BUDDHIST EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN INDIA: RISE, DECLINE AND THE CONSTITUTIONAL CASE FOR REVIVAL UNDER ARTICLES 29 AND 30, WITH 'MAHARASHTRA' AS THE PRINCIPAL CASE

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ABSTRACT

From about the fifth century BCE to the twelfth century CE, Buddhist monastic centres such as Takshashila, Nalanda, Vikramashila, Odantapuri, Valabhi and Jagaddala made the Indian subcontinent a hub of organised, residential and internationally connected higher learning. Within a few centuries of the Turkic invasions, and after a long erosion of royal patronage and social support, almost all of them had disappeared from India. This paper pursues three linked aims. The first is historical: to explain the decline by separating internal, political, economic, social and military causes instead of relying on the single narrative of invasion. The second is legal: to examine whether Articles 29 and 30 of the Constitution of India, read with the National Commission for Minority Educational Institutions Act, 2004 (NCMEI Act), can support the establishment and revival of Buddhist educational institutions. The third is empirical: to compare Buddhist institutions with those of other minorities, using the NCMEI list of Minority Status Certificates up to 30 September 2025, with Maharashtra as the principal case. Maharashtra holds nearly three-quarters of India's Buddhists (about 65.3 lakh, or 5.81 per cent of the State), yet it accounts for only three of the 68 Buddhist certificates issued nationally. The paper argues that the decline was largely structural, and that any modern revival must rest on constitutionally secure, community-administered and financially diversified institutions rather than on symbolic restoration.

Keywords: Buddhist education; Nalanda; minority educational institutions; Article 30; NCMEI Act, 2004; Maharashtra; institutional revival.

1. INTRODUCTION

Education has long served as a means of social transformation, equality and cultural development in Indian society. Among the traditions that emerged in ancient India, Buddhist education holds a distinctive place because of its openness, its commitment to inquiry and ethical values, and its readiness to carry knowledge across the usual boundaries of caste, gender and religion. Despite this contribution, the institutional tradition that sustained Buddhist learning declined over several centuries, and most of its leading centres were lost.

Modern India has witnessed a significant Buddhist revival, above all after Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's conversion in 1956, which drew a large section of historically marginalised communities, particularly in Maharashtra, towards Buddhism. The movement placed education at the centre of social empowerment, equality and cultural identity. The Census of India, 2011 recorded approximately 84 lakh Buddhists in the country, of whom nearly 65.3 lakh lived in Maharashtra, the largest Buddhist population of any State.[1] The growth of Buddhist-managed educational institutions has nevertheless not kept pace with the educational, cultural and social aspirations of these communities.

The Constitution of India supplies the legal setting in which this gap must be examined. Article 29 protects the right of any section of citizens to conserve its distinct language, script and culture, while Article 30 guarantees religious and linguistic minorities the right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice. Both provisions bear directly on the preservation of Buddhist cultural heritage and on the creation and revival of Buddhist educational institutions.

This paper therefore studies the historical development, decline and possible revival of Buddhist educational institutions in India, with Maharashtra as its principal case. It assesses the reach and effectiveness of Articles 29 and 30, identifies the legal and institutional challenges that Buddhist educational organizations face, and proposes measures for their revival. Its wider concern is how such institutions can advance educational equality, cultural preservation, social empowerment and constitutional values.

[1] Census of India, 2011, Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner, India. Figures are rounded; the Maharashtra count is about 65.31 lakh, or 5.81 per cent of the State's population.

1.1 Objectives and Research Questions

The study pursues three linked aims; each framed as a research question:

1. *Historical:* why did Buddhist institutions of such scale and prestige decline, and was invasion their sole or even their principal cause?

2. *Legal:* can Articles 29 and 30 of the Constitution, together with the National Commission for Minority Educational Institutions Act, 2004 (NCMEI Act), support the establishment and revival of Buddhist educational institutions today?

3. *Empirical:* how does the institutional presence of Buddhists, measured by NCMEI Minority Status Certificates, compare with that of other notified minorities in relation to population, and what might explain the difference?

1.2 Methodology and Scope

The study is primarily doctrinal. It analyses the constitutional provisions, the NCMEI Act, 2004 and the decisions of the Supreme Court of India on minority educational rights. It adds a descriptive, comparative treatment of the list of Minority Status Certificates issued by the National Commission for Minority Educational Institutions (NCMEI) up to 30 September 2025, read against the population figures of the Census of India, 2011.[2] The historical sections rely on established secondary accounts. The certificate data are used as an indicator of formal recognition and not as a census of Buddhist-managed institutions, a limitation discussed in Sections 3.4 and 9.

