



Ms. Phyu Mar Lwin is a MA Student of International Theravāda Buddhist Missionary University in Myanmar. She received her Diploma in Buddha Dhamma and BA (Buddha Dhamma) from ITBM University. She has already completed M.Sc degree in Engineering Physics from Yangon University, Myanmar. She made presentations in several International Conferences regarding Buddhism: the 5th International Buddhist Research Seminar in MCU, Thailand; the International Conference on “Buddhist Studies in Contemporary World”, Thailand; the United Nation Day of Vesak Conference 2014 in Vietnam; the Third International Conference on Buddhist Meditation and Psychology, Myanmar; the International Conference on Religious Tolerance and Harmony, Sri Lanka.

The Buddha’s Teaching: Pedagogy for Children in Poverty

Phyu Mar Lwin

International Theravada Buddhist

Missionary University (ITBMU)

Yangon, Myanmar

ABSTRACT

Nowadays, on account of rapid growing poverty and hunger, the homeless population becomes increased. The poorest people have less access to health, education and other services. Less access of education make people poorer, vice visa; the poor have low chance to be educated. In this paper, the word ‘children in poverty’ is specially meant for homeless children and child workers. Just only to be literate one is not enough in education. Intellectual upgrade is also required to change their mindset and manners. To be positive changing, the

teaching method should be of high-quality. As the Buddha is the Incomparable Teacher for all beings, following the Buddha's way is the best. Since childhood, gradual teaching to become moral persons is the most basic. This paper sets to describe the Buddhist pedagogy for poor children, which is of two methods: (1) Mobile Teaching (2) In-class Teaching. Based on Buddhist education, the children would be literate and righteous for the future world.

Keyword: homeless, child workers, Buddha's Teaching, pedagogy, mobile teaching, in-class teaching

Introduction

Nowadays, on account of rapid growing poverty and hunger, the population in poverty becomes increased. Almost half of the world populations are living in poverty and hunger. Thus, poverty becomes one of the major threats of today world. It might be seen that poverty has a range of causes: war, famine, diseases, lack of education and so forth. Among them, deprivation of education is one of crucial roots so that education is a key of antipoverty. Undeniably, children play as the most vital role for our future. To build up prospectus future, every child should have equal chance to access education. The majority of poor children are not able to literate. In rural areas, illiterate population is getting high. Since this is a worldwide problem, governments, non-government organizations and all citizens should cooperate together to diminish illiteracy. From the Buddhist viewpoint, there are two parts of education. Firstly, one means to be able to read and write then to get the skills in the particular work; the second is to attain and intellectual wisdom which leads to liberation from all suffering. In fact, poverty is a consequence of unwholesome deeds in the past. Besides, it could be said that less knowledge and less diligence also cause poverty. Because of lack of morality and intellectual wisdom, people are encountering numerous difficulties. When people try to purify morality, the status of human will be uplifted. There is a firm relationship between human's morality and poverty. While the development of material things grows faster, the character and mind-set of humanity are going down. In the present world, morality of human being is degraded. Mankind becomes less compassionate to the other beings. Increasing greed, hatred, ill-will set the hearts of people on fire. For getting profit and gain, they become wicked in doing their business or in pursuing their social, economic prosperity without respecting human dignity. People also fail to do their respective obligations such as

duties of son and daughters, that of Parents, that of teachers, that of an employer or employee and etc. In order to change people's mind-sets and characters, Buddha's Teaching is the most appropriate and logical approach. The aim of this paper is not only that unlettered child to lettered one but also that negative mind and character to positive. If one receives his schooling by following Buddhist education since childhood, he would have intellectual knowledge to improve his present life as well as the benefits for future existence.

Children in Poverty

According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) "children living in poverty are those who experience deprivation of the material, spiritual and emotional resources needed to survive, develop and thrive, leaving them unable to enjoy their rights, achieve their full potential or participate as full and equal members of society"¹

The gap between rich and poor is getting higher in both developed and developing countries. Indeed, youngsters are innocent victims of poverty. They came from poor families. They live in slum, shanty town or they are homeless. Some are orphans depending on relatives; some are of single- mother family; some are street children or throwaway children. As a result of poverty, the large number of children is engaged in labour. Young children, especially between the ages of 8 and 14, are working in the small industries, in hotels and tea shops. The employers do not give the adequate wages to the child workers of this age. Education is a key tool in preventing child labour while child labour acts as an obstacle to children attending school.

