

Impact of Bodhisattva Philosophy on Indian Society

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Abstract

*Buddha says that each person is his own master, he promulgates a principle whose applicability becomes stronger as man begins to get more and more confidence in the control of himself and the environment. So if, today, with scientific and technological development, man feels that he has come to a point where his own intellect makes him superior to anybody else or allows him able to solve any problem that he has, whether physical or ethical or political or whatever, would not the principle that man is the master of himself that he has to be responsible to himself because whatever he does he inherits become one of the most important ways of looking at himself. Another important aspect of Buddha's teachings is meditation. Meditations in Buddhism are of many types and names (Sati, Samadhi, Samata, Vipassana, Metta etc.). As truly described in Dr. Ambedkar's *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, Dhamma to many people is only meditation, and is only the teaching of Buddha, but this is not so. In reality, they are all just tools to further strengthen practice of Dhamma (to become righteous) in little more depth. But these cannot be taken as the final teaching of Buddha. Every individual has a liberty of choice to follow a certain way to apply those teachings in his life. Because the ultimate goal for Buddhism is to free people from all the bondages setbacks sorrows of life and have Liberty, Equality and Fraternity in Society.*

Keywords: *Meditation, Society, Buddha and Dhamma.*

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INTRODUCTION

Today India is again appearing on the Buddhist map of the world. Indians are awakening to their Buddhist past. In the second half of the 9th Century thanks, to western and Indian archaeologists and orient lists. Indians began to be surprised at the discovery of the Buddhist legacy. To talk of a “revival of Buddhism” in modern India is right in this sense of the discovery of the Buddhist heritage by Indians. Even today, 199 years after the foundation of the Asiatic Society, 81 years after the foundation of the Maha Bodhi Society of India, 71 years after the foundation of the Archaeological Survey of India, the process of the discovery of Buddhism in India is still going on. There is no doubt about it that much good work has been done in recent decades to disseminate some knowledge about Buddhism among those who care to know or those who can read and write. But the number of those who care to know is small and of those who cannot read or write is very large and much literary and educational work remains to be done in order to give a glimpse of the wonder that was Buddhism in the Indian sub-continent before the Muslim invasions.

HINDUISM AND BUDDHISM

HINDUISM

Hinduism is the third largest religion in the world, following Christianity and Islam. Hinduism stands for the faith and the way of life of most people who live in India. It is unknown where Hinduism was started and by whom. The beliefs of the Hindu's are very different than that of Christian's. Hinduism is based on beliefs in things such as reincarnation, dharma and in three main gods. The religion of Hinduism teaches us that each living body, including animals, is filled with an eternal soul. Hindus say that the individual soul was a part of the creator spirit, Brahma or existence from within their own Atman, roughly soul. It is each soul's job and wishes eventually to return to Brahma. It is not possible though because by a soul's sins, and impurities from the world, they are no longer pure and holy to return. Instead, a soul must become pure before returning to Brahma, who is absolutely pure. The process of becoming pure is so hard that no soul can become pure in only one lifetime. The soul is forced to live life after life until it is pure enough to return to Brahma. In Hinduism, attaining the highest life is a process of removing the bodily distractions from life, allowing one to eventually understand the Brahma nature within.

BUDDHISM

The term Buddhism is now used to denote the teaching of the Buddha, a historical person who flourished some 25 Centuries ago on the Indian subcontinent. This teaching has been described variously as a religion, a philosophy, a psychological system, an ethico-moral code, a socio-economic blue-print, and so on. No doubt all

these aspects could be discerned in different parts of the Buddha's teaching, but the teaching is itself something more than all these combined. The term which Buddhists use to designate the teaching is Dhamma or Dharma.¹ This term comes from a root term meaning "to uphold", and means the basic law which "upholds" the universe. It is therefore sometimes translated simply as Law or Norm. It conveys some idea of the unity that informs the whole body of the Buddha's teaching. We shall use the words dhamma and Buddhism as synonyms.