Sections 2 and 3 set out the historical and contemporary background. Sections 4 and 5 examine the constitutional, statutory and judicial framework, and Section 6 considers practical barriers. Section 7 presents the case for revival, and Sections 8 to 10 offer findings and recommendations, limitations, and conclusions.

[2] National Commission for Minority Educational Institutions, *List of Educational Institutions Issued Minority Status Certificates up to 30.09.2025*. The source file carries the title "MSC issued upto 31.07.2025", while its contents are cited here as at 30 September 2025, the date used throughout this paper. The date should be confirmed against the official list before publication.

2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: RISE AND DECLINE OF BUDDHIST EDUCATION

2.1 Origins and Growth of Buddhist Learning

Buddhist education arose in the sixth and fifth centuries BCE as an alternative to the Brahmanical system, which was organized around the *Gurukula* and restricted access to learning on grounds of caste and gender (Altekar, 1965; Mookerji, 1951). Buddhist teaching focused on equality, ethical conduct and open inquiry, and its use of Pali, Prakrit and other regional languages made instruction available to far wider sections of society (Kumar, 2023).

The institutional vehicle was the *vihara*, which began as a temporary shelter for monks during the rains. Over time viharas became permanent residential monasteries and, eventually, large centre of higher learning known as *mahaviharas*, with lecture halls, libraries, residences and places of worship, sustained by royal patronage, land grants and public donations (Dutt, 1962). The curriculum went beyond Buddhist doctrine to include philosophy, grammar, logic, medicine and the arts. Residential study, public debate and scholarly exchange extended India's educational and cultural influence across Asia.

Nalanda Mahavihara, founded in the fifth century CE in present-day Bihar and traditionally linked to the Gupta ruler Kumaragupta I,[3] became one of the most celebrated centres of higher learning in the ancient world. The accounts of the Chinese travellers Xuanzang and Yijing describe its academic standing, organization and international reputation (Beal, 1884; Watters, 1904–1905; Takakusu, 1896; Sankalia, 1972).[4] It drew students and scholars from China, Korea, Japan, Tibet and South-East Asia. Together with Takshashila, Vikramashila, Odantapuri, Valabhi and Jagaddala, it formed a wide network of educational and intellectual exchange that carried Buddhist philosophy and learning well beyond the subcontinent (Thapar, 2002).

2.2 Causes of Decline

The decline of this network is commonly attributed to the destruction of major mahaviharas

[3] The attribution of the foundation to Kumaragupta I is traditional; see Sankalia (1972) for the evidence on the founding of Nalanda.

[4] Xuanzang (Yuan Chwang) travelled in India between 629 and 645 CE and Yijing (I-Tsing) between 671 and 695 CE; see Watters (1904–1905) and Takakusu (1896) respectively.

during the invasions of the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, particularly the attacks associated with Bakhtiyar Khalji.[5]. The weakening of royal patronage, especially after the decline of the Pala dynasty, changing political conditions, the disruption of institutional support and the limits of an education model centered largely on monasteries all contributed to the gradual disappearance of these institutions (Thapar, 2002).

The destruction of prominent institutions was therefore a decisive event within a wider historical process, and not its sole cause. Institutions that depended on a narrow base of royal and monastic support proved unable to survive the loss of that support. This structural reading, which separates internal, political, economic, social and military factors, is central to the argument of this paper: it shows that revival cannot be achieved by restoring buildings alone, and that it requires durable legal, financial and social foundations.

2.3 Revival of Buddhism in Modern India

Buddhism nonetheless retained cultural and intellectual significance in India. Its modern revival gathered momentum through Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, especially after his conversion in 1956. The movement, commonly called Navayana or Neo-Buddhism, again placed education at the centre of social transformation, equality and empowerment for historically disadvantaged communities, and Maharashtra became its principal centre because of its large Neo-Buddhist population. The social and demographic revival has not, however, been matched by a restoration of educational institutions comparable to the great centres of the ancient period. This historical and contemporary gap frames the inquiry that follows.

3. BUDDHIST EDUCATION TODAY: INSTITUTIONAL REPRESENTATION IN INDIA AND MAHARASHTRA

3.1 Forms of Buddhist Educational Activity

Contemporary Buddhist education contrasts sharply with the historical achievements of Buddhist institutions. Buddhist educational activity in India now takes several forms: institutions managed by Buddhist organizations, institutions offering Buddhist studies, research and training centres, and universities that promote Buddhist philosophy and heritage.

[5] The scale and chronology of the destruction attributed to these attacks are discussed in the historical literature, and the accounts should be read with that discussion in mind; see Thapar (2002).

The revival of Nalanda University is an important step towards restoring India's association with Buddhist scholarship and international academic exchange (Mandal, 2024). It should, however, be kept distinct from the establishment of Buddhist-managed minority educational institutions, which raises different legal and institutional questions.