The life of poor families is generally complicated and stressful. In their daily life, the poor are experiencing a lot of troubles for survival such as unemployment, poor housing, and lack of social support. Therefore, family relationships are different from the other middle-class and high-class families. Many parents have to work outside for long hours. They could not care their children and also not pay attention to school them. As the consequences of poorness, these children have less access to education. Additionally, they are easily drawn into a web of harmful activities such as gambling, drinking and taking drugs.

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Child_poverty

Deprivation of Education

The word 'Education' has been derived from Latin words- 'Educare' and 'Educatum', 'e+duco'. 'Educare' means 'to bring up, to rise, and to nourish, to train or mould'. The child has to be brought up like a plant in the garden by the teacher. His potentialities should be developed with proper care and nourishment. In Indian traditional point of view, 'Education' was given top priority for the child. It was termed as the only way to reach the ultimate truths of the world and individual life.²

“Wealth is not equal in value to learning. Thieves do not take away learning: it is friendship in this world, and the bearer of happiness in the next”³

Everywhere, education is priority. Many people speak thus “Education has a power to change the world”. But, illiteracy is widespread in poor and remote area of the world. Lack of education is common problem in poor families. There are some reasons that governments cannot afford to provide enough good schools in rural areas; parents who do not have enough knowledge to school their children; parents are unemployed; etc. Poor children often give up schooling in order to making earnings. In addition, employment opportunity in developing countries becomes scarcity. In countries with high populations, unemployment level is growing and a lot of people depend on nominal wage which is below poverty line. More than 40% of people live on below \$10 per day. The inequality between rich and poor is still high. The poorest people will also have less access to health, education and other services. This condition tends to decrease the schooling opportunity for the children from poor families. Less access of education make people poorer, vice visa; the poor have low chance to be educated. To change this situation, Buddhist education serves as cornerstone to raise the poor's lives. Hereafter, we are going to focus on the way of Teachings of the Buddha and plan a suitable pedagogy for poor children by tracing the Buddha's Teaching methods.

² Aman Sharma, Explain the etymological derivation of the word 'education' <www.preservearticle.com>

³ Lokaniti verse 7

The Incomparable and Great Teacher and His Pedagogy

The Buddha is the Best Teacher who guides all beings how to live well in the present life as well as the way to liberate from the cycle of rebirth. Among the Nine Attributes of the Buddha, three are dealing with Teaching or Guiding:

- *Anuttaropurisadhammasārathi*

The Buddha is the Incomparable tamer of beings who deserve to be tamed. He tamed the unruly men like *Angulimāla*, ascetic *Saccaka*, *Ālāvaka* and many beings with compassion.

- *Satthādevamanussānam*

The Buddha is known as ‘*Tilokaguru*’- the Teacher of Three worlds. He is also the Supreme Master of gods and men. The Blessed One knows how to teach gods and men to attain present benefits, future benefits and the ultimate goal which is *nibbāna*. He provides them with the right view (*Sammādiṭṭhi*) – the guiding torch to guide them to walk the right way which is free from all dangers.

- *Buddho*

The Buddha is the Enlightened One due to these reasons; he is the discoverer of realities, thus he is enlightened; He is the awakener of the generation, thus he is called enlightened. On the other hand, He discovered the Four Noble Truths by himself and awakened others to see them.

The Buddha never forced others to be in blind faith whatever he taught. In *Kālāma Sutta*, He gave the advice to the inhabitants of *Kesaputta* thus;

“Yes, *Kālāmas*, it is proper that you have doubt, that you have perplexity, for a doubt has arisen in a matter which is doubtful. Now, look you *Kālāmas*, do not be led by reports, or tradition, or hearsays. Be not led by the authority of religious texts, nor by mere logic or interference, nor by considering appearances, nor by the delight in speculative opinions, nor by seeming possibilities, nor by the idea; ‘this is our teacher’. But, O *Kālāmas*, when you know for yourselves that certain things are

unwholesome (*akusala*), and wrong, and bad, then give them up....And you know for yourselves that certain things are wholesome (*kusala*) and good, then accept them and follow them.”⁴

This advice indicates that Buddha’s Teachings let everyone freely think what is good or bad. No one should be follow a doctrine or teaching without critical thinking. This is a noteworthy fact when pedagogy set up. If a teacher sticks students into a particular teaching or subject, they will not be getting intellectual progressive.

