

# UNDERSTANDING THE CONCEPT OF THE “EDUCATED PERSON”: A BUDDHIST PERSPECTIVE

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## ABSTRACT

*The general goal of education is to produce an educated person. But, the concept of the educated person varies in the theories of education offered by various philosophers and thinkers. For instance, Plato, in his theory of education, suggested “a certain type of man” who is capable of ruling “a distinctive type of society”. Rousseau, on the other hand, emphasized on nurturing the innate virtues of children guided by natural principles. Dewey says that an educated person is someone who has attained “intellectual autonomy.”*

*Buddhist scholars have expressed their concern regarding the current education system on the basis that it fails to inculcate ethical values and develop true qualities of human beings. While discussing the aim of education, it is opined that the goal of Buddhist education should be imparting “values” and “spiritual nobility” (Bodhi, 1997) and upgrading a person to the “noble individual” (Ratanasara, 1995). An education system based on such principles can produce “self-respecting people”, who are “the ideal person” of the society (Wisadavet, 2003), and “good person” (Piyarathana, 2017) to the society.*

*The aim of this paper is to understand the concept of the educated person from the Buddhist viewpoint. First, it will present a brief discussion of the educated person as it is understood in different periods*

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*and cultures. Then, it will investigate the aforementioned views to clarify and concretize the concept of the educated person from the Buddhist perspective. It will show that the Buddhist concept of the educated person embodies a combination between practical skills required for sustaining everyday life, and intellectual abilities needed for spiritual development and realizing the full potential of human beings. Buddhism endorses the view that human beings intrinsically possess such ability to realize their maximum potential. Finally, drawing information from relevant Buddhist sources, it will suggest that Inquiry-Based Learning (IBL) is an effective method that trains learners to ask reflective questions about life and the world and hence, triggers the intrinsic ability to achieve the full potentiality of human beings.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

“What is an educated person?” has been a vital question among the educational philosophers and thinkers for a long time (Boyer, 1995). It is understood differently in different periods, places and cultures. For instance, Plato’s concept emerged in the 4<sup>th</sup> century Greece and is significantly different from that of Rousseau which emerged in 18<sup>th</sup> century France. Likewise, the 20<sup>th</sup> - century educational theories and pedagogies are criticized by the 21<sup>st</sup> century educational theorists (Lister, 2015). Therefore, new theories and methods have appeared to deal with contemporary issues in the field of education and society in general.

Buddhist scholars have also responded to the limitations in the current education system and proposed a philosophy of education based on Buddhist principles. While discussing the aim of education, it is opined that the goal of Buddhist education should be imparting “values” and “spiritual nobility” (Bodhi, 1997) and upgrading a person to the “noble individual” (Ratanasara, 1995). An education system based on such principles can produce “self-respecting people”, who are “the ideal person” of the society (Wisadavet, 2003), and “good person” (Piyarathana, 2017) to the society.

The key purpose of this paper is to understand the concept of the educated person from the Buddhist viewpoint. It will, first, present a brief discussion of the educated person as it is understood in different periods and cultures. Then, it will investigate the

aforementioned views to clarify and concretize the concept of the educated person from the Buddhist perspective. It will show that the Buddhist concept of the educated person embodies a combination between practical skills required for sustaining everyday life, and intellectual abilities needed for spiritual development and realizing the full potential of human beings. Buddhism endorses the view that human beings intrinsically possess such ability to realize their maximum potential. Finally, drawing information from relevant Buddhist sources, it will suggest that Inquiry-Based Learning (IBL) is an effective method that trains learners to ask reflective questions about life and the world and hence, triggers the intrinsic ability to achieve the full potentiality of human beings.

## 2. THE CONCEPT OF THE EDUCATED PERSON IN MAJOR EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY

This section presents a selection of definitions of the educated person by the major educational philosophers in different times to show how it is understood in those periods. By doing so, it will demonstrate the scope and relevance of the Buddhist concept of the educated person in today’s context.

Plato (427-347 B. C.), the ancient Greek philosopher and the earliest educator (Turan, 2011), suggests that the fundamental aim of education is to produce “a certain type of man” who is capable of ruling “a distinctive type of society” (Moore, 2010). This certain type of man, according to him, is the philosopher king who is a complete man “embodying all gifts and excellencies, and claiming to rule the world (Nettleship, 1906). The core idea of Plato’s education is to “nurture” the soul to the highest level. The soul, Plato believes, is living and eternal. It is constituted of three parts: appetitive, spirit, and philosophic (Nettleship, 1906) of which, the philosophic part is the highest one. These three parts of the soul represent three types of people in his ideal state such as: “lovers of gain or wealth, lovers of contention or honor, lovers of learning or wisdom” respectively. Of these three, the last group of people enjoy “the fullest experience and to live the highest life (Nettleship, 1906). Plato talks about three kinds of work for the wellbeing the ideal state. These are “the work of producing the material commodities essential to life, the work of protecting the