3.2 The National Picture

The National Commission for Minorities Act, 1992 notifies six religious minorities[6]: Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains and Parsis. The NCMEI list of Minority Status Certificates, which contained 14,222 entries up to 30 September 2025, shows wide differences in institutional representation (Table 1).

Table 1: NCMEI Minority Status Certificates by Community (up to 30 September 2025)

Community	Certificates	Share of total (%)
Christian	7,907	55.6
Muslim	5,331	37.5
Jain	586	4.1
Sikh	315	2.2
Buddhist	68	0.5
Parsi	15	0.1
Total	**14,222**	**100.0**

Source: NCMEI, List of Educational Institutions issued Minority Status Certificates up to 30.09.2025. Percentage shares are computed from the list.

Measured against the Census of India, 2011, Buddhists are the fourth-largest notified minority by population but rank fifth in certificates, and their representation per lakh of population is the lowest of the six. The Jain community, which is considerably smaller than the Buddhist,

[6] National Commission for Minorities Act, 1992, and the notifications issued under it. The Jain community was added to the notified list in 2014.

holds about 8.6 times as many certificates,[7] and the Parsi community, with a population of roughly 57,000, holds 15 certificates against 68 for Buddhists. The distribution of Buddhist certificates is also uneven: 52 of the 68 are in Uttar Pradesh, and only 16 are spread across eight other States and Union Territories.

3.3 Maharashtra as the Principal Case

The disparity is sharpest in Maharashtra. The 2011 Census recorded about 65.3 lakh Buddhists in the State, 5.81 per cent of its population and nearly three-quarters of all Buddhists in India. Yet Maharashtra accounts for only three of the 68 Buddhist certificates, about 4.4 per cent. All three were issued in 2008 and relate to the Bahujan Samaj Prabodhan Shikshan Sanstha in Ahmednagar district and its institutions, including a secondary school at Padalane and an Adhyapak Vidyalaya at Kotul.[8] Table 2 compares Buddhists with the other large minorities in the State.

Table 2: Population and Minority Status Certificates in Maharashtra

Community	Population (lakh)	Certificates	Certificates per lakh
Buddhist	65.3	3	0.05
Jain	14.0	12	0.86
Christian	10.8	115	10.6
Muslim	129.7	73	0.56

Source: Census of India, 2011; NCMEI list up to 30.09.2025. Certificates per lakh are computed from these figures.

The Buddhist population of Maharashtra is roughly six times the Christian population and nearly five times the Jain population, yet Buddhists hold three certificates against 115 and 12 respectively. Per lakh of population, the Buddhist figure of about 0.05[9] compares with 0.86 for

[7] The ratio is 586 ÷ 68 ≈ 8.6. The Parsi population of about 57,000 is taken from the Census of India, 2011.

[8] As recorded in the NCMEI list. The details of these institutions should be verified against the certificates themselves.

[9] Certificates per lakh = number of certificates ÷ population in lakh (for example, 3 ÷ 65.3 ≈ 0.05). Population

Jains, 10.6 for Christians and 0.56 for Muslims. The Buddhist community thus has a comparatively small presence in the official framework for recognizing minority educational institutions, notwithstanding its demographic weight in the State.

3.4 Interpreting the Disparity

The figures call for explanation, but caution is needed. A certificate is evidence of formal recognition and not a measure of every institution a community manages. Many Buddhist-managed institutions may operate through general educational trusts, social-welfare organizations or bodies founded for the advancement of Scheduled Caste communities, without ever seeking separate minority status. The coexistence of Scheduled Caste welfare frameworks with religious minority rights may itself shape the legal choices Neo-Buddhist organizations make.[10] Other plausible factors are limited awareness of the constitutional and statutory mechanisms, financial and administrative constraints, and difficulties of registration, recognition and affiliation. These possibilities cannot be confirmed from certificate data alone and require verification through institutional records, legal provisions and consultation with Buddhist educational organizations.

The absence of a certificate cannot by itself show that an institution is not Buddhist-managed or that it would not qualify for minority protection. The disparity is therefore best treated as an important research indicator. It raises the central question of whether the constitutional guarantees of minority educational rights are being translated into institutional opportunities for the Buddhist community.

4. CONSTITUTIONAL FOUNDATIONS OF MINORITY EDUCATIONAL RIGHTS

4.1 Origins of the Guarantee

The protection of minority rights was a deliberate commitment of the framers, reflecting their dedication to democracy, secularism, cultural diversity and social equality. The Constituent Assembly debates recognized that safeguarding minority interests was necessary not only to preserve distinct identities but also to secure equal opportunity in education, cultural

figures are from the Census of India, 2011, and are rounded.

