

Original and Development of Buddhist Education Reflected in Buddhist Sanskrit Literature Important from the Saddharmapundarīka-sūtra

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Abstract: *Original and development of Buddhist Education reflected in Buddhist Sanskrit Literature Important from the Saddharmapundarīka-sūtra The Saddharmapundarīka-sūtra also called the Lotus Sutra, White Lotus Sutra, Sutra of the White Lotus, or Sutra on the White Lotus of the Sublime Dharma; (Sanskrit: Saddharmapundarīka-sūtra). Probably composed in its earliest form in the period 100BCE – 100CE, the White Lotus proposes that the three yanās (Shravakayāna, Pratyekabuddhayāna, and Bodhisattvayāna) are not in fact three different paths leading to three goals, but one path, with one goal. The earlier teachings are said to be of “skilful means” in order to help beings of limited capacities. Notable for the (re)appearance of the Buddha Prabhutaratna, who had died several a earlier, because it suggests that a Buddha is not inaccessible after his parinirvāna, and also that his life-span is said to be inconceivably long because of the accumulation of merit in past lives. This idea, though not necessarily from this source, forms the basis of the later Trikaya doctrine. Later associated particularly with the Tien Tai in China, Tendai school in Japan, and the Nichiren schools in Japan. The earliest known Sanskrit title for the sūtra is the SaddharmaPuṇḍarīkaSūtra, which translates to the Good Dharma Lotus Flower Sutra. In English, the shortened form Lotus Sūtra is common. The Lotus Sūtra has also been highly regarded in a number of Asian countries where Mahāyāna Buddhism has been traditionally practiced. Translations of this title into the languages of some of these countries include Chinese, Japanese, Vietnamese, English.*

Keywords: Buddhist education, development of Buddhist education reflected in Buddhist Sanskrit literature, role of lotus sutra in Buddhism

1. Introduction

In India during the time of Buddha, there was racial discrimination in society. This discrimination was according to the profession of man, and according to birth. In the society, there were four divisions of many Brahmins was superior. Brahmanism¹ dominated the society and established their supremacy in the country. They enjoyed rights for religious training and education. But another category of people deprived of their religious and educational rights. At that time there were 62 heretical doctrines in existence and the priesthood got the upper hand. In this background, a religious revolution started in ancient India in 600 B. C. and a new doctrine or system developed which is called Buddhist doctrine or Buddhist philosophy².

It is to be said that on the foundation of Buddhism a new and special Education System originated in ancient India. Buddhism made a tremendous movement that played a valuable role in the development of the Education System in ancient India or the ancient Buddhist world. It is well-known that with the rise of Buddhism in India there dawned the golden age of Indian culture and civilization. There was progress in all aspects of Indian civilization under the impact of Buddhism there arose many centres of learning which did not exist before

The goal of Buddha’s teaching-the goal of Buddhist education is to attain wisdom. In Sanskrit, the language of ancient India, the Buddhist wisdom was called Anuttara-Samyak-Sambhodi meaning the perfect ultimate wisdom³.

The Buddha taught us that the main objective of our practice or cultivation was to achieve this ultimate wisdom. The Buddha further taught us that everyone has the potential to realize this state of ultimate wisdom, as it is an intrinsic part of our nature, not something one obtains externally. The chief aim of Buddhist education was all round development of child’s personality. This included his physical, mental, moral and intellectual development. The aim of Buddhist Education is to make a free man, a wise, intelligent, moral, non-violent & secular man. Students became judicious, humanist, logical and free from superstitious. Students became free from greed, lust and ignorance. Buddhist Education was wide open and available to people of all walks of life. The principal goal of Buddhist Education is to change an unwise to a wise, beast to a priest.

The Buddhist education system is aimed at regaining our intrinsic nature. It also teaches absolute equality which stemmed from Buddha’s recognition that all sentient beings possess this innate wisdom and nature. Buddha’s teaching helps us to realize that innate, perfect, ultimate wisdom.

