



Empowering Youth through Buddhist Education

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Abstract

This paper focus is on how we can empower youth through Buddhist education. It looks at the some of the environmental factors and external pressures that the youth of today are succumbed too. It looks to proves that not only that the empowerment of youth is possible through Buddhist education; it also proposes that thought the empowerment of the youth, peace in society is a very tangible goal. The researcher has identified and given a brief synopsis of numerous Buddhist Sutta's that he believes are most suited to the empowerment of today's youth.

Keywords: Buddhist Education, Empowering Youth, Peace, Buddhism

We are living in a state of contradictions, ambiguities and ‘inbuilt anxieties’ which may be said to be a landmark of modern times. We know for sure that modernity with all its ‘accomplishments’ has entered into our physical frame; it is also true that modernity is the watchword within which our mind and soul relish our days. The modern science and technology somehow shapes our daily practice. Its technical know-how, predicaments, forms and cognitive phase outlines our empirical situations and we do not think that modernity has made us happy; nor can it make us unhappy. Therefore, we are tempted to think that modernity with all its advancement towards higher altitudes of technology and scientific temper has made youth more arrogant and ignorant of the real issues faced by the society as a whole. There are a lot of temptations surrounding the new generation for examples, drug addiction, smoking, drinking, sexual relationship and luxury shopping, followed by violence in neighborhoods and communities, followed by money, personal relationships, and intense competition. These temptations are creating anxieties among the youths which are caused by competition leads to social problems, like stress, disease, depression. In such situations, youth not only needs to fully prepare their inventory of a complete life dealing with all issues such as: academics, career, thoughts, knowledge and life experiences but also to cultivate and promote the positive in all aspects of life in order to fulfill the role and its responsibilities towards family, society through cultivation of personal morality and values.

At the same time, due to persistent crises, many youths are disengaged, at the extreme margins of society and have lost hope in the future. More than ever, it is now time to improve investment in research, policies and programmes to create an enabling environment for youth to prosper, exercise rights, regain hope and a sense of community and engage as responsible social actors. The starting point is to consider youth as the solution and not as the problem. It is vital that they are fully engaged in social change through empowerment. Their energy, creativity and critical spirit in identifying innovative solutions and building bridges and networks across groups have been demonstrated in several regions. If provided with an enabling environment, they can channel this energy into efforts that will benefit sustainable development, democratic consolidation and a culture of peace, for both present and future generations. The integration of youth among the priorities of the United Nations Secretary-General’s Five-Year Action Agenda, in January 2012, reflects this position. Since 1999, UNESCO has advocated the importance of working with and for youth to be more focused than ever, to engage youth as beneficiaries, actors and partners. The objective is to provide them with the skills and opportunities to be agents of change for peace and sustainable development.

Buddhist Education:

Buddhist education basically means leading life in a right manner and making right decisions about issues related to every walk of life. Buddhist education pragmatically and progressively taught the ground reality of human life. This was the greatest contribution of Buddhist education to the humanity. So, Buddhism may in a broad sense be understood as an ideal system of education, on which contemporary education is based as Suraj Narain Sharma writes: "...The Buddhist religious system was cast in the mould of an educational system. So religion became lifelong education and education became a living religion".¹ A. S Altekar is of the opinion that "At first, they were intended for monks and nuns only, but later on for the lay population as well; for was soon discovered that the best way of getting a good supply of novices of the right type and of propagating the religion among the masses was to mould the pliant minds of the young generation by taking up its education".²

Buddhist Conception of Empowerment of Youth:

Empowerment is possible through the adaptation of Buddhist teachings which will help in developing a peaceful society. Only a peaceful society can ensure creative and progressive thinking of individuals. The scriptures like Buddhist canonical literature declare that for establishing peace in society and bringing about progress at all levels, youth should be empowered. Empowerment is the capacity for building up confidence, insight and understanding, and developing personal skills. It is the ability to analyze situations and communicate more effectively with others. So, the youth should acquire attention about the practical and philosophical perspectives of a good life to get comfortable when faced with ups and downs in life. Because they have to face on many difficult situations in life to pursue their ambitions, if their wishes and enthusiasms without right way may lead them go astray in the absence of spiritual direction in life. The value of Buddha teachings such as social relations, social duties and obligation, sociology, ecology and economics guide lines are practically acceptable Philosophy until now. It is really helpful for their life problems. And young people comprehend the teachings of the Buddha will help them achievement happiness and the world will be more and more peaceful.