[10] The Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Orders (Amendment) Act, 1990 extended Scheduled Caste status to persons professing Buddhism who belong to the listed castes. How that status interacts with minority educational rights is a distinct question that lies beyond the scope of this paper.

development and national life. The Draft Constitution contained a broader set of special provisions on minority rights in Part XIV (Draft Articles 292–301);[11] the final text carried the principal safeguards in Articles 29 and 30.

4.2 Articles 29 and 30

Article 29(1) gives any section of citizens having a distinct language, script or culture the right to conserve it, whether that section is a minority or a majority. Article 29(2) bars denial of admission to any citizen into a State-maintained or State-aided educational institution on grounds only of religion, race, caste or language. Article 30(1) guarantees religious and linguistic minorities the right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice, and so gives constitutional recognition to the autonomy of minority communities in advancing their educational, cultural and linguistic interests. Article 30(1A), inserted by the Constitution (Forty-Fourth Amendment) Act, 1978,[12] ensures that compensation payable on the compulsory acquisition of property of a minority educational institution does not restrict or abrogate the right under Article 30(1). Article 30(2) prohibits the State from discriminating against an institution in granting aid merely because it is managed by a religious or linguistic minority. These guarantees are supported by Articles 14, 15, 19(1)(g), 25 and 26, which together address equality, non-discrimination, freedom of religion and the freedom to carry on an occupation.

4.3 Who is a Minority? The State as the Relevant Unit

The Constitution neither defines "minority" nor fixes a numerical threshold, so the courts have shaped the concept. In *T.M.A. Pai Foundation v. State of Karnataka* (2002),[13] an eleven-judge Bench held that minority status under Article 30 is to be determined by reference to the population of the State concerned and not of India as a whole. The principle has particular force for Buddhists. They form about 0.7 per cent of India's population but 5.81 per cent of Maharashtra's, and a substantial share in parts of the Himalayan and North-Eastern regions. Minority status must therefore be assessed State by State.

Recognition of a community as a minority in a State must, however, be distinguished from the

[11] Constituent Assembly Debates; Draft Constitution of India, Part XIV (Draft Articles 292–301).

[12] Constitution of India, Art. 30(1A), inserted by the Constitution (Forty-Fourth Amendment) Act, 1978.

[13] *T.M.A. Pai Foundation v. State of Karnataka* (2002) 8 SCC 481.

minority character of an individual institution. An institution must itself satisfy the requirements of establishment and administration by members of the minority community, and mere association with Buddhism or the adoption of a Buddhist name does not confer minority educational status.

4.4 Buddhist Identity: Article 25 and the Denomination Question

Two questions of identity complicate the position of Buddhist organizations. The first arises from Explanation II to Article 25, which provides that, for the purposes of Article 25(2)(b), references to Hindus include persons professing the Sikh, Jain or Buddhist religion, and references to Hindu religious institutions are construed accordingly.[14] The provision is confined to social welfare and reform and to the opening of Hindu religious institutions of a public character to all classes and sections of Hindus. It does not declare Buddhists to be Hindus for all constitutional purposes or extinguish their distinct religious identity, and it should not be treated as a barrier to claiming minority protection under Article 30(1).

The second question concerns the difference between a religious denomination and a religious minority. In *Bramchari Sidheswar Shai v. State of West Bengal* (1995),[15] the Ramakrishna Mission case, the Supreme Court rejected the claim that the Mission's followers formed a separate religious minority and treated them as a denomination within the broader Hindu tradition. Articles 25 and 26 protect denominations, while Article 30 protects minorities; the categories are related but not interchangeable, and the existence of a distinct religious organization does not itself establish a right under Article 30. For Buddhist institutions the decision shows why the legal character, religious identity and constitutional status of the founding body must be established before minority educational rights are claimed.

5. STATUTORY AND JUDICIAL FRAMEWORK

5.1 The NCMEI Act, 2004 and the Institutions Involved

The constitutional guarantees are given practical form by the NCMEI Act, 2004, which created[16] the National Commission for Minority Educational Institutions to protect minority

[14] Constitution of India, Art. 25, Explanation II. Its operation is limited to the purposes of Art. 25(2)(b).

[15] *Bramchari Sidheswar Shai v. State of West Bengal* (1995) 4 SCC 646.

[16] National Commission for Minority Educational Institutions Act, 2004 (2 of 2005), as amended by Acts 18 of 2006 and 20 of 2010. Section references in this paper follow the Act as so amended and should be checked against

educational rights and to resolve disputes concerning minority institutions. Under Section 12 the Commission exercises specified powers of a civil court. Section 10 allows persons or organizations seeking to establish a minority educational institution to apply for a No Objection Certificate (NOC), with a deemed grant if the application is not decided within ninety days. Section 10A recognizes the right of minority institutions to seek affiliation to a university of their choice, subject to applicable legal and academic requirements. Section 12A provides an appeal against specified orders of competent authorities, and Sections 12B and 12C deal with the Commission's powers to determine and cancel minority status.

