

BUDDHIST EDUCATIONAL CONCEPTS WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO SIKKIMESE MONASTIC EDUCATION

-Mr. S. N. Agnihotri

The system of education is very old and continuous one in our context and we are fortunate enough to have preserved it despite all bogs and storms of adverse times. Since the educational system was basically oral, known as 'sruta parampara' it was handed down from one generation to another with unremitting zeal. The Guru felt relieved after having poured out his knowledge into a competent and able disciple (sisya).

The educational system has been geared to preserving the socio-cultural values of a given society in a given era. It has been subservient to the goals of each society. As such each educational system was found suitable to one and wanting in another. It went on changing from time to time as per needs and requirements of each society. It is therefore, quite truly felt that no definition of education can be said to be all exhaustive to suit for all times and all climes. It undergoes change as per demands of the time. The word education etymologically means that which is led out from the word 'educa' meaning thereby that the different potentialities of a pupil are drawn out which lie in dormant stage. The education thus helps him actualize his own potentialities. But the process of drawing out refers to pupils internalized potentialities independent of our outside world. Therefore education will not simply mean drawing out, it will further require something to be poured in from outside too. It is because no individual is free to grow all by himself. He has to face the strife and the stress of the society in the process of his development. As such he cannot remain immune to social change. Keeping in view the inadequacy of above definition one requires the broader view to be comprehensive enough to convey the concept of education. The Sanskrit word 'Vidya' has been used in five different sense from the root 'vid' to convey the total gamut of its implication:

1. Vid Janana; to know, to regard 'veti', 'ved'.
2. 'Vid Sattayami', to happen, to be 'vidyate'.
3. 'Vid Labhe', to get, to find, to feel 'vindati', 'vindate'.
4. 'Vid vicarane' to discuss, to consider, 'Vinkte'.
5. 'Vid Cetana- akhyana-nivasesu' to feel to, dwell, 'Vedyate'.

(Foreword, L. O. Joshi Jt. Secretary 'in' Education in Ancient India by Ved Mitra, Delhi, 1964)

Thus Vidya connotes different aspects of this multifarious concept of education very vividly. The another word 'Siksha' is also used to convey the process of learning. As per Sanskrit sutra 'Siksa Vidyopadanam' which means 'Siksa' is the upadan of Vidya i.e. something that serves the attainment of 'Vidya' which is knowledge. The other words found in ancient Indian education are 'Adhyayana' and 'Vinaya'. The Adhyayana means 'to go near' and express the idea of pupils going so some teacher for education. Thus initiation ceremony 'Upanayana' was instituted which literally means 'Taking near'. The word 'Vinaya' found in classical literature means 'to lead out in a particular way' i.e. trained in a particular way. The first meaning is identical with that of 'education' (i.e. to draw out) and second one expresses the idea of the formation of character. Thus the two aspects of

Bulletin of Tibetology

education individual and social come under its way. The concept of education has so broadened now that it encompasses every field of human activity denoting it by different names at different places. Now we have technical, industrial, social and many other types of education being talked of these days in addition to academic and moral one. The life has been so revolutionized by science and technology that learned and lay men both require to have education for their day to day life. The farmer needs to have it for knowing how to sow the new seeds and when to irrigate, how much manure to give and what pesticide to use to save his crop. Similarly a mechanic has to acquaint himself in the new tools and their operational techniques to earn his bread. As such each one of us has compelling need to go on learning something new and newer things in this fast changing world.

Now coming to the concept of education which can be said to be Buddhist monastic system we find it to be essentially religious one. R.K. Mookerjee remarks 'as the Vedic system revolved round sacrifice, the Buddhist system revolved round monastery'. Since Buddhism is an institutionalized religion, it has its founder, its philosophy its canons, rules and regulations, its scriptures and followers where the whole life was saturated with religion. The one important function of institutionalized religion is that it is proselytizing in nature with a view to bringing in more and more people within its fold. As such education becomes *sine qua non* for this proselytizing activity. The monks were required to be grounded in teachings of Buddha and the methodology to impart it. As such a well planned training was a must before they were allowed to embark upon the course of converting the people to the new faith. The education started as a part of training for the monks and, undoubtedly it was sectarian one at its incipient stage. Only the Buddhist monks got the opportunity to learn and the leisure to teach it. However in course of time it had to come out of its cloistered inbred character to be open to others too. It could not remain only religious but became quite broad based to be secular one. The Sangha became the centre of not only religious activities but of academic and cultural activities too. The Sangha, that was meant to be a dwelling place for the monks, expanded into Viharas and Mahaviharas in course of its developments and become famous as great seminaries of higher learning. The names of Nalanda, Vikramasila, Udantapur, Vallabhi are too known to need any introduction.

The Buddhist developed their own infrastructure of educational concepts, practices, rite and rituals and methodology similar in many to existing Brahmanical system and in a way parallel and rival to it. The ceremony of 'pabbajja' and 'Upasampada' correspond to upanayana and Samvartana ceremonies of Brahmanical system. The novices admitted into order were known as 'Sramanara' and the fully indoctrinated ones as 'Bhikkhus'. The Buddhist education became open to all castes and classes but retained the right of keeping only the Buddhist teachers' unlike the brahmanical one where only 'Savarna' enjoyed the privileged of becoming teachers barring a few exceptions here and there.