The presentations of celestial Buddhas and Bodhisattvas within the Mahayana are often seen as expedients that, though ultimately untrue, from the relative standpoint provide a focus for devotion and are given to help practitioners, ultimately leading them towards salvation and enlightened understanding. The meditation practice under discussion can thus be described within the context of skilful means. It is a skilful means for harnessing the mind's general business by letting it become preoccupied with the details of the visualization. This draws it from the outside world and its concerns, so that it can calm down of its own accord. The colours and content of the visualization provide interest but at the same time lead to stability. Often one is told to focus on the lower parts of the Buddha's form or on the lotus or throne if the mind is excited. If one then becomes mentally dull, one is encouraged to focus on the upper parts of the Buddha's body, for example on the face or between the eyebrows.

COMPARISON BETWEEN HINDUISM AND BUDDHISM

According to SarvepalliRahdhakrishnan, "Buddhism, in its origin at least is an off shoot of Hinduism". Both Hinduism and Buddhism originated in the Indian subcontinent and share a very long, but rather peculiar and uncomfortable relationship, which in many ways is comparable to that of Judaism and Christianity. The Buddha was born in a Hindu family, just as Christ was born in a Jewish family. Some people still argue that Buddhism was an off shoot of Hinduism and the Buddha was a part of the Hindu pantheon, a view which is not acceptable to many Buddhists. It is however widely accepted that Buddhism gained popularity in India because it released the people from the oppression of tradition and orthodoxy. The teachings of the Buddha created hope and aspiration for those who had otherwise no hope of salvation and freedom of choice in a society that was dominated by caste system, predominance of ritual form of worship and the exclusive status of the privileged classes which the Vedic religion upheld as inviolable and indisputable.

BUDDHA'S ATTITUDE TOWARDS HINDUS

Prior to his enlightenment, the Buddha was brought up in a traditional Hindu family. Before finding his own path, he went to Hindu gurus to find an answer to the

problem of suffering. He followed the meditation techniques and ascetic practices as prescribed by the Hindu scriptures and followed by the Hindu yogis of his time. It is said that after becoming the Buddha, he showed special consideration to the higher caste Hindus especially the Brahmins (priests) and Kshatriyas (warriors). He exhorted his disciples to treat especially Brahmins with respect and consideration because of their spiritual bent of mind and inner progress achieved during their previous

The ideal in Buddhism, Brâhmanism and Upanisad: The Buddhist ideal was the attainment of tranquility (upasama), the deathless state (amata) state of peace (santi) and supreme bliss (parama-sukha) by the extinction of defilement (âsava) such as desire, ignorance and craving. Early Brâhmanism aimed at obtaining material gain through sacrifice, while the Upanisadic doctrine aimed at the attainment of liberation through realisation of the identity of Âtman and Brahman. Asceticism was considered to be of great importance to attain this idealbirths.

BUDDHIST IDEAS IN INDIA

As it developed in India, Buddhism was a rational evolution emerging from the context of Hindu (Vedantist) religion-philosophy. On the religious level, Buddhism accepted the Vedic posture that sense-based life is suffering and must be transcended to experience a higher state of realization, one's "own true nature," as it is frequently referred to in scriptures of both traditions. It differed from Hinduism, however, on a number of important points, some religious (use of rites, moral precepts, definition of God), and some philosophical.

CONTRIBUTION OF BUDDHISM TO INDIA

The contribution which Buddhism made to the cultural advancement of India is indeed notable. The part played by the viharas and sangha was unique in this regard. In this paper, the researcher made an attempt to describe some of its important aspects, such as educational system, artistic development, political and social ideas acquired by the people of India.

CONCLUSION

Rdhakrishnandid a great work on Budha Dharma and Darshan, Buddhism and its philosophy. He spent more than a decade writing this book. This was published a few hours before his death. This work was an excellent treatise on Buddhist philosophy. He had also made a valuable contribution to Buddhist studies by translating into Hindi and English Abhidharmakosh of Sarvastivada originally written by Acharya Vasubandhu, the 4th Century great Buddhist philosopher. At the eleventh hour of his life, he was compiling a glossary of Buddhist terminology, but could not complete. Great Indian leader Jayaprakash, Narayan rightly said about him, we owe

a debt of gratitude to Acharya Narendradeva a debt to his unique personality, his civility and affection, to his intellectual contributions, his leadership, and above all, to his innocent, selfless, intensely humane character, his renunciation and sacrifice. H.L. Singh is a writer and researcher. He has worked as translator and editor. He has written several books. A brief encyclopaedia of Buddhism in Nepal, Nepal in Records, Modern Interpretation of Buddhism, is important ones.

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