The Ministry of Minority Affairs plays a separate administrative and policy role through welfare schemes aimed at the educational and socio-economic disadvantage of notified minorities. The statutory determination of minority educational institution status must be distinguished from these general welfare functions, since the NCMEI holds the specific statutory role in relation to minority educational rights. How these bodies interact with the constitutional provisions largely decides whether rights become institutional opportunities for Buddhist organizations.

5.2 Establishing and Administering: From Azeez Basha to Naresh Agarwal

The phrase "establish and administer" in Article 30(1) has been extensively interpreted. In *In re Kerala Education Bill, 1957* (1958),[17] the Supreme Court held that Article 30 enables minorities to preserve their distinct identity through educational institutions, while accepting reasonable State regulation to maintain educational standards. In *S. Azeez Basha v. Union of India* (1967),[18] the Court linked the establishment of Aligarh Muslim University to the statute that incorporated it, and on that basis denied the university protection under Article 30(1).

That reasoning was reconsidered in *Aligarh Muslim University v. Naresh Agarwal* (2024).[19] A seven-judge Bench, by a 4:3 majority, overruled the principle in *Azeez Basha* that an institution cannot claim minority character merely because it was incorporated by legislation. The majority distinguished establishment from incorporation, held that statutory incorporation does

the current official text.

[17] *In re Kerala Education Bill, 1957* AIR 1958 SC 956, a Presidential reference under Art. 143 of the Constitution.

[18] *S. Azeez Basha v. Union of India* AIR 1968 SC 662 (decided in 1967).

[19] *Aligarh Muslim University v. Naresh Agarwal* 2024 INSC 856 (seven-judge Bench, 4:3). Whether Aligarh Muslim University is itself a minority institution was left to a regular Bench.

not by itself remove minority character, and identified the considerations relevant to deciding whether a minority established an institution: its origin, its founding purpose, the contribution of the community and the community's involvement in bringing it into existence. The Court did not finally decide whether Aligarh Muslim University is a minority institution, and left that question to a regular Bench. The judgment matters for Buddhist organizations that establish institutions through societies, trusts or statutory arrangements, because it directs attention to the substance of community initiative and not merely the form of incorporation.

5.3 Regulation and Institutional Autonomy

The right under Article 30(1) is not absolute. The State may regulate to secure academic standards, transparency, educational quality, financial accountability and student welfare, but regulation must not become a means of taking over administration or destroying minority character. *Ahmedabad St. Xavier's College Society v. State of Gujarat* (1974)[20] recognized that the right to administer includes managing institutional affairs, appointing staff and maintaining the institution's character, subject to permissible regulation. *T.M.A. Pai Foundation*[21] developed these principles, affirming institutional autonomy while permitting reasonable regulation to maintain standards and prevent maladministration.

Later decisions addressed admissions, fees and aid. *Islamic Academy of Education v. State of Karnataka* (2003)[22] and *P.A. Inamdar v. State of Maharashtra* (2005)[23] dealt with State control over admissions, fees and reservations in private professional institutions, including minority institutions. *Inamdar* recognized the autonomy of minority institutions while stressing the need to prevent profiteering and capitation fees and to maintain transparency and merit in admissions. In *Pramati Educational & Cultural Trust v. Union of India* (2014),[24] the Court held that the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 could not be applied so as to abrogate the rights of minority institutions under Article 30(1), and it also addressed the interaction of Article 15(5) with those institutions.

For Buddhist organizations these decisions show that minority recognition is only one part of

[20] *Ahmedabad St. Xavier's College Society v. State of Gujarat* (1974) 1 SCC 717.

[21] See *T.M.A. Pai Foundation*, cited at Section 4.3 above.

[22] *Islamic Academy of Education v. State of Karnataka* (2003) 6 SCC 697.

[23] *P.A. Inamdar v. State of Maharashtra* (2005) 6 SCC 537.

[24] *Pramati Educational & Cultural Trust v. Union of India* (2014) 8 SCC 1. Art. 15(5) was inserted by the Constitution (Ninety-Third Amendment) Act, 2005.

the task. Sustainable institutions must also be able to exercise autonomy within the regulatory regime governing admissions, fees, recruitment, affiliation and financial management, without compromising educational standards or constitutional safeguards.

6. PRACTICAL AND INSTITUTIONAL BARRIERS

Constitutional and statutory safeguards do not by themselves ensure that institutions are established and recognized. Seven barriers deserve attention, particularly in Maharashtra, where a large Buddhist population coexists with a small number of recorded certificates. They are possible explanations to be tested and not findings established by the present data.