The Buddha is the best teacher who utilized the various methods of teaching in accordance with the character of individuals, various occasion, condition and time. Among these methods, the following methods should be pursued in building pedagogy for the poor children.

- Going to the being who deserve his Teaching in appropriate time
- Going to the one who is suitable to realize Dhamma (teaching) at the right time and right place.
- Explaining whenever one has doubts and confusions about the Dhamma (teaching) without hesitation
- Sometimes, doing question and answer to get clear understanding
- Teaching the sermons with Similes

Building Pedagogy by following the Buddha’s Way

Buddhist Education is a realistic education not imaginary. It can show the way to uplift the poor. That is why; a pedagogy based on the Buddha’s Teaching should be set for the children in poverty. After enlightenment, the Buddha preached and taught the Dhamma throughout 45 years. Without discriminating poor or rich, He guides the way to live well in present and also to liberate from Saṃsārā. His teaching is not reserved for a particular individual, castes, gender, race.

⁴ Aṅguttara Nikāya, p. 115

The Teaching of the Buddha is very systematic and rational. All of His admonishments are of three great divisions (*Tipiṭaka*): *Vinaya*, *Suttanta* and *Abhidhamma*.

- *Vinaya* is the rules or discipline for *bhikkhus* and *bhikkhunis*. This is a particular education how to conduct oneself and restraint on bodily and verbal actions in monkhood. In the other words, it describes Dos and Don'ts, penalties and remedies for offences.
- *Suttanta* is the collection of discourses, in which the Buddha expounded variety of threefold trainings (morality, concentration and insight wisdom) according to the characters of addressees. For example, there are the duties dealing with layman in *Singalovāda Sutta*, sixty two kinds of wrong views in *Brahmajāla Sutta* and the process of evolution and dissolution of the world in the *Aggañña Sutta*. Apart from morality, concentration and insight knowledge, the listeners could catch a lot of knowledge concerned with social, political and cultural of that time. In some Suttas, the Buddha used many similes to be clearly understood what He meant.
- The philosophical aspect of the Buddha's Teaching is *Abhidamma*, more profound and conceptual than other discourses (*Suttanta*). It is deep study to analyze ultimate Truths and investigate mind and matter. Studying *Abhidhamma* is beneficial support to get higher wisdom.

Following the Buddha's Teaching, first, we should set the specific disciplines in pedagogy; next, draw a syllabus which is suitable for situation of poor children. Last, children would be boosted up critical thinking when they are able to read and write.

Interconnection between Teachers and Students

When literacy plan for the poor children comes to implement, firstly, volunteers for teaching must monitor the behaviors and attitude of the children. The majority manners of such children are strange from the other children. According to their surrounding, their behaviors may be impolite and also they do not willingly want to learn. As a preliminary work before teaching, a teacher should greet each and every child courteously as the Buddha addressed to the one before he gave a sermon. By this way, the first meeting should be warmly welcome and smooth going. Without mutual understanding, there cannot be set up a good relationship between teacher and students.

Psychologists said that in learning process, it is necessary to understand individual differences in intelligence, cognitive development, affect, motivation, self-regulation, and self-concept, as well as their role in learning. To educate the poor children, alternative teaching approach is need. The Teaching method of the Buddha is the most suitable for the children in poverty. It trains both character and intelligence to renovate the society of human being by balancing these two that brought to achievement. To implement a project to educate the poor children by the Buddhist education, first and foremost, it should have 3M: Mind power, Man Power, Money power.