state against external enemies and of preserving order within it, and the work of legislation and government.” According to him, only the people involved in military and administrative works are worthy of receiving education and those who engaged in production works need no education. According to Nettleship (1906), such an idea is, relevant in ancient Greek society although it is incongruent in the modern context. However, it cannot be ignored that Plato’s concept of education is class-biased. He rules out the working class from their access to education and by doing so, he denied their intellectual potentiality. Therefore, Plato’s harmonious society is not harmonious at its core; rather it is based on the rulers and the ruled relationship. Buddhism responds to this concept, at least, in three ways: first, it upholds equality and hence, advocates equal access to education for all; second, it believes that all human beings intrinsically possess the potentiality to obtain the highest wisdom. Third, while the purpose of his education is to create competent rulers, the purpose of Buddhist education is not so. The immediate purpose of Buddhist education is to produce good human beings and the ultimate purpose is spiritual development that leads to attaining wisdom.

Rousseau (1712-1778) puts emphasis on nurturing the natural virtues and innate qualities of children guided by natural principles. He completely believes in the natural purity of man and condemns the negative effect of society (Payne, 1918). He talks about three educators, such as nature, men and things. The absence of any one of these leads to the improper development of a child, while the presence of all the three leads to a “well-educated” man (Payne, 1918). Rousseau further emphasizes that children should not be given any formal training from infancy until the emergence of reason. They should be completely left free to natural development under the guidance of a wise educator. Rousseau goes so far in this respect that he is against giving any book to children during this period. The source of knowledge during this phase is “senses and feelings” (Collins, 1976). After the emergence of reasoning power in them, children should learn about different branches of knowledge such as art, history, literature, social science, and religion (Collins, 1976). This approach of educating children is later known as the

“child-centered” (Collins, 1976) approach which is considered an important method by modern educators (Hurst, Wallace and Nixon, 2013). His main argument is that children are innately good but society corrupts them by teaching those principles and values that are conducive to the service of the society and its institutions (Monteiro, n.d.). Hence, he proposes an education system that retains native virtues of children at first and thereafter, teaches all the subjects necessary to be good human beings and good citizens. To respond to Rousseau’s concept from the Buddhist perspective requires a lengthy discussion which is not the purpose of this paper. It only focuses on a few aspects. Buddhism views human life as full of suffering (*dukkha*) which is the first of the fourfold noble truths (*catu-arya sacca*). Since birth, human beings experience different types of suffering that continues throughout the cycle of life (*samsāra*). The roots of suffering are the defilements such as greed (*lobha*), hatred (*dosa*) and delusion (*moha*). Therefore, Buddhism advises cultivating dispassion, loving-kindness, and wisdom (Bodhi, 1988). However, it does not mean that human beings are inherently evil. Buddhism explains that the behavior and actions of human beings are not resulted from the external forces but from internal defilements. Such an idea must be understood from the viewpoint of dependent-origination (*paticca-samuppada*) and kammic effect. Regardless of the question whether human beings are inherently good or bad, it can be said that they possess various psychological tendencies that need to be refined if good, or removed if bad and thus cultivate the good tendencies. Buddhism has a positive attitude toward the nature of human beings. It believes that human beings possess the innate nature of cultivating virtues and obtaining enlightenment. Hence, it promotes an education system that teaches morality and spirituality to the students along with other necessary subjects and vocations. The purpose of such education is to produce an educated person who lives a happy and righteous life while accumulating virtues for the ultimate wisdom.

American psychologist and educator Dewey (1859- 1952) says that an educated person is someone who has attained “intellectual autonomy” which is a basis for one’s personal and social growth. According to him, education is a process through which a learner

trains himself or herself to be able to think critically and reflectively. He further considers that “transmission of knowledge” is useful in so far as it works as a foundation of triggering further inquisitiveness (Mahmoud, 2004). Dewey’s pedagogy broadly encompasses the methods such as pragmatic learning, learner-centered, experiential-based, social interaction etc. (Williams, 2017). Buddhism also encourages critical inquiry and intellectual autonomy to understand the nature of the conventional world. They are considered as intellectual means necessary prior to gain faith in the teachings of the Buddha (Bodhi, 1998b; 1988; Morgan, 2013). In terms of pedagogy, Buddhism also offers somewhat similar methods such as: “learning by practice” (Anon., n.d.); autonomy-facilitating education (Morgan, 2013); community-based education (Gates, 2005). This article proposes Inquiry-Based Learning (IBL) as another important approach within the Buddhist philosophy of education.