1. **Limited legal awareness** of the rights under Articles 29 and 30 and of the procedures under the NCMEI Act, 2004.

2. **Registration and recognition difficulties** in forming educational trusts and societies and in obtaining the necessary permissions, recognition and affiliation.

3. **Financial and infrastructural constraints**, including difficulty in securing land, buildings, funds and qualified teaching staff.

4. **Limited administrative capacity** to manage educational organizations and meet regulatory requirements.

5. **Overlapping legal and welfare frameworks**, since the Scheduled Caste welfare framework applicable to many Neo-Buddhist communities may complicate the choice and use of minority educational rights.

6. **Regulatory and affiliation hurdles**, including NOCs, university affiliation and compliance with State educational regulations.

7. **Limited institutional representation**, since the small number of recorded Buddhist institutions leaves few established models and raises questions about formal recognition and capacity.

7. THE CASE FOR REVIVAL

The historical contribution of Buddhist institutions, their decline and their limited modern

presence raise the question whether revival is needed. It is best understood not as nostalgia for a lost tradition but as a constitutional, social and institutional necessity.

7.1 Constitutional Justification

Articles 29(1) and 30(1) together support revival. The first protects the cultural identity of a section of citizens; the second secures the autonomy of religious minorities to establish and administer institutions. Buddhist philosophy, Pali literature, history, art, architecture and ethical teaching form part of India's civilizational identity, and educational institutions are effective vehicles for preserving them alongside modern education and research. Libraries, research centres and specialized programs in Buddhist studies would enable the community to conserve its intellectual heritage and pass it to future generations (Monirozaman et al., 2026).

The right under Article 30(1) is, however, available only to institutions that meet the legal requirements of establishment, administration and minority character. The real question is therefore whether existing mechanisms are accessible enough to Buddhist organizations, and whether greater legal awareness and institutional support are needed to make them usable.

7.2 The Ambedkarite Educational Tradition

Revival in Maharashtra cannot be separated from Ambedkar's educational philosophy and social reform. He saw education as the essential means to social equality, individual dignity, intellectual development and release from entrenched disadvantage, and he stressed opening higher education and building institutions able to empower marginalized groups. The conversion of 1956 bound Buddhism, education and social transformation more closely together and renewed aspirations for education, equality, self-respect and advancement among Neo-Buddhist communities.

This tradition points to institutions that combine general and professional education with the study of Buddhist philosophy, history, literature, social thought and cultural heritage, and that support research, scholarship and international collaboration. Revival should thus be seen as an extension of the Ambedkarite vision of education and empowerment and not merely as an effort to found institutions on religious lines. Such institutions should be inclusive centres of learning that promote constitutional values, scientific inquiry, equality, fraternity and social justice while preserving the distinct cultural and intellectual identity of the Buddhist

community.

7.3 Lessons from Other Minorities

The experience of the Christian, Muslim, Jain, Sikh and Parsi communities in building educational institutions offers models for organization, legal recognition and management. The contrast in Maharashtra (Table 2) shows that a larger population has not produced more recognized institutions, which points to differences in historical institution-building, resources, awareness of minority rights and use of the statutory mechanisms. The comparison does not assume that every minority should have the same number of institutions, or that institutional development can be measured by population ratios alone. Its value lies in identifying the structural factors behind the differences and in drawing lessons on educational trusts, management structures and institutional networks.

7.4 Counter-Arguments

Four objections to revival deserve a response. The first is that separate Buddhist institutions are unnecessary because existing public and private institutions are open to Buddhists, and Articles 14, 15 and 29(2) protect equality and non-discrimination in admission. Access to general institutions and the right to establish institutions that preserve a distinct religious and cultural identity are, however, separate constitutional matters. The availability of the former does not displace Article 30 or the cultural protection under Article 29(1).

The second objection is that education should remain secular and inclusive and not be organized on religious lines. The concern is serious in a constitutional democracy committed to secularism and equality. Yet Article 30 itself recognizes the right of religious minorities to establish institutions of their choice, and minority institutions are not inherently opposed to secular educational values so long as they comply with constitutional requirements, applicable laws and educational standards.

The third objection is that the small number of certificates does not prove an absence of Buddhist-managed institutions. This is correct, particularly in Maharashtra, where the Ambedkarite educational movement has grown through many organizational forms. It means that the number, management and legal status of Buddhist institutions must be investigated independently before firm conclusions are drawn. The fourth objection is that revival requires

money, infrastructure, trained faculty and administrative capacity that many organizations lack. These limits are real and call for sustainable planning, effective management, academic quality, financial accountability and collaboration with public and private educational bodies.