¹Suraj Narainn Sharma, "*Buddhist Social and Moral Education*", Parimal Publications, 1994, P. 48.

²Altekar, A. S., "*Education in Anicent Indian*", p.77.

The self-realization of youth is related to actualization of desires and possibilities for empowerment. It is related to its application in the society where youth as well as society can play an important role for its betterment. As the actualization of self-realization in youth is possible only when there is change in the mental faculty of youth will ultimately enables the youth to break social and cultural barriers. The change in mental attitude of society enables the society to accept the existence of youth and at the same time also provide such opportunities to youth that encourages exploring and enhancing their capacities and capabilities to make them empowered to effectively affect the much needed change in the society. The Buddhist concept of empowerment means authentic empowerment of an individual (youth) which ultimately beneficial for society as well. The Buddhist Concept of Empowerment means a youth who wants to empower himself should not only realize his/her potential and true nature but must put in efforts to achieve his/her goals.

It can be concluded that the lack of self-realization and self-reliance is the main cause of the problems of the youth and their attitude to the society and in turn for the society's attitude towards youth. The main factor behind all sorts of problems of youth is that the society is also ignorant of their potential to affect positive change in the society. The Buddhist Perspective on Empowerment of Youth has efficiently provided possible solutions. In this respect too, the teachings of the Buddha offer a handy tool of practical solutions to youth and also to the society simultaneously. A deep look into Buddhism will enable the society to remove the ignorance towards distracted youths and rekindle the spirit of wisdom towards the roles and responsibilities of the youths of today.

Buddhist perspective on causes of disengagement among youth:

As per the Buddhist perspective is concerned, youth (individual) empowerment can be achieved through the destruction of the depravities (*Āsavas*), *Avijjā* comes into existence. Through the destruction of depravities that *Avijjā* is destroyed. Depravities are:³

1. *Kamāsava*: means desire, attachment, pleasure and thirst after the qualities associated with the senses.
2. *Bhavāsava*: means desire, attachment and will for existence.

³<http://www.ssrn.com/link/OIDA-Intl-Journal-Sustainable-Dev.html>

3. *Ditthasava*: means holding views such as ‘the world is eternal or non eternal’ or that ‘the world will come to an end or will not come to an end’ or that ‘the body or the soul are one or are different.
4. *Avijjāsava*: means ignorance of sorrow, its cause, its extinction and the means of its extinction Buddhists further points out that the afflictions (*Kleśas*) do not differ much from *Āsavas*. For they are but the specific passions in forms ordinarily familiar to as such as covetousness (*Loha*), anger or hatred (*Dvesśa*), infatuation (*Moha*), arrogance, pride or vanity (*Mana*), heresy (*Dittha*), doubt or uncertainty (*Vichikitsa*), idleness. These *Kleśas* proceed directly as a result of *Āsavas*.

Buddhist tools to overcome disengagement of youth:

If we look into the Buddha’s teachings, we may very categorically get tools to overcome the disengagement of youths from the burning societal issues the world is facing today. The Buddha has set forward certain techniques to overcome disengagement (desires) which are as under:

1. Practice of right discipline (*Sīla*): means desisting from committing all antisocial deeds
2. Concentration (*Samādhi*): it is an advanced effort by which the roots of all the *kleśas* are destroyed.
3. Wisdom (*Prajñā*): *Sīla* and *Samādhi* directly bring true wisdom

Buddhists describes five faculties which can play a major role among youths to put them into the right path and those five faculties are as follows:

1. Faith: involves the knowing and getting rid of the defilement of mind such as greed, anger, malice, hypocrisy etc.
2. Vigor: involves the striving to prevent the arousal of evil and the unwholesome mental states and the arousal, maintenance and development of wholesome mental states.
3. Mindfulness: involves four applications with respect to body, feelings, mind and mental states. Mindfulness of the body involves sitting cross legged with the back erect and drawing in the breath in and breathing out thinking of the breath, he should be fully aware of various activities like walking, standing and

sitting, etc. Mindfulness of feeling involves the awareness of passion such as hatred. Mindfulness of mental states involves the awareness of desires for sense pleasures, ill will towards others and getting rid of them.