Panellists at the seminar held by Harvard Graduate School of Education opine, “to be considered educated, students should leave school with a deep understanding of themselves and how they fit into the world, and have learned what some call “soft skills” – complex problem-solving, creativity, entrepreneurship, the ability to manage themselves, and the ability to be lifelong learners” (Anderson, 2012). This definition mirrors the capitalist ideals to train students to be skilled employees so that they can “fit into the world” of the competitive labor market. It also focuses on training students with entrepreneurial and managerial expertise so that they can play role in the capitalist economic order. Buddhist response to this definition is that it does not deny the necessity of practical skills for one’s survival in the world but, at the same time, it denigrates the sole emphasis on such aims of education that turns students into servants to capitalist system and its institutions; rather it stresses on inculcating morality and spirituality and upgrading true human qualities.

This selection of definitions of the educated person show how the concept is understood in different times and cultures. Each of these definitions, while focuses on a few significant features of the educated person, overlooks other important ones which are essential in today’s world. The next section presents the concept of the educated person from the Buddhist viewpoint and emphasizes

that the educated person embodies a combination between practical and social skills necessary for everyday life and intellectual potentialities essential for psychological and spiritual development. Such a combination is important for the complete development of human beings. Buddhism endorses the view that human beings intrinsically possess such ability to realize their maximum potential.

### 3. BUDDHIST PERSPECTIVE ON THE EDUCATED PERSON

Chin Kung in his book “Buddhism as an Education” mentions that wisdom is the goal of Buddhist education and all human beings inherently possess the potential to obtain this goal. However, being overcome by ignorance, they cannot realize their innate nature. Therefore, the aim of Buddhist education is to help regain this intrinsic nature of human beings (Kung, n.d.). It is true that the end goal of Buddhism is emancipation from suffering through the acquisition of wisdom. In order to achieve this goal, one must follow the path instructed by the Buddha.

Buddhist followers are mainly categorized into two communities: the monastic community and the lay community. The monastic community leaves family life and observes spiritual principles with a view to attaining wisdom. Apart from the teachings instructed for this community, Buddhism also offers a set of principles for the lay community who lives in worldly life, engages in different kinds of jobs, and performs manifold duties and responsibilities to maintain their familial and social life. Unlike the monastic community, the Primary aim of the lay followers is not to attain *nibbāna*; but to live their everyday lives in peace and happiness. Moreover, as Ratanasara (1995) opines, in order to achieve *nibbāna*, one must go through multiple steps, perform various activities, and cultivate virtues. During this period one cannot ignore the duties and responsibilities one has to perform in daily life. Therefore, according to Buddhism, the primary goal of education is to teach learners to be able to live a virtuous and happy life. This aim is not in contrast to the ultimate goal of Buddhism because “their features and qualities do not obstruct them from taking that path” (Wisadavet, 2013). Therefore, the primary goal and the ultimate goal of education are not contradictory but a way of gradual development from the former to the latter.

As mentioned above, the prime concern of the Buddhist scholars regarding the current education system is that it fails to bring forth the true human potentialities. It trains learners to satisfy only material needs. But, human beings are not merely physiological beings, they are also psychological beings. Hence, they have psychological needs as well. According to “Maslow’s hierarchy of needs” human beings have eight stages of needs which are divided into two major categories, such as basic needs that include physiological needs, safety needs, love, and belonging needs and esteem needs; and psychological needs that consist of cognitive needs, aesthetic needs, self-actualization needs and self-transcendence needs (Maslow, 1954). Therefore, the aim of education is to train learners not only to fulfill their basic needs but also to accomplish their psychological needs which lead them to realize their full potentialities as human beings. As discussed in the following sections, the Buddhist perspective of education concentrates on fulfilling both practical and intellectual needs which are essential to establish oneself as an educated person as envisaged in the Buddhist philosophy of education.

Etymologically the term “educate” means “bring out, lead forth” (Anon., n.d.). If the aim of education is “to draw forth from the mind its innate potential for understanding”, as Bodhi (1998a) puts it, the purpose of Buddhist education is “to bring the potentialities of human nature to maturity in the way envisioned by the Buddha” (Bodhi, 1998a). He further says that the aim of education should not focus merely on transmitting information and developing social and commercial skills, but “instilling values” and “spiritual nobility”. Human beings are naturally inclined to learning, but the current education system suppresses this innate appetite for learning and turns them into mere “servants” of the society. He points out that “loss of vision” and “commercialization of education” are the key reasons behind it. The education system functioning under the capitalist order serves its purpose to transform students into mere productive tools that work for the capitalist system in order to create maximum profits. Although Buddhist education does not deny the necessity of practical competence and moderate material happiness in society, it emphasizes that this practical aspect must be combined with other aspects that are essential to developing true human



qualities. Therefore, the goal of Buddhist education is a balanced development of practical, moral and intellectual potentialities. In order to develop the character of people, Buddhism prescribes five virtues that a model disciple should possess. These are “faith, virtue, generosity, learning, and wisdom” (Bodhi, 1998a). Here, Bodhi addresses the problems in the current education system that mainly focuses on creating skilled human resources devoid of ethical and spiritual values. Besides, it suppresses the human being’s natural urge for learning. Therefore, he proposes an education policy that promotes not only practical needs but also moral and intellectual needs.