These objections show that the goal should not be to create institutions merely to obtain minority status or preferential treatment. It should be to build academically credible and sustainable institutions that meet genuine educational needs, preserve Buddhist intellectual heritage and contribute to social development and constitutional democracy.

8. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 Principal Findings

1. **The decline was multi-causal.** Destruction during the medieval invasions, including those associated with Bakhtiyar Khalji, was important, but it occurred within a broader process of weakening patronage, political change, contraction of monastic networks and loss of economic support. A single-cause explanation is rejected.

2. **The historical legacy has not been translated into modern institutions.** The contribution of Nalanda, Vikramashila, Odantapuri, Valabhi and Takshashila to philosophy, logic, medicine, grammar and literature is widely acknowledged, but no comparably visible network of Buddhist-managed institutions exists today. This affects the systematic preservation of Buddhist philosophy, Pali, literature, history, archaeology, art and architecture, and points to the need to move from commemoration of ancient universities to sustainable contemporary educational and research institutions.

3. **Articles 29 and 30 provide a foundation, with limits.** Article 29(1) is not confined to religious minorities, and Article 30(1) enables Buddhist communities to combine modern education with the preservation of Buddhist traditions. Neither provision automatically confers minority status on every institution established by a Buddhist individual or organization. Each institution must satisfy the requirements of establishment, administration and minority character, and the minority status of the community in a State, determined under the State-unit principle, does not by itself establish an institution’s character.

4. **The NCMEI Act, 2004 offers an institutional legal pathway.** Sections 10, 10A, 12B and 12C support NOCs, affiliation and the determination of minority status, but the statutory route does not remove the need to comply with requirements on registration, land, infrastructure, academic standards and affiliation. Legal awareness and administrative assistance are therefore conditions for making constitutional rights practically accessible.

5. **Maharashtra is a significant case for institutional research.** With about 65.31 lakh Buddhists (5.81 per cent of the State) but only three of the 68 national certificates, all linked to the Bahujan Samaj Prabodhan Shikshan Sanstha, the State shows a marked gap between demographic presence and recorded institutional recognition.

6. **The Ambedkarite tradition is a strong foundation for revival.** Revival should extend beyond religious instruction to schools, colleges, professional institutions, universities, research centres, libraries and digital learning platforms.

7. **Certificate data are a starting point and not proof.** The national figures (68 Buddhist certificates against 7,907 Christian, 5,331 Muslim, 586 Jain, 315 Sikh and 15 Parsi) raise questions about organizational structure, legal awareness and recognition practice, but they cannot establish the actual number, quality or contribution of institutions, or the existence of discrimination. Institutional age, administrative capacity, legal strategy and alternative recognition routes may all affect them.

8.2 Recommendations

On the basis of the historical, constitutional, statutory and comparative analysis, the following measures are proposed for the revival and sustainable development of Buddhist educational institutions.

Directory and inventory. A national directory of Buddhist educational institutions, periodically updated, and a separate Maharashtra inventory should be prepared. They should record each institution's name and location, year of establishment, the legal status of its managing trust, society or organization, its type (school, college, university, research centre, monastery-based or vocational), courses, recognition, affiliation and accreditation, minority-status certification, enrolment, funding and research activity. The Maharashtra inventory

should compare Buddhist institutions with those of other notified minorities on number, type, distribution, enrolment, infrastructure and funding, and not on certificates alone; the State Government, universities, research bodies and Buddhist organizations may prepare it together. It would show whether the certificate gap reflects a genuine institutional gap, limited use of the certification process, or both. The directory is a research output to be built through separate district-level data collection and verification, and not a completed national census.

Legal awareness and facilitation. A facilitation mechanism should guide eligible organizations on registering trusts and societies, preparing governing documents, establishing and administering institutions, applying for NOCs under Section 10, seeking minority-status determination and appeal, obtaining affiliation under Section 10A, and meeting recognition and accreditation requirements. Universities, law colleges and legal aid bodies can run regular workshops and documentation clinics. The aim is to reduce procedural difficulty and not to presume that every Buddhist-managed institution is entitled to minority status.

Recognition and affiliation. Recognition and affiliation should be accessible, transparent and time-bound for eligible institutions. Authorities should state application requirements, point out deficiencies, give reasons for rejection and decide applications within the statutory periods, and universities should give clear guidance on academic standards, infrastructure, faculty qualifications and inspections. Facilitation must preserve academic quality and accountability, since minority rights do not exempt institutions from reasonable regulation.

Targeted regional support. In Himalayan and border regions with established monastic traditions, support may go to schools, residential facilities, language centres, libraries, digital education and research. In Neo-Buddhist regions, especially Maharashtra, it may focus on quality school and higher education, professional courses, research, vocational training and infrastructure. Support should rest on transparent criteria of need and regional disadvantage within the constitutional and statutory framework, and should not operate as an automatic entitlement based on religious identity.