¹ A. L. Herman (1991). A Brief Introduction to Hinduism: Religion, Philosophy, and Ways of Liberation. Westview Press. pp. 143–148. ISBN 978-0-8133-8110-7.

² David Kalupahana, Causality: The Central Philosophy of Buddhism. The University Press of Hawaii, 1975, p. 70

³ Developing wisdom is of central importance in Buddhist traditions, where the ultimate aim is often presented as “seeing things as they are” or as gaining a “penetrative understanding of all phenomena,” which in turn is described as ultimately leading to the “complete freedom from suffering.” In Buddhism, developing wisdom

With wisdom, we can then solve all our problems and turn suffering into happiness.

In the Buddhist era, religion was given top priority and education was imparted through it. The chief aim of education was the propagation of religion and inculcation of religious feelings and education served as a means to achieve salvation or nirvana.

Preparation for life, there was a provision for imparting wordily and practical knowledge along with religious education so that when the students entered normal life they may be able to earn their livelihood.

In the early period, Buddhist Education was limited within the monasteries and only for the members of the monastery. But later on, it was open to all; even laypeople got scope to have education in those institutions. In modern days Buddhist Education became wide open and embraced people of all walks of life. The aim of Buddhist Education is to change an unwise to the wise, beast hood to Buddha-hood (Sanskrit: *Buddhatva*, Pali: *Buddhatta* or *Buddhabhāva*).

Buddhist Education made a revolutionary change in society. The Buddhists in the world first made Education open to all. Students irrespective of caste, creed, religion got the opportunity to have an education which was denied by the superior class in the society. In India also, in Vedic Educational school students from lower classes were refused to get admission.

The monasteries or Buddha Vihars were the chief centres of learning and only the Buddhist monks could be admitted to them for education. Thus there was no planned arrangement for mass education as such during the period. It forms this position it would be wrong to construe that the Buddhist monks were unmindful of the education of the people in general. So at the time of begging alms, the monks used to remove the religious doubts of the people through their interesting conversation or short and alp lectures. Thus the people, in general, received moral and religious education from the monks.

2. The Original Sources of the Saddharmapundarika Sūtra

In Buddhist Sanskrit literature

What do we really know about the Lotus Sutra in India? It hardly needs to be stated that the Lotus Sutra is a prominent scripture in East Asian Buddhism, particularly in traditions related to the Tiantai⁴ or Tendai, and later on in Japan particularly for Nichiren-affiliated groups. There is also no question that the scripture was highly valued in Central Asia in the medieval period, although naturally, our evidence here is much less clear and convincing than that we have for East Asia. However, in fact, it is not at all uncommon to

⁴Tiantai (Chinese: 天台; pinyin: PRC Standard Mandarin: *Tiāntāi*, ROC Standard Mandarin: *Tiāntái*) is a school of Buddhism in China, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam that reveres the Lotus Sutra as the highest teaching in Buddhism. In Japan the school is known as Tendai, in Korea as Cheontae, and in Vietnam as Thiênthai

encounter broad claims that the Lotus is one of the most important, if not the uniquely most important, of Buddhist scriptures. While these claims are understandable when made by devotees of the text, they are less understandable when presented as objective, concrete facts.

Almost every textbook or introduction to Buddhism discusses the major scriptures of the Buddhist tradition. And almost invariably, along with the Perfection of Wisdom texts and the Pure Land sutra, one finds mention of the Lotus as one of the major texts of Mahayana Buddhism⁵. But there is something potentially very misleading with such a presentation, for nothing has importance or significance except to some person or persons. Things are not important in the abstract, but only at some time, in some place, and to some person.

We should not ask then whether the Lotus is important as such, but rather to whom it is important. And then we must also ask ourselves what it is that makes the text important. By this I do not intend a philosophical or theological question about what doctrines of the text are most profound, the answer to which would tell us much about the investigator but little about the investigated. Rather I intend something more concrete: if we want to claim that something is important for somebody, we must ask in what way that importance is manifest.

