop students. Including the Buddha's teaching to be a part of life through learning curriculum would be preparation of Pāli literature. The internal learning factors are applied to the learning activities and curriculum, which starts the learning process according to Tipiṭaka and threefold training (tisikkhā). Buddhism has a threefold training relating to precepts, meditation, and wisdom.

Roles of Buddhist Monks

Buddhist monks have many roles in Theravāda Buddhism in Mandalay, Myanmar society. The Buddhist monks' roles are significant for Buddhāsāsanā (the teaching of the Buddha) for lay people. The roles of Buddhist monks in education are associated with two kinds of duty (dhūra). Those who are primarily supposed to teach are called ganthadhūra. Granthadhūra meaning 'having books as their burden or duty'. The others are called vipassanādhura. Vipassanādhura meaning 'having meditations as their burden or duty'.¹⁹

¹⁹ Richard F. Gombrich, *Buddhist Precept and Practice, Traditional Buddhism in the Rural Highlands of Ceylon*, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, Private Limited, 2008), p. 315.

Buddhist monks obtain knowledge and wisdom, and they can share those for good use to serve the needs of their own monastery in a village. The Buddhist monks have to take care of the monasteries or monastic education centers by cleaning, chanting, and offering of all things to bhikkhus (Saṅgha) in Theravāda countries. Buddhist monks and lay people study dhamma and vinaya or dhamma and practice.

Some Buddhist traditions are changing to modern practice and some traditions are lost in Myanmar. So, Buddhist monks have two kinds of duties. Not only one duty to teach the good Dhamma and Vinaya, but also another duty of their own practice and to control other lay people or meditators.

Roles of Saṅgha or Government to Monastic Education

In Myanmar, Buddhist monks' roles are already studied to monastic education of Saṅgha organization or government. The Saṅgha organization or government has divided the monastic education into the present Buddhist education, as follows: 1) Tipiṭaka education, 2) Dhammācariya education, 3) Pathamapyan education, 4) Nikāya education, 5) Abhidhamma education and Visuddhimagga education, 6) Monastic education, and so on.

The Role of Buddhist Monks as Teacher

Buddhist monks who have the role of teacher, have to teach Buddha's teachings or Tipiṭaka. The roles of a teacher are most important for Buddhist education centers because students can acquire knowledge arising from learning. Buddhist monks have many teaching roles in Theravāda Buddhism. Buddhist monks have the role of teaching as follows: 1) Role of teaching like a snake, 2) Role of teaching for liberation and 3) Role of teaching to be our treasure.

Role of Buddhist Monks as Students

According to the role of Buddhist monks as students, there are eight causes and conditions that lead to knowledge and wisdom, and also related to learning or teaching an educated society. The roles of students are attending class: listening, thinking, asking, reciting, investigating, taking notes, learning and brings.

Role of Vipassanādhūra Monks

The threefold training and the four kinds of development, which are key principles and pertain directly to education. Learning and acquiring knowledge is one aspect of the Pāli word *sikkhā* (threefold training), which means self-training and self-development, so that one acquires the capability to live a good and virtuous life. Our lives depend on learning and training.²⁰ To live a good life one needs to make the effort to improve one's life. one needs to engage in study and training. Training or education is a lifelong pursuit, to be undertaken at all times. It is not limited to the education center. This shows the vital relationship between people and their education. Education (learning and training) becomes one and the same with living a good, virtuous life. Education becomes the primary activity of one's life.

Conclusion

Education is teaching and learning, practicing and training, also answer education is knowledge of letter. Buddhist education is exceptional than other formal education systems because it is not only about the knowledge but also Buddhism is emphasizing on training people with their behaviors covering physical, verbal and mental acts. Theory is pure thought, while practice is the act of the person. Theory is essentially universal, practice is individual. Theory is thought, which discloses being or essence. Practice is action, which gives us real existence. The basis of practice is learning and the benefit of practice is insight wisdom (*vipassanāpaññā*), knowledge of path (*maggañāna*), knowledge of fruit (*phalañāna*), happiness (*sukha*), peace (*saṅti*) and realization (*nibbāna*).

²⁰ P.A. Payutto (Somdet Phra Buddhaghosacariya), *Education Made Easy*, Robion Moore (trans.), (Bangkok, Thailand: Phli-dhamm Publishing, 2002), p. 4.

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