Diversified and sustainable funding. Institutions should not depend on a single source. Possible sources are community contributions and endowments, donations from individuals and philanthropic bodies, Corporate Social Responsibility funds subject to the Companies Act,

2013 and applicable rules,[25] eligible government grants, research grants, alumni and scholarship funds, and lawful public–private partnerships. Transparent accounts, independent audits, clear governance and long-term financial plans are essential to public confidence and sustainability.

Buddhist studies and international collaboration. Universities and research bodies should develop Buddhist Studies as an academic discipline through departments, chairs, research centres and programmes in Pali language and literature, Buddhist philosophy and ethics, history and archaeology, art and architecture, comparative religion, Buddhist contributions to science, logic and medicine, Ambedkar's interpretation of Buddhism, and the relationship between Buddhism, constitutional values and social justice. Fellowships, doctoral programmes, translation projects, manuscript digitization and publication should be encouraged, together with student and faculty exchange, joint research, conferences and language programmes with institutions in countries that have established Buddhist educational traditions.

Inclusive admission policies. Institutions claiming minority status should frame admission policies that respect Article 30(1) while remaining consistent with Article 29(2) in State-maintained or State-aided institutions, with reference to their legal status, the nature of the course and the judicial principles on minority institutions. An inclusive approach can promote access, excellence and social harmony without disregarding minority protection.

An Ambedkarite educational network. Buddhist organizations, trusts, universities, colleges and social institutions should build a coordinated network inspired by Ambedkar's educational philosophy, offering scholarships for disadvantaged students, mentoring and career guidance, preparation for competitive examinations and professional courses, teacher training, collaboration among existing institutions, research and publication on Buddhism and social transformation, and digital learning resources. Its objective is to turn the ideals of equality, liberty, fraternity and social justice into sustainable institutional practice.

Periodic review. A review mechanism should assess institutional growth, recognition and affiliation, enrolment, academic quality, geographical access, financial sustainability, research output and the participation of disadvantaged groups, using transparent and consistent methods.

[25] Companies Act, 2013, s. 135, read with the rules framed under it.

Certificates should be treated as one indicator among several, and a five-year review is suggested.

9. LIMITATIONS AND SCOPE FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Three limitations should be acknowledged. First, the certificate comparison rests on NCMEI data for a fixed period and does not represent all institutions established or managed by minority communities. Second, the Maharashtra case study relies mainly on demographic and certificate data; a full assessment of the State's Buddhist educational infrastructure would need district-wise field research, institutional surveys and interviews with administrators, Buddhist organizations, teachers and students. Third, the historical analysis draws on established accounts, and further specialized research is needed on regional variation and on the relative weight of political, economic and institutional factors. Future work should therefore prepare a verified national directory, conduct a district-wise survey of Buddhist institutions in Maharashtra, examine alternative recognition mechanisms and assess the educational outcomes of existing Buddhist-managed institutions.

10. CONCLUSION

The history of Buddhist education in India is an important chapter in the development of knowledge, philosophy and institutional learning. Its ancient centres showed that institutions can sustain inquiry, debate, research and international exchange. Their decline resulted from a complex process in which political, economic, institutional and social factors operated together with military destruction.

In contemporary India the question of revival must be placed within the constitutional framework of equality, cultural preservation and minority educational rights. Articles 29 and 30 offer safeguards and opportunities, and the NCMEI Act, 2004 supplies statutory mechanisms for the recognition and protection of eligible institutions. Maharashtra, with its large Buddhist population, the legacy of the Ambedkarite movement and its aspirations for social transformation, is the most significant setting for this effort. The small number of Buddhist certificates recorded in the NCMEI data nevertheless raises questions about legal awareness, institutional recognition and the availability of reliable information. These require empirical investigation and not conclusions drawn from certificate figures alone.

Revival should not mean reproducing ancient universities in their historical form. It should mean establishing modern, inclusive, academically credible and financially sustainable institutions that draw on Buddhist intellectual heritage and Ambedkar's emancipatory vision of education. Such institutions should offer Buddhist philosophy and cultural studies together with science, technology, law, medicine, social sciences, professional education and interdisciplinary research, and should foster critical thinking, constitutional morality, equality, fraternity, human dignity and social responsibility.

The constitutional protection of minority educational rights becomes meaningful only when communities have the awareness, organizational capacity, financial resources and institutional vision to exercise it. Revival is therefore not merely the recovery of a lost legacy but an opportunity to turn that legacy into a contemporary educational movement grounded in knowledge, equality, social justice and constitutional values. Legal awareness, institutional planning, public policy support, academic collaboration and community participation, working together, can provide its foundation.

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