4. Concentration: involves keeping the body in a steady posture and the mind calm, concentrated and one pointed. In the first *dhyāna* state, one keeps himself aloof from pleasures of the senses and aloof from emotions. This however is accompanied by initial thought and discursive, the mind becomes tranquil. There will be rapture and joy. In the third stage, even this rapture fades out while consciousness is clear. By getting joy, by getting rid of sufferings, by the dying down of one's former pleasures and sorrows, he enter into and abide in the fourth *dhyāna* which has neither suffering nor joy, and is entirely purified by even mindedness and mindfulness.
5. Wisdom: consists of close investigation of the mental states, discernment, discrimination, clear understanding and comprehension.

From the above five faculties, one attains a state of four fold meditation of *Maitri* (universal friendship), *Karuṇā* (universal compassion), *Muditā* (happiness at the prosperity of all) and *Upekkhā* (non-preferment of oneself from one's friend or enemy) which is collectively known as *Brahma Vihāra* (Four Sublime States). Above mentioned Buddhist doctrine can be used to empower youth of today. These are the best Buddhist tools through which one can empower the young generation of present time.

Youth Empowerment and Selective Buddhist Suttas: A Way Forward

In fact, the Buddha did not talk about the concept of empowerment of youth but the investigation of epistemological and metaphysical considerations behind the Buddhist thoughts enable us to understand the Buddhist concept of empowerment to handle this burning issue of the modern world. The youth empowerment will enable us, further, to solve the problems that arise in a youth's life. 2562 years ago, the Buddha laid down his thoughts about youth that were substantial enough to empower the youth through interacting directly for the betterment of society. The Buddha's teachings are still relevant in present world scenario. Buddhist scholars have tried to study the teachings of the Buddha on youth after comprehending the significance of his views in the light of youth empowerment.

In order to put the youth of today on the right path through the teachings of the Buddha, I have opted for four important *Suttas* which are very much fit into this burning issue of youth empowering. The four selected *Suttas* are as under:

1. The Mangala Sutta
2. The Parabhava Sutta
3. The Vyagghapajja Sutta
4. The Sigalovada Sutta

These four *Suttas* are going to explain us how to gain prosperity and happiness, how to avoid material, moral and spiritual downfall and enlighten us on the blessings in life to win the bliss of deliverance. These four *Suttas* are very useful and practical guidelines for youths of today to deal with the issues of day to day life, to lead personal improvement, spiritual progress and social development.

The *Mangala sutta*⁴ of the *Sutta Nipata* is one of the most important and popular teachings of the Buddha. It is so well known that because of the wide range of teachings within a few easily remembered stanzas or verses are available in Buddhist texts. The *Sutta* also provides unfailing guidance, capable of direct application and immediate fruitful used by people from all walks of life, irrespective of differences of sex or status, race or religion, creed or education. There are all together thirty eight (38) good qualities or highest blessings to be developed by everyone, introduced in a very pleasant way in this great sermon. This teaching includes the most basic blessings or useful practical guidelines, each and every one should have and lead gradually to the highest qualities required to win the ultimate blessings of *Nibbāna*. It is a complete manual for building up successful and stable life, without any need for supplication to power besides oneself. This is the main purpose of this *Sutta*. Hence, it start with the value of avoiding bad company for the sake of good enough living and having a basis of spiritual progress, and ends with telling of the clear mind. Ideals set forth may bring progress for the individual and the society, nation and mankind. Here we find family morality expressed in most elegant verses. A happier household life should be won after following these injunctions as long as it takes, so as to make one's essential conditions fruitful. Not to associate with the foolish, but to associate with the wise; and to honor those who are worthy of honor this is the greatest blessing.

⁴ Khu. SN, P,46 (PTS)

In this first teaching, we can see “not to associate with the foolish” that is basically principle in our life. The foolish are not only to the stupid and uncultured, but also the depraved and wicked in thought, word and deed. This point is very important for young people. Men can’t stand alone in this world. In youth life, most of the times are spent with their friends in a day and their youth life. Here friendship and friends are very important for their life. They will face various kinds of friendship who are good attitude behaviors or bad behaviors. Most of the knowledge and behavior were learnt from their friendship in out of the classroom. Here they must know what behavior is bad and what the behavior is good. That is why, the Buddha taught firstly for everybody to wealthy and happy to stay is not to associate with foolish.