Piyarathana (2017) opines that Buddhist philosophy and Buddhist philosophy of education are not two different but one single body. According to him, “the whole purpose of Buddhist education is to develop the personality of a person” (Piyarathana, 2017). It can be achieved in two ways: first, by teaching “good conduct” and then by teaching “spiritual development. These two aspects constitute the total personality. According to him, the philosophy of education that aims at individual and social benefit is the philosophy of reality that is represented by Buddhism. An integral component of the Buddhist philosophy of education is “Educability” which “is meant that a person can act willingly, make decisions, select the best things and act accordingly thinking the benefit of it” (Piyarathana, 2017). He puts this idea against the notion of determinism (*niyativāda*) and creationism (*isswaranimmanavāda*) to emphasize on the innate quality of human beings to think and act independently without being influenced by external forces or ideas. This concept agrees with Morgan’s concept of “autonomy” (Morgan, 2013) which will be discussed later in more detail. Piyarathana (2017) further says that the ultimate goal of Buddhist education is to purify the mind, but the immediate objective is individual and social development. Hence, the aim of education is to create good people and good citizens through physical and psychological development so that they can have a righteous and happy life and also make a positive contribution to society and country. It can be done not only through intelligence training but also instilling moral values because knowledge and intelligence without morality may bring a detrimental effect to society. Other attributes of a good person are discipline, loving-kindness, and compassion (Piyarathana, 2017).

Ratanasara (1995) offers a secular version of Buddhist education theory. He does not completely agree with the idea that the primary goal of Buddhist education is *nibbāna*, “*sila, samādhi, and pañña*”, or “the sevenfold purities”. In line with Piayarathana, he opines that the most important purpose of Buddhist education is individual and social development. By individual development he means “the removal of the rust that forms in an individual’s mind and elevating him to the level of the noble individual (*ariyapuggala*)” and by the development of society, he implies “the inculcation of similar noble thoughts in a society” (Ratanasara, 1995). *Nibbāna* is not the primary goal but a distant goal in his proposed education theory. In order to achieve this final goal, one must acquire many other virtues which cannot be achieved ignoring one’s duties and responsibilities in everyday life. In his words, “no living being can concentrate exclusively on the effort to attain the eternal bliss of *nibbāna* forgetting one’s active day to day life” (Ratanasara, 1995). He sets a few goals to be obtained in his proposed theory of education such as: “self-awareness” which can be achieved by practicing “*kayagatasati*”; knowledge of norms, customs and culture of a society in which a person lives and grows up; knowledge of social, national and international relations. He also emphasizes studying secular subjects like geography, history, economics, political science, general science, educational science, international language etc. but he alerts that these subjects must be studied with an open mind (Ratanasara, 1995). Such knowledge not only helps enrich intellect but also generates a clear perspective to view society and the world. Apart from the moral and intellectual accomplishment, he also emphasizes that people must achieve economic stability; but it must be achieved following Buddhist principles of right livelihood (Ratanasara, 1995). Ratanasara recommends the development of an individual with all the necessary skills and knowledge required for a happy and virtuous life. He further puts emphasis on the importance of spiritual practice that leads one to develop as a noble individual. Such an individual can play a role in the development of society. Moreover, by living a happy and virtuous life one can acquire virtues for *nibbāna*, the ultimate goal of Buddhism.

Wisadavet (2013), in his proposed philosophy of education, states that the purpose of Buddhist education is to produce “self-

respecting people” who are the ideal person of the society. The ideal person to be produced through this education is a good “worldly being” who is not necessarily an *arahant*. The philosophy of education proposed by him must meet three essential goals, such as (a) social needs, (b) individual development, and (c) the ultimate truth. The purpose of the first objective is to produce good citizens who are well-informed about the norms and customs of society and the state. Such knowledge teaches them to perform their duties and responsibilities properly and play their respective role in society. The purpose of the second objective is to train people to be independent both financially and intellectually. They can enjoy material happiness in a moderate degree and possess necessary wealth earned through proper utilization of their abilities and following honest means. Furthermore, they have a clear view of their lives and the goals they want to achieve. They are able to act independently to obtain their goals without being tempted or influenced by the external forces. The ultimate truth addressed in the third objective does not mean *nibbāna*, although it is not against the principles of Buddhism. *Nibbāna* is not the primary aim and *arahant* is not the ideal person in his concept of education. Because he believes these goals are too high. He leaves the choice to the ideal person, who, if tired of the worldly happiness, can pursue the inner happiness that will gradually culminate in the transcendence. He attributes several other characteristics the self-respective people such as fairness, self-awareness, self-confidence, modesty etc. Self-respecting people, who possess the traits mentioned above, are called “good worldlings” (Wisadavet, 2013). Like Ratanasara Piayarathana, Wisadavet also emphasizes that education should aim at individual and social development. The “self-respecting people” produced through his proposed education system should possess all the practical skills and knowledge so that they can live a materially satisfied life. Being satisfied with material happiness, if they wish, they can work for spiritual happiness.