- Man power – organize the enthusiastic volunteers who want to teach the poor children
- Mind power – motivate the volunteers to help the poor children with volition (*cetanā*) and compassion (*karuṇā*)
- Money power – raise financial support. Fundraising is essential to provide the necessity for children, but expenses should be reduced as much as possible

Venerable Kaccāyana mentioned thus “*Attho akkharasaññāto*”⁵, which stand for “to know the accurate meaning of words only by the letters”. From this verse, it is definitely needed to unlettered to lettered ones first. Thus, two methods would be fieldwork; Mobile Teaching and In-class Teaching, to build up foundation of education.

1. Mobile Teaching

Most of the poor children could not receive schooling. There are many reasons: government could not provide enough school buildings in their territory; unemployed parents; unlettered parents; financial condition; they need to assist to parents and sometimes, they themselves do not want to learn and so on. In such situations, the volunteer teachers go and teach them from home to home. At the beginning, they would not easily accept to study. There may be many reasons. Some children who engage in labour would refuse to learn because they do not spend their time in studying instead of earning. Volunteer teachers (VT) should gradually persuade by the ways:

- Helping their house work

Some children must do housework as their parents go to work. This is a reason that they do not want to study. In order to spoil this excuse, VT should help them to get extra time to teach. In the case of children workers, volunteers have to replace in their work for one or two hour during the teaching hours.

⁵ Kaccyāyanabyākaraṇa – 1

- Make a conversation

At the beginning, they would be shameful and dare not to talk with a stranger. Thus, VT should make a conversation to be getting familiar each other, mutual understanding and good relationship would be good supportive in teaching later.

- Talk about a successful idol who came from a poor family

The nature of Children is very easy to rely on others and they want to imitate an idol who they admire. That is why, VT have to talk about the famous persons who faced difficulties in their childhood like Nelson Mandela, Thomas Edison and Abraham Lincoln, etc.

- Telling the stories concerning with moral conduct

VT should tell the Jātaka Stories and Life of the Buddha and His Disciples. When they are familiar with the religious Teaching, their manners and attitude will change to be polite.

- Reading the books with colourful pictures

Children are inquisitive and they like bright colour. Therefore, VT should stimulate their mind by reading colourful books. They come to inspire reading so that it is easy to accept teaching.

2. In-class Teaching

When a teacher can arouse the mind of children to be eager learning, he/she should bring the children into the class. It does not need a large space for classroom. It should be clean, good ventilation and enough space for 5-10 children. In the classroom, we should have a particular syllabus or curriculum for all students. After teaching how to read and write the letters and words, let the children read themselves the stories of Jātaka. Whenever they have read a story, ask them the questions what they recognize from the story. This is the training for reading and critical thinking.

Next step is to teach five precepts and make them observe.

- Teach not to harm others. Cultivating the compassion by comparing by oneself (You do not like if other hurt you)
- Teach not to take other's property without permission in order to respect for the rights in ownership of the other people.
- Teach not to commit adultery in order to control one's mind and action.

- Teach not to lie and avoid slandering, harsh speech and nonsense
- Teach not to drink, smoke and take intoxicants which are the causes of recklessness.

Moreover, the consequence of breaking moral precepts and the benefit of observance should be taught to the children. When they understand the action and reaction of good and bad deeds, teachers make them to practice mindfulness meditation for 10-15 minutes. It benefits them to study easily with calm and peaceful mind. Step by step Buddhist education will surely effected to the poor. The better they change their actions (*kamma* and *vipāka*), the more they gain benefits. As a saying goes, “Children are the future of mankind”, poor children do the wholesome deeds under the Buddha’s Teachings, their future would be prosperous and they can get rid of poverty.

Conclusion

Man is a supreme social creature having manifold qualities: his thinking, reasoning and creative power, which make him more responsible, rational, judicious and highest intelligence one among creatures. But people who live in poverty lack confidence due to lack of education, information and skills. Some think that it is hopeless to escape from poorness. Buddhist perspective on poverty is different; it is not unchangeable condition. On account of doing great merits, it is verified in the Sacred Text that a certain man or a lady got rid of poorness. Summing up, this paper set to describe the way of changing the status of the poor by educating Buddha’s teaching since their childhood. Thus, planning Buddhist pedagogy for the children in poverty is preliminary research so that it will open a new insight for future.

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