What is it that someone might say or do which would indicate to us that he considers something important? One answer is that something which one esteems and values, to which he attributes some authority, he finds significant or important. If we want to suggest then that what makes a text important or significant to some person or persons is that those persons hold it to be of value or authoritative, we must look for signs of that esteem. Such signs are to be found in the actions that people take with respect to the scripture, whether this involves copying it, producing art based upon or inspired by it, lecturing about it, quoting it, and so on and so forth. Without reference to some manifestation of the significance being attributed to scripture by some person or community, we are not justified in claiming importance for that scripture.

3. The Role of the Saddharmapundarika Sūtra in Buddhism

With regard to the Lotus Sutra in India, the question we must ask is what importance this text may have had to Indian Buddhists. A full treatment of this question would require a consideration of the Indian manuscript evidence, treatment of textual parallels in other scriptures, investigation of art historical evidence, and so on. We can dispense with one of these items immediately. To the best of

⁵Mahāyāna (Sanskrit for "Great Vehicle") is one of two (or three, under some classifications) main existing branches of Buddhism and a term for classification of Buddhist philosophies and practice. This movement added a further set of discourses, and although it was initially small in India, it had long-term historical significance.[1]The Buddhist tradition of Vajrayana is sometimes classified as a part of Mahayana Buddhism, but some scholars may consider it as a different branch altogether.

my knowledge, there exists at present no known art historical or inscriptional evidence conclusively related to the Lotus in the Indian subcontinent. (I will discuss the so-called *astabhaya* images of Avalokitesvara⁶ on another occasion.)

As for manuscript evidence, as is well known we have precious few Buddhist manuscripts of any kind from ancient India, 1 but what there is comes mostly from Gilgit. There are at least six Lotus manuscripts from Gilgit, as well as manuscripts from Central Asia which may have been written in India, and while it is not possible here to treat them in any detail, one of the interesting things about some of these manuscripts is that they are written in a kind of ornamental script which suggests that they were intended more as objects than as texts to be read. Limitations of space prevent any further consideration of the manuscript evidence here, or the whole set of questions raised by possible parallel passages in other texts, which may show influences from, or on, the Lotus. Rather, I would like to concentrate on the degree to which the text was taken into account by Indian satiric authors.

In the first place, we must note that there is one commentary, extant only in two Chinese translations or better to say two recensions of one and the same Chinese translation which claims to be an Indian commentary on the Lotus. The authorship of this commentary, the *Miaofalianhua jingyoubotische* or so-called “*Saddharmapundarikopadesa*”, is attributed to Vasubandhu⁷. Setting aside the question of whether Vasubandhu may actually be the author, which is problematic, it is quite likely that the commentary is indeed Indian, and its existence should be noted. This commentary has been the focus of relatively little attention from modern scholars—although the force of this statement may be blunted by the observation that the same is true of almost every Indian Buddhist text, and it is worth mentioning only because so much attention is lavished on certain other Lotus Sutra related materials. On the other hand, there is no trace of the more than 50 Indian commentaries which are said in a seventh-century Chinese reference, on the indirect authority of Paramartha to have at one time existed, including works by Nagarjuna, Sthiramati and so on. It may well be that the quotations in the *Mahdprajnaparamitopadesa* of Nagarjuna and the *Mahayanavatara* of Sthiramati (or Saramati) were confused in this late Chinese tradition with the existence of independent commentaries.