Based on the above discussion, the Buddhist concept of the educated person can be deduced. But, before that one aspect of the philosophy of education proposed in the above views needs to be clarified. While the primary goal of Buddhist philosophy is the liberation from suffering and attainment of *nibbāna*, the goal

of the philosophy of education discussed above is not so; rather it aims at producing educated people who are able to live a happy and virtuous life in the experiential world. However, these two goals are not mutually contradictory but a process of development from the former to the latter. As discussed earlier, one who lives a righteous life performs all the duties and responsibilities to the society, also cultivates virtues for one's journey to the attainment of the highest goal. All human beings innately possess this potentiality to reach the highest goal. Keeping this point in mind and based on the above discussion, we can establish the concept of the educated person in the following way:

- i. The educated person possesses the virtues of morality and spirituality. As evident in all the above views, the Buddhist perspective of education emphasizes the cultivation of morality and spirituality along with other practical and social skills required for maintaining everyday life. It has been emphasized in the above views that knowledge and skills without morality are harmful to society. And, spirituality purifies one's mind from the mental defilements. These virtues are important to live a happy and righteous life which is the primary goal of education.
- ii. The educated person has a wide range of knowledge about various subjects, about the norms and customs of society in which she lives and the way the society and the world function. Besides, she also possesses practical knowledge and skills on various crafts required for physical subsistence. Therefore, Buddhist scholars propose an education system that imparts not only knowledge of practical skills but also for psychological development.
- iii. The educated person is autonomous in thought and action. The knowledge he acquires about various subjects, about society and the world, helps her to form a clear view about life and the world. Hence, she develops an ability to think critically and act independently without being influenced by external forces or ideas. Therefore, contrary to the current education system that suppresses

people’s natural instinct to learn, Buddhism proposes an education system that teaches not only knowledge on different subjects but also critical thinking ability which is important to keep oneself uninfluenced by the consumerist and capitalist ideas. Besides, it also teaches to be self-aware and self-critical, the qualities essential for one’s self-development. The next section “Buddhist Perspective on Inquiry-Based Learning (IBL) contains a more elaborate discussion on this point.

- iv. The educated person is dutiful and responsible toward herself, family, society and the country. As mentioned earlier, the educated person is well-informed about the norms and customs of society. Thus, being aware of her duties and responsibilities, she plays her respective role and actively participates in the development of society and the country. Such an attribute helps her to become a good member of society and a good citizen of the country.
- v. The educated person is kind and compassionate. Loving-kindness (*metta*) and compassion (*karuna*) are two of the four sublime virtues (*Brahma-viharas*) in Buddhism. One who possesses these virtues is able to free oneself from the mental negativities toward own-self and others. As Thera (1999) states, “they are the right or ideal way of conduct towards living beings (*sattesu samma patipatti*)”. They help to remove personal and social conflict and establish peace and harmony in society. Thera (1999) further says, “A mind that has attained to that boundlessness of the *Brahma-viharas* will not harbor any national, racial, religious or class hatred”.
- vi. The educated person believes in moderate material happiness. Buddhism concedes with the necessity of material happiness in life and considers it as a precondition for spiritual practice. It is stated that “a hungry man is an angry man. A man poisoned by discontent is hardly in a fit frame of mind to develop his moral and spiritual life” (R. Bogoda, 2009). But, Buddhism does not advocate

indulgence in extreme material happiness. Hence, the educated person does not engage in extreme sensual pleasures and extreme austerity knowing that both of these practices are impediments to be a good human being. Besides, Buddhism advises that wealth or property required for a happy life must be earned by honest means properly utilizing one's skills and abilities. The educated person earns her wealth following the right livelihood (*samma ajiva*) and the right effort (*samma vayama*).

- vii. Finally, although wisdom, as it is understood in the Buddhist context, is not the immediate purpose of the educated person, it is the ultimate goal. Since Buddhist philosophy of education is firmly based on Buddhist philosophical doctrines which aim at the liberation from suffering by obtaining wisdom; the ultimate purpose of education is the attainment of this final goal. As stated above, all human beings have this intrinsic potentiality to attain the ultimate wisdom. Therefore, this primary goal of education is not in contrast to the ultimate goal; rather it is a way of gradual development from the former to the latter. The educated person, who possesses the aforementioned qualities that equip her to satisfy the physical and psychological needs, also accumulates virtues in the process and creates the way to the attainment of wisdom. But, this journey toward the highest goal is not, as Wisadavet (2013) opines, resulted from tiredness deriving from the satisfaction of worldly happiness; rather a natural upward development from the fulfillment of the primary needs to the higher needs as evident in Maslow's Hierarchy Needs Pyramid (Maslow, 1954).

