



Research Paper

Rousseau's Education Philosophy from Buddhist Perspectives

Dr. W.K.D Keerthirathne

Senior Lecturer in Education, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Department of Humanities, Rajarata University of Sri Lanka, Mihintale, Sri Lanka

ABSTRACT

Teachings of both the Buddha and Rousseau have played vital roles in developing educational concepts over a long period of time. This research reveals that teachings of the Buddha are subtle and analytical when compared with Rousseau's teachings. Moreover, teachings of these two traditions on child's nature, learner's task and the teacher's task in the learning teaching process, way of knowledge construction and student discipline can be used for further development of the educational views for a better and meaningful future of the 21st century learner due to the precious nature remained with them. It can be argued that Rousseau may have influenced by Buddhist teachings directly or indirectly along with his life experiences. The main aim of this research was to conduct a comparative study on Rousseau's education philosophy from Buddhist perspectives. Historical-Comparative method has been used as the research method in this paper. While the Buddhist teachings in Sutta Pitaka have been examined as primary sources western philosophy books, relevant research papers and conference papers have been examined as the secondary sources. The author has paid his attention only to Rousseau's education philosophy through Buddhist perspectives since the scope should be narrowed down.

KEYWORDS: Buddhist teachings, education philosophy, perspectives, teaching learning process.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The Buddha can be considered as a great religious leader as well as a great philosopher who nourished both eastern and western educational contexts through his vital and deep but subtle teachings over 2500 years. Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) who was born in France is also considered one of educational philosophers who contributed immensely for developing educational field over three hundred years. Rousseau was a naturalist and he presented educational views from naturalistic perspective. But the Buddha did not belong to any extreme end since his major teaching was the middle path.

II. RESEARCH METHOD

Historical-Comparative method was used as the research method in this paper. While the Buddhist teachings in *Sutta Pitaka* have been examined as primary sources western philosophy books, relevant research papers and conference papers have been examined as the secondary sources. The author has paid his attention only to Rousseau's education philosophy through Buddhist perspectives since the scope should be narrowed down.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

Nature is the best teacher and it can be considered as the main way of getting learning experiences as revealed by Rousseau (Sahu, 2002). Rousseau promoted negative teaching method rather positive. In another way, Rousseau's philosophy of education emphasizes that child learns by his/her own experiences (Shahid, 2000). Students should not be taught. When the problem is presented they learn by themselves as a result of searching solution to problem they are given (Good, 1949). Rousseau is the founder of student centered learning (Nanda, 1999).

IV. FINDINGS/DISCUSSION

Rousseau viewed nature as the best teacher and it is the main way of getting learning experiences (Sahu, 2002). Nature is of two types: inner and outer. Child should be motivated to collect learning experiences with the help of the nature. Under a natural learning environment the child has a big freedom to learn what they want as

shown by Rousseau. Here, the child develops learning experiences by himself/herself. As discussed by Rousseau, nature is the guide book a child should be given instead of text books with pages and pages. Even the Buddha illustrated that natural environment helps the learner to understand the real nature of the life; *Anicca (impermanence), Dukkha (suffering) and Anatta (non-self)*. And also, most of the time, the Buddha spent his time with the natural environment from womb to tomb (*DNI:1*). The Buddha did not rejected knowledge gained with the association of books like Rousseau. But the Buddha showed that student should not rely on information gathered by reading and studying books as the one and only source to collect knowledge. Because the knowledge gain through books would be true or it would be false. Students were motivated to inquire the accuracy of the learning experiences critically they collect (*AN1:188*). Although the Buddha admired the influence of inner and outer nature in one's education but he did not consider nature as the one and only influential factor in the process of education.

As Rousseau believed, children should learn through their sensory experiences because the senses are the gateways of knowledge (Bloom, 1991). Though the Buddha showed the importance of sensory organs in the process knowledge construction he did not view that knowledge gain through sensory organs is accurate and perfect. According to Buddhism there are cognitive levels beyond the knowledge gain through sensory organs. They are, *Panna* and *Parinna* (*MN1*, 292). To Premasiri (1997), the Buddhist notion of *parinna* is related to its goal of emancipation as are all other cognitive terms which signify a higher level of knowing in early Buddhism. Premasir further lists such five terms that comes in *Pali Nikayas* to express distinctions in modes of knowing by varying the prefix which is attached to *Jnā*: *sam+jnā= Sannā (noun), Sanjanati (verb), vi+jnā = viññā (noun), vijanati (verb), abhi +jnā = abhinnā (noun), abhijanati (verb), pari + jnā = parinna (noun), parijanati (verb), Pra + Jnā + Pannā (noun), pajanati (verb)*.

Rousseau viewed that education is not memorizing or storing information. It is the process which results in the development of the child's nature and personality internally. This proves that Rousseau promoted negative teaching method rather positive. In another way, Rousseau's philosophy of education emphasizes that child learns by his/her own experiences (Shahid, 2000). This learner centered leaning situation is highly appreciated in Buddhist education too. According to Buddhist education the leaner is in the center of learning teaching process. Cases of *Chullapantaka* (Thag, 59), *Angulimala* (Thag) and *Kisagotami* (DhpA, 270) show the nature of child centered education practiced in Buddhist education.

As revealed by naturalists including Rousseau there is no significant role played by a teacher in the learning teaching process. The learner is an explorer and discoverer. Rousseau further explains that the problem should be placed in front of the learner and the learner should be allowed to find solution by himself. Science should not be taught to students but students should be allowed to explore it by themselves (Good, 1949). The Buddha too illustrated in his role as a teacher that the teacher is a facilitator and guide in the teaching learning process since the education is pedo-centric (Dhp:157, 276 & MN1:376). *Veemansaka Sutta* (*MN1:744*) and *Kalama Sutta* (*AN1:188*) reveals the role of the student in the learning teaching process where child centered learning appeared.

Rousseau's opinion was that children should never be punished for their wrong deeds because nature spares none. The Buddhist view regarding the punishment is somewhat different from Rousseau because the Buddha has recommended mental punishment except physical punishment, in order to modify the behavior of the offender without leaving it for nature. As Rousseau believed the mind of a new born baby is pure. It is corrupted by stimuli coming from outside. This is a major fact that discussed in Buddhist books prior to Rousseau (*AN1:18*). It can be argued that Rousseau may have influenced by Buddhist teachings directly or indirectly along with his life experiences.

V. CONCLUSION

Teachings of Both the Buddha and Rousseau on educational concepts: child's nature, learner's task and the teacher's task in the learning teaching process, way of knowledge construction, building student discipline in the leaning teaching process are not exactly the same. But there are some similarities as well as differences in these philosophical views presented from two different perspectives. Teachings of these two traditions can be used for further development of the educational concepts for a better and meaningful future of the 21st century learner due to the precious nature of them. Finally, it can be concluded that Rousseau may have influenced by Buddhist teachings directly or indirectly along with his life experiences.

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