⁶Avalokiteśvara is a bodhisattva who embodies the compassion of all Buddhas. This bodhisattva is variably depicted, described and is portrayed in different cultures as either female or male. In Chinese Buddhism, Avalokiteśvara has become the somewhat different female figure Guanyin. In Cambodia, he appears as Lokeshvarak, and in Japan he is called Kanzeon or Kannon

⁷Vasubandhu (Sanskrit; traditional Chinese: 世親; pinyin: *Shiqin*; Wylie: *dbyiggyen*) (fl. 4th to 5th century C.E.) was a very influential Buddhist monk and scholar from Gandhara. Vasubandhu was a philosopher who wrote on the *Abhidharma* from the perspectives of the *Sarvastivada* and *Sautrāntika* schools. Along with his half-brother *Asanga*, he was also one of the main founders of the *Yogacara* school after his conversion to *Mahayana Buddhism*.

In any case, while all of this material certainly deserves our attention, my central focus here is on another form of evidence, that provided to us by unquestionably Indian authors who quote or refer to the *Saddharmapundarika*. If we are particularly interested in the status of the sutra in India, the references to the text by Indian Buddhist authors provide a crucial set of hints for us. Of course, aside from the content of the quotations, their mere existence may tell us very interesting things, for example about the circulation and accessibility of the text. In addition, quotations are potentially useful for textual criticism. They provide us with a way to augment our knowledge of the textual transmission of the scripture, and indeed, as is well known, since most of the Indian Buddhist scriptural literature is lost in its original Indic language form, often the only Sanskrit fragments we have of work come from its quotations in the works of later authors.

Unfortunately, as is the case with Indian Buddhist literature as a whole, most of which exists only in Tibetan or Chinese translations, almost all of the texts which refer to the *Saddharmapundarika* are also extant not in Sanskrit but only in translations. These translations are obviously of correspondingly less utility for close text-critical comparison, especially since it is often the case that Tibetan and even Chinese translators of *sastras* made use of already existing scripture translations when they ran across sutra quotations in the works they were rendering.

To the best of my knowledge, there are only three texts which quote or refer to the *Saddharmapundarika* in Sanskrit: *Arya-Vimuktisena's Abhisamayalamkaravrtti*, *Santideva's Siksamuccaya* and *Haribhadra's Abhisamayalamkaraloka*. Of these, the first appeals to the authority of the scripture in only a general way, regarding the nirvana of the *sravaka*, without referring to any specific passage in the text.

4. Conclusion

The positive goal of the *Dharma Flower Sutra* is described in several different ways. Here I have used the idea of becoming a Buddha as the highest goal. Of course, being a Buddha is also called “supreme awakening,” often translated as “enlightenment.” So it might rightly be said to be the highest goal. Another very prominent term in the sutra is “joy”. Over and over we are told that a result of hearing even a small part of the sutra is joy. And we are allowed to witness the great joy that comes to Shariputra when he realizes that he too is a bodhisattva on the way to becoming a Buddha. Joy can be said to be the goal of the Lotus Sutra. Another equally important term is “peace.” “It is not my intent,” the Buddha says in chapter 3, to lead people to extinction. “I am the king of the Dharma, free to teach the Dharma, appearing in the world to bring peace and comfort to all the living.” Peace can also be said to be the goal of the Lotus Sutra.

From Language and Literature of Mahayana Buddhism produced extensive and varied literature and much of it has been lost forever. Whatever is available is in mixed Sanskrit. It can be divided into two classes sutra or text attributed to the Buddha and the *sastras* or treatises by the Buddhist sages and authors. The *sastra* includes commentaries on the

original sutra as well as original works. The earliest Mahayana sutra is the *Sadharmapundarika* sutra and *Prajnaparamita* sutra. Among the Mahayana sutra, nine texts are regarded as the most important. They are also called the *Vaipulyasutra*. Hardly less famous are the *Sukhavativyuha*, the *Amitayussutra*. We have already discussed this mass of literature in the previous section.

The teaching of the Buddha is truly a message of peace and happiness for everyone in this world. It appeared and lived strongly over 2.500 years. No doubt its spirit has been absorbed by the majority of people in the world. Its true values are a great contribution to humankind. These values are still preserved and developed in future.

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