Now, based on these features, the educated person can be defined in the following way: the educated person embodies the virtues of morality and spirituality, kindness and compassion. She is knowledgeable about a wide range of subjects and crafts and knows how to apply her knowledge creatively. She is well-informed about the norms and customs of society in which she lives and performs

her duties and responsibilities for the betterment of the society. She has a critical and independent outlook toward life and the world. She believes in moderate material happiness and earns her living by the right livelihood and the right effort. Most importantly, she is self-aware and self-critical and constantly strives for self-development. She gains the ability to expand her boundaries to the maximum level, physically, mentally and spiritually. Such ability gradually leads her to the attainment of “self-actualization” (if we borrow the term used as the final psychological development in Maslow’s Hierarchy Needs Pyramid) or the ultimate wisdom (*pañña* in Buddhist terminology). Therefore, the education system proposed by Buddhism emphasizes not only on material development but also spiritual and psychological development of learners leading them to elevate themselves to the educated person defined above.

#### 4. BUDDHIST PERSPECTIVE ON INQUIRY-BASED LEARNING (IBL)

This section will focus on the Buddhist perspective on inquiry-based learning (IBL) and show that it is an effective method to produce the educated person as defined in the preceding section. Before that, it provides a short definition of the term as it is understood in pedagogy.

#### 5. DEFINITION OF INQUIRY-BASED LEARNING (IBL)

Inquiry as an intellectual means of acquiring knowledge has a very long tradition beginning from “Socrates’ questioning method in Ancient Greece and from work on inquiry by the educational thinker John Dewey in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century” (Friesen, 2013). Parson and Beauchamp’s research (2012) (as cited in Lister’s, 2015) shows that the 20<sup>th</sup> century education system that derives from the industrial revolution emphasizes more on accumulating information instead of true learning. Such an outmoded model is unable to meet the needs of all learners and the society of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Hence, they propose an alternative student-centered paradigm that “creates more meaningful and authentic learning opportunities”. IBL is a modernized teaching-method that puts students at the center and encourages curiosity toward learning by being actively engaged in the process. It is a “student-centered way of learning and teaching where students develop a sense of curiosity

about the world around them and are introduced to mathematical and scientific ways of thinking” (Lister, 2015). Although this approach is widely used in science, mathematics, social science, art etc., it can also be applied in other subjects and fields of study (Lister, 2015). This article will concentrate on the general application of the term i.e. a method of learning and teaching that trains students to be inquisitive and ask reflective questions in order to acquire deeper knowledge about the true nature of life and the world. Ergul et al. (2011) as cited by Lister (2015) claim “curiosity is an “innate trait in children and leads them to develop questioning skills and inquiry from an early age”. IBL can enhance this ability of children. While discussing the Deweyan concept of inquiry, Johnston (2009) says that it is “a focused, deliberate framework and a program that is in keeping with the point and purposes of inquiry can augment a child’s successful understanding of the world”.

It needs to be clarified, here, that the Buddhist perspective of IBL is not subject-specific, rather a general approach aimed at showing how it could be beneficial in helping learners to acquire a deeper understanding of the true nature of life and the world.

## 6. INQUIRY-BASED LEARNING (IBL) IN BUDDHISM

Buddhist scholars have extracted several pedagogical methods based on Buddhist principles such as: “learning by practice” (Anon., n.d.); autonomy-facilitating education (Morgan, 2013); community-based education (Gates, 2005) etc. These methods have their own merits in the teaching-learning process. This section will focus on the Buddhist perspective on IBL and show that it is an effective method to produce the educated person defined in the earlier section.

Buddhism at its core is a philosophy that is chiefly centered on deliverance from suffering (*dukkha*). The key impediment to obtaining this goal is ignorance (*avijja*) which can be eradicated by obtaining wisdom (*pañña*). However, Buddhism also emphasizes acquiring knowledge about the nature of the experiential world and says that such knowledge is useful for someone who wishes to pursue higher wisdom. The role of inquiry in Buddhism is to help discover the true knowledge about the experiential world. Let us see how inquiry is understood in Buddhism.



The following passage from the Kālāma Sutta is often cited while talking about Buddhist viewpoint on inquiry,

*“Come, Kalamas, do not go by oral tradition, by lineage of teaching, by hearsay, by a collection of scriptures, by logical reasoning, by inferential reasoning, by reasoned cogitation, by the acceptance of a view after pondering it, by the seeming competence [of a speaker], or because you think: ‘The ascetic is our guru. But when, Kalamas, you know for yourselves: ‘These things are unwholesome; these things are blameworthy; these things are censured by the wise; these things, if accepted and undertaken, lead to harm and suffering/ then you should abandon them”* (Bodhi, 2012).