Further, the *Sutta* describes that most of the evil one always hate good one, they consider honest people as their opponents, even the honest one are afraid of them and humble them everything, every time, everywhere. When we want to know a good person or evil person, we should see what he or she is motivating, what are their good or bad motivations, good or evil? We must use wisdom to identify them. Evil one is often perceived wrong as wrong is right, never follows the law, the constitutions and often interfering with others to make them upset, discomfort and suffering.

Here, the wise does not mean knowledgeable only but should be perfect as well. The teacher (wise) is very important for guiding and nurturing. For example, once upon a time, Ānanda put one statement before the Buddha which says ‘teacher is only half important in one life’. But the Buddha denied quietly the question pit forth by him. Then the Buddha replied that the teacher is fully important in one life, because of me (the Buddha) all of the beings were known the Four Noble Truths and attainment of the fruition. In the first verse of this sutra it discusses about the social activity in day to day life.

“To reside in a suitable locality, to have done meritorious actions in the past and to set oneself in the right course... this is the greatest blessing.

To have much learning, to be skillful in handicraft, well-trained in discipline, and to be of good speech... this is the greatest blessing.

To support mother and father, to cherish wife and children, and to be engaged in peaceful occupation... this is the greatest blessing.

To be generous in giving, to be righteous in conduct, to help one’s relatives, and to be blameless in action... this is the greatest blessing.

To loathe more evil and abstain from it, to refrain from intoxicants, and to be steadfast in virtue... this is the greatest blessing.

To be respectful, humble, contented and grateful, and to listen to the Dhamma on due occasions... this is the greatest blessing.

To be patient and obedient, to associate with monks and to have religious discussions on due occasions... this is the greatest blessing.

Self-restraint, a holy and chaste life, the perception of the Noble Truths and the realisation of Nibbāna... this is the greatest blessing.

A mind unruffled by the vagaries of fortune, from sorrow freed, from defilements cleansed, from fear liberated... this is the greatest blessing.

Those who thus abide, ever remain invincible, in happiness established. These are the greatest blessings.”⁵

The next *Sutta* is the *Parābhava Sutta*⁶ which also explains that the causes of downfall and guides us how to avoid those causes of downfall in our all activities. It is a very short *Sutta* which teaches us the causes of downfall. Each of the causes of downfall shuts a person off from the path of material and spiritual progress, and will eventually lead to unhappiness and suffering. Those causes of downfall are the main reason for one’s financial disasters and spiritual decline and never enjoy true and lasting peace and happiness here in this life and future. So be wise, alert and mindful and remember all those causes of downfall to get rid of all various misfortunes and finally enter the Path of Purity.

In this sutra mentions as follows; easily known is the progressive one, easily known is the declining one. One who loves the Dhamma progresses, one who hates the Dhamma falls. The wicked ones are agreeable to him, in the virtuous he finds nothing pleasing; he favours the teachings of the foolish ones, which is the cause of one’s downfall. He who is drowsy, fond of society, not diligent, indolent, and who is of fiery tempers, which is the cause of one’s downfall. He is capable of supporting his elderly mother and father in their declining years, but does not do so, which is the cause of one’s downfall. He who, by falsehood, deceives a Holy person or an ascetic, or any mendicant is the cause of one’s downfall. The man who owns much property, who has gold and food, but selfishly enjoys

⁵<http://www.accesstosight.org/tipitaka/kn/khp/khp.5.nara.html>- 15/08/2017, 11:00AM

⁶Khu. SN, P. 19 (PTS)

his delicacies (without sharing) is the cause of one's downfall. The men who take pride in his birth, wealth and clan, and despites even his own kinsmen is the cause of one's downfall. The man who is a womanizer, a drunkard, a gambler, and one who squanders whatever he possesses is the cause of one's downfall. Not contented with one's own wife, he is seen among prostitutes and others' wives is the cause of one's downfall. The man who past his youth takes a very young wife and cannot sleep due to jealousy for her is the cause of one's downfall. He who places in authority a woman given to drinking and squandering, or a man of similar nature is the cause of one's downfall. He who has little wealth but great ambition (due to greed), is born a Khattiya but aspires to (an unattainable) kingship is the cause of one's downfall. Knowing well these causes of downfall in the world, the Noble Sage, endowed with insight shares a happy realm.