The cardinal principles stressed in the monastic system are that of 'sila', 'samadhi' and 'panna' with the modes of learning known as 'pariyatti', 'Patipatti' and 'patibheda' as first, second and third in the order. The basic concepts of four noble truths, the concept of 'anatta', 'anicca' and 'dukkhata', 'paticca samudpada' eight fold path formed the basics of monastic system. The stress on building character and gradual striving of emancipation (Nibbana) characterized its earlier aims and objective. The Arhathood was considered the goal prior to enlightenment. This got replaced by the concept of 'bodhisattva' evolved by Mahayanist.

The education was not bookish but all embracing to keep a learner receptive and responsive to his surroundings. The Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha formed the Trinity of the monastic system. Buddhist education has also made important contribution in the field of methodology by employing different modern psychological methods of modern education. The Kissa Gotami illustrates the successful use of discovery method wherein a grieving mother brings her dead son to Buddha for bringing him back to life and Buddha asked her to bring some mustard seeds from some house where no death had taken place and when mother fails to bring them Buddha explains the universality of death to her. Buddha also used heuristic method to explain the things taught by him which were less than what remained untaught. While going on his way along with his disciples and picking some leaves from the bush in his fist asked the question to the mother whether leaves in his hands were less or more than which were in the bush.

The monastic system has given a new twist to formation of healthy attitude of pupils by inculcating the catholic principles of 'Karuna', 'ahimsa' and 'metta'. It also provides as antidote to the growing impact of industrial, material culture of consumerism and carnality by stressing upon the concept of self discipline and celibacy during and after the study period. It avoids extremes of indulgence and asceticism by suggesting the middle path. The different rituals like 'Pati mokha' and 'Sanghakamma' give a basic teaching of corporate life and living to bring about a homogeneity among the pupils.

Now something about the Sikkimese monastic system as an adaptation and extension of Buddhist system. The Buddhism has preached the philosophy of change and propounded the principle of everything being in the state of flux. As such it is not uncommon to see its ramification into different new concept and practices which are found now. Since Sikkimese Buddhism owes its origin to Tibetan Buddhism, it has received Buddhism in the form of Tantricism introduced by Guru Padmasambhava. The another salient feature is lamaism as a conscious corollary to the first one as 'tantricism' requires a punctilious specific detail for performing any act. Therefore a clear guidance and supervision is a must which perhaps is intended to be achieved through lamaism. The Sikkimese monastic system strives to achieve its goal through lamaism. The Sikkimese monastic system has retained the basic core of Buddhist teaching and has modified it as per its needs and requirement. Lamaism may be defined as a mixture of with a preponderating amount of mythology, mysticism and magic. It was accepted as it protected the people from devils. The introduction of lamaism into Sikkim dates from the time of Lhatsun Chhembo's arrival there about the middle of 17th century A.D.. By this time Lamaism had become a most powerful hierarchy in Tibet and was extending its creed among the Himalayan and Central Asian tribes.

The main feature of Lamaism is called 'Dzog-Pa-chhen-bo', or 'The End'. This Mahayoga i.e. to go into deep 'Samadhi'. The devotees have to lead faultless life in order to be capable of going into Samadhi. The Guru Padmasambhava is worshipped as Second Buddha. Lamaism has preserved the essential features of the religious philosophy of the people of the Indus Valley Civilization (2000-3000 B.C.). The Tantric Cult was made an essential feature of lamaism as it was regarded necessary in order to make the nation strong to fight against the enemies.

How much the monastic education is serving the objectives and aims of the people of Sikkim is not very clear in the changed scenerio of modern world where technical and indus-

Bulletin of Tibetology

trial culture is sweeping every other culture in its march. The people require to have something for the sustenance which necessarily involves the dynamics of secular life which in practice means a change in the way of life as per the demands of Science and Technology whose impact on the minds of people cannot be wished away easily. Whether monastic system will meet this challenge successfully and elegantly without compromising its basic philosophy, will be a test which will be decided in course of time.

To sum up the monastic education can be said to have evolved its infrastructure gradually as per the exigencies and perfected it in terms of both content and methodology. Its impact is felt in the cultural and social world too. It also proved viable despite change of time and place by adapting itself as per situation to situation.

The monastic system, as being practised in Sikkim, incorporates secular subjects too in its curricula besides the sectarian ones. It is quite in fitness of things that each monk is required to have the knowledge of various dialects like Lepcha, Sherpa in addition to Tibetan. They are also taught Sanskrit and English to keep them abreast with the present. The teaching of science subject, is also taken up to equip them with necessary scientific attitude very much needed for the present day world and which govern each one of us through different media channels operated and enjoyed in homes in today's industrialized world.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. A.S. Altekar : Education in Ancient India, Benares, 1964.
2. Dass S.K. : The Education systems of the Ancient Hindus, Delhi, 1988.
3. Anand, W. P. Gurge : The Contribution of Buddhism to Education. (A paper presented in International Seminar on Buddhism, Delhi 1971).
4. Charles Elliot : Hinduism & Buddhism, London, 1957.
5. Coomaraswamy Ananda : Buddha & Gospel of Buddhism, London, 1928.
6. Monier Williams : Buddhism, London, 1889.
7. Mookerjee R.K. : Ancient Indian Education
8. Keay F.E. : Indian Education in Ancient and later times.
9. N. Dutta : Early Monastic Buddhism.
10. Schumacher E.F. : Small is Beautiful.
11. Waddell L.A. : Lamaism in Sikkim, Delhi, 1973 (Oriental Publishers).