This passage from the Kālāma sutta is frequently quoted to justify that Buddhism encourages free inquiry (Thera, 2008; Bodhi, 1988) before accepting something as true. But, Bodhi (1988) questions this approach to the passage on the ground that it must be understood in the context in which the Buddha preached it to the Kalamas. He argues that the Kalamas were not yet the Buddha’s followers at the start of the sutta when they approached the Buddha seeking his advice to dispel their doubts regarding the issue of rebirth and *kammic* effect. They considered the Buddha as a counselor who might help them remove their confusion. Therefore, the advice for a free inquiry was given to the Kalamas who did not take refuge in the Buddha and his teachings yet. Hence, the Buddha did not teach them any of his fundamental doctrines which are taught to those who have established faith in Him as a teacher. However, after advising them in the above way for free-inquiry in the situations they encountered, the Buddha offers his teachings of “moral discipline and mental purification” which are confirmable in the present life regardless of the belief in the existence of the afterlife. These teachings bring their inherent results for those who do not wish to look beyond the present life, but, they have more profound implications for those who intend to comprehend life from a wider and deeper perspective. Because, the three fundamental roots of evil- greed, hate, and delusion are not only causes of “wrong conduct or moral stains upon the mind”, but also are the causes of “bondage and suffering” eradication of which will lead to — “dispassion, kindness, and wisdom”. These teachings

are verifiable through their results here and now, i.e., defilements cause harm and suffering while their removal brings peace and happiness. The immediate result of the teachings helps one to gain firm faith in the Buddha and his teachings “that are relevant to the quest for awakening, even when they lie beyond one’s own capacity for verification” (Bodhi, 1988). In the essay, Bodhi (1988) shows a distinction of the two aspects of the Buddha’s teachings: those that are verifiable within the ordinary experience and those that are beyond ordinary experience and hence beyond the scope of confirmation. The latter type of teachings is grounded on deep faith. The Buddha gives Kalamas only those teachings that are confirmable through personal experience and excludes the teachings that require profound belief. Of these two types of teachings, the former helps gain deeper faith in the latter that leads to the acquisition of wisdom. Therefore, the role of free-inquiry, according to Buddhism, is in helping people discover and understand the truth about life in and about the phenomenal world. If one wishes to pursue one must establish faith in the Buddha and His teachings.

As evident in the above interpretation of the sutta by Bodhi, inquiry, and faith play different roles in Buddhism. Inquiry is the initial step that creates a way to gain faith in the doctrine of Buddhism. A similar approach of him is noticeable in the essay titled “Two faces of the dhamma” (Bodhi, 1998b), in which he discusses empiricist and religious aspects of Buddhism and says, “the empiricist face turned to the world, telling us to investigate and verify things for ourselves, and the religious face turned to the Beyond, advising us to dispel our doubts and place trust in the Teacher and his Teaching” (Bodhi, 1998b). According to him, “investigation and critical inquiry” are the first steps to attain wisdom “enabling us to resolve our doubts and gain a conceptual grasp of the truths upon which our deliverance depends” (Bodhi, 1998b). What is evident in both these essays is that inquiry results from doubt and it is an intellectual means to drive out the doubts and thus unfold the truth about the existence in the world and about the world itself in its entirety. Once the truth is discovered, the role of inquiry ends and faith is established in the dhamma. Bodhi (1998b) further says, “doubt and questioning cannot continue indefinitely. Once we have decided that the Dhamma is to be our vehicle to spiritual freedom,

we have to step on board: we must leave our hesitancy behind and enter the course of training which will lead us from faith to liberating vision”. Such a view indicates that after one acquires knowledge about life and the world, one places complete faith in the dhamma leaving all the doubts behind and starts practicing the principles instructed in Buddhism. Therefore, inquiry is a means to acquire true knowledge about life and the phenomenal world. Knowledge thus acquired creates the foundation to begin the journey toward wisdom guided by the Buddhist principles. This view is important to understand the Buddhist perspective of IBL.

One criticism against the current education system is, as mentioned earlier, it teaches only to gather information and suppresses the appetite of learning. Contrary to it, the Buddhist philosophy of education emphasizes not only on accumulating objective information but also generating an inquisitive mind toward acquiring profound knowledge about the world. Since one of the primary goals of the educated person is the acquisition of true knowledge about the experiential world; IBL is a useful method in this regard, to train students to develop an inquisitive attitude that will help them unfold the true nature the world.

Apart from understanding the external world, the educated person is also aware of her inner self. As noted earlier, mere knowledge without morality and spirituality is harmful, and as Bodhi (2005) says, “acquisition of objective information about the constitution and operation of the physical world” is insufficient. It is also important to have a clear understanding of “one’s personal existence”. A person possessing an inquisitive mind not only explores the external world but also the internal self. Besides, self-awareness and self-examination are the important traits of the educated person. One who is inquisitive about the self and the world constantly develops herself through self-examination. Self-inquiry is a useful tool in this regard.