Another *Sutta* in contention here is the *Sigālovāda Sutta*⁷ which considered as one of the most well known discourses in Buddhist world. It is one of the greatest and most valuable set of teachings which deals with basic morality, building and preserving wealth, friendships, the reciprocal responsibilities in social relationships, and the qualities of successful persons. It is also called *Gihī Vinaya* or laymen's discourse. The laymen's code of discipline or layman's *Dhamma*. This *Sutta* beautifully described and gives a clear picture of the domestic and social life of the lay people. So no other disciplinary rules or social or domestic ethics are required to train adults and children except what has been taught in this *Sutta*. As such our earnest desire is that those who are able to understand and appreciate these valuable instructions given in this *Sutta*, to adopt yourself as a guide to strengthen your confidence, devotion and practical knowledge for the attainment of everlasting happiness.

The Sigalovada Sutta was delivered by the Buddha at Rajagaha to teach a young man named Sigala. The youth Sigala used to worship the six cardinal points, namely, the East, the South, the West, the North, the Nadir and the Zenith in obedience to the last advice given by his dying father. The Buddha explained to the young man that according to him, the six directions were:

1. The East standing for parents;
2. The South standing for teachers;
3. The West standing for the wife and children;

⁷D. III, p.180 (PTS)

4. The North standing for friends and associates;
5. The Nadir standing for servants, employees;
6. The Zenith standing for samanans, brahmanas.

The Buddha explained further that the six social groups mentioned in the discourse were to be revered as sacred and worthy of respect and worship. One should worship them by performing one's duties towards them. Then these duties were explained to the youth Sigala.⁸

The fourth and last *Sutta* in contention here is the *Vyagghapajja Sutta* which is also known as the *Dighajanu Sutta*⁹. The Vyagghapajja means tiger path and it was Dighajanu's family name. He was so called because his ancestors were born on forest path infested with tigers. Buddha was approached by this rich layperson called Dighajanu who asked some advice for lay people who enjoy a luxurious life. So here the Buddha instructs rich householders how to preserve and increase their prosperity and happiness avoiding the loss of wealth. This sermon describes the conditions that improve the welfare of lay people. Further it explains in detail how wealth both material and spiritual can be surely accumulated by anyone with righteous qualities for an ideal citizen in an ideal society.

The above mentioned four discourses of the Buddha delivered to youth are very useful and practical guide lines for every life even in the present scenario, which serve as a foundation for intellectual and ethical development. All these *Suttas* mentioned here are shining examples that reflects such criticism is entirely unwarranted. The Buddha had emphasized that without some degree of economic well being, spiritual progress was entirely difficult. He therefore asked his lay disciples to earn money in a righteous way as much as possible without being lazy. So try your best to adjust yourself to live according to these noble principles where you can win every happiness and prosperity in this world. The Buddha has shown the clear way, we just only need to follow all these guide lines and practice of which brings immediate results.

⁸Ko Lay U. Guide to Tipitaka, P.56 , Buddhnet e-book library, 1984.

⁹A. III, P. 281 (PTS)

So, we should shun evil, attempt to do good deeds, from those good actions, your mind always are purified and going on the right path to achieve the happiness. That was the teaching of the Buddha in *Dhammapada*.¹⁰

Sabba pāpassa akaraṇaṃ kusalassa upasampadā

Saccitta pariyodapanam etaṃ buddhāna sāsanaṃ

Not to do any evil, to cultivate good, to purify one's mind, this is the teaching of the Buddha.

The Buddha taught that, we should be near the wise man who understands the benefits of the present life: do not follow the wrong way, do not violate the law of the country, and do not disturb the people around us. The person who understands the benefits of future: no spoiled, selfish, dare to bring money out to help each other and give food to the poor people, etc. The Buddhist teachings are representation of the voice of great knowledge with wisdom and the right way, especially young people who orientate and practice it to have a real happy life. Therefore, nothing is more important than guiding them understand the methods to solve all difficulties in the life. But the matter here is to transfer those experiences to young people then they can share their understandings to their generation practice it together, so that the society shall be at peace and on the path of spiritual development. The Buddha teachings have taken from the practical application of life; if we know to apply it on proper time and proper situation definitely it is going to turn out as per our expectation or our wishes. Especially, young generation really understands the meaning and the value of Buddha teachings, society will reduce problems and Buddhist discourses with young people become better and day by day.

¹⁰K.Sri Dhammananda, *The Dhammapada*, verse 183, P.388, The Penang Buddhist Association, Malaysia, 2007.

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