Inquiry, as interpreted by Bodhi, is an intellectual tool to gain knowledge about life and the phenomenal world before establishing faith in the dhamma. Such ability helps one to form an independent outlook toward life and the world. The confidence to depend on one’s ability of critical thinking leads one to be an autonomous

person who can think and act independently. Morgan (2013) claims, such a trait is supported in Buddhism as a means of attaining conventional truth, but it is impertinent in the ultimate level where the existence of self is denied. Agreeing with this view of Morgan, it can be said that autonomy (as defined by Morgan) is a method of acquiring true knowledge because “the autonomous person reflects and criticizes the principles that his parents, teachers and other authorities have transmitted to him, and therefore may sometimes reject them” (Morgan, 2013). This view shares conformity with the Kālāma sutta as interpreted by Bodhi. But, this approach of Morgan may seem radical. Bodhi (1998) also expresses concern about the danger of “free-inquiry” if given to those whose morality is not well-developed, and assumes that the Buddha must have considered Kalamas as morally developed. Conforming to this idea, it can be said that autonomy can be practiced by those who have gained “reasoning power” (if we use Rousseau’s term) and morality. Such a person not only examines the external world and but also the inner self. In other words, free-inquiry must be based on reason and morality. This ability of free-inquiry is applied to understand not only the external world but also one’s internal self. As Morgan (2013) puts it, “as an autonomous person one engages in an ongoing process of self-examination; not constantly, but from time to time she pauses to reflect on the standards by which she lives and then possibly revises these standards so that her life is her own. This is implicit in the very notion of ‘self-rule.’ The importance of critical thinking and questioning in Buddhism in discovering the truth is also addressed by Gamage (2016). Referring to De Silva (2014), he notes that the purpose of education is “not information gathering or seeking quick answers”; rather the purpose is “getting immersed in the question.” The key point here is pondering on the question in order to unfold the truth. Therefore, we can say that the Buddhist approach to IBL recommends teaching students to explore not only the external world but also the inner self. It is an effective method that trains students to develop an inquisitive and critical attitude to both the external and internal world.

## 7. CONCLUSION

This essay has contemplated on two important points: first, the

concept of the educated person in Buddhist philosophy of education and second, the Buddhist perspective on IBL as an effective method of teaching. It has also provided a concise discussion on the concept of the educated person as it is defined by different educators in different periods and cultures. Based on the discussion, it can be said that the Buddhist approach of the concept of the educated person is noticeably different from the other views. The key reason behind this difference is the difference of time and socio-cultural background of each of the philosophies. Besides, the goals of them are also significantly different from each other. These differences of objectives constitute the features of the educated person.

The educated person in the Buddhist philosophy of education embodies several significant characteristics. First of all, she is a moral and spiritual person. Buddhism emphasizes these virtues more than others and believes that intelligence and skills without morality. The origin of Buddhism can be understood as an active response to contemporary religious thoughts. The philosophical outlooks of Buddhist teachings have promoted Buddhism to the level of highest social recognition. Brahmajāla Sutta in Dāgha Nikāya illustrates how far contemporary society in six century B.C in India at the time of Buddha was twisted by sixty-two dogmatic views. In this regard, the dawn of Buddhism can be known as a means to discharge people from the darkness of ignorance (Avijjā) and leading them to the light of wisdom (Paṃṃā). This philosophical outlook has provided a new path to be known in Buddhism as a favorable doctrine of education. are harmful to society. Second, she possesses the knowledge required for understanding the true nature of life and the world. Such knowledge helps her to build a critical and autonomous outlook about life and the world. Third, she has a sense of duty and responsibility toward society. She is kind and compassionate to the other fellow beings. She believes in moderate happiness and uses her skills and knowledge to earn her livelihood via honest means. Most importantly, she is self-aware and self-critical and constantly strives for self-development. In brief, she possesses a combination of practical abilities, moral and spiritual values, and intellectual potentialities. As a result, she lives a happy and righteous life in the present and at the same time, accumulates

virtues that lead her to the acquisition of the highest wisdom.

The Buddhist perspective of education recommends IBL is an effective method to train students to be the educated person defined above. It generates an inquisitive attitude that helps learners to inquire about the true nature about life and the world and leads them to discover the truth. The Buddhist viewpoint of inquiry not only concentrates on the external world but also the internal self. Hence, it helps to realize one's inner self. Such an understanding is important for one's development as the educated person. Moreover, in Buddhism inquiry is a first step toward the journey to the ultimate wisdom. Therefore, we can say that IBL is an effective method of education in producing the expected educated person who aims at acquiring true knowledge about life and the world and hence, creates the way to the ultimate wisdom.

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