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REVIEW ARTICLE

A STUDY ON THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF BUDDHISM TO INDIAN CULTURE

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A Study on the Contributions of Buddhism to Indian Culture

Dr. Bhupender Kumar

Principal RN Inter College, Nazibabad

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INTRODUCTION

Buddha as the transcendental, eternal and absolute, who saves all living beings through his triple body, dharma, sambhoga etc. Maheyenists believe in an infinite number of Bodhisattvas, who take vow to attain Buddha-hood and to liberate all beings. Maheyenists emphasize both the life of monk and that of householder. They consider wisdom, devotion as the means to liberation. Maheyenists regard Nirvana as transcendental experience of sunyata and is a positive state. Yoga believe in only mind, which constructs the conditioned world. According to them, Alayavijana is real and all objects, which are manifested from Alayavijana, are unreal. Madhya-mikas believe in sunyata or emptiness which is the essence behind the impermanent phenomena and all things are the manifestation of sunyata. Enlightenment, according to Mahayana, does not mean simply the understanding of the Four Noble Truths in their positive states but the experience of sunyata or Buddha-nature that constitutes the original enlightenment of all creatures. And the Buddha is not merely the Enlightened One in the old sense but an omniscient. This is why the Buddha's enlightenment is higher than that of Arhats.

Mahayana is also called Bodhisattvayana, the vehicle of the future Buddhas. The idea of Bodhisattva is the hall-mark of Mahayana. In the Henayanic doctrine, there is only one Bodhisattva who was before the Buddha's enlightenment; while in Mahayana teachings there are innumerable Bodhisattvas, who take vows to become Buddhas in order to save all beings. Like Homeless Bodhisattva, he also observes the Bodhisattva precepts and practices ten perfections. Household Bodhisattva is considered as the protector of Buddhism. Though he lives in the worldly family, he always keeps his mind pure and tries to avoid any disturbance from the external objects. He can also attain sainthoods from the joyful stage to immovable stage of Bodhisattva.

Homeless Bodhisattva is one, who is dedicating his own life for the happiness of others. He is considered as the keeper of the Buddha's Dharma. He tries to complete his self-benefit and then to benefit others. He

not only teaches the Buddhist teachings to people but he also teaches professions, medicines, arts, literatures, philosophies, psychologies, etc to them. Besides, he also gives gifts to the poor, the needy, the orphans, etc. He also constructs hospitals, schools and other welfare projects. He can attain twelve stages of Bodhisattva.

SOCIAL AND POLITICAL BACKGROUND OF BUDDHISM

Generally, caste system was popular in Indian society before the period of Mauryas and discrimination between four castes became serious and fierce. While analyzing the Indian social factor, it needs to be kept in mind that the history of ancient India has been the history of the upper castes. By the beginning of the Buddhism, caste system with its gross inequalities was well entrenched in India and it had become both functional and hereditary. Four castes are known as Brahmins, Ksatriyas, Vaisyas and Sudras. Among these castes, Brahmins were considered as the highest people, who enjoyed every social privilege and their ascendancy as an inalienable birthright. And they came to be viewed as gods in human form and kings were obligated to place themselves at their service.

In the Madhura Sutta, the Brahmins consider themselves as the most distinguished and three other castes as inferior. The Brahmins alone are accounted pure and those who are not Brahmins impure. The Brahmins are sons of Brahman, born from his mouth and the heirs of Brahman. Such a haughty attitude of Brahmins was certainly protested by Buddhism and Jainism as all men have the power to become perfect. As a result, all members of the society were admitted into Buddhist sangha and then they were treated equally in the Buddhist Order.

Again, the claim to superiority by the Brahmins against the rest of the castes was challenged by the Ksatriyas, who took lead in the struggle against the Brahmins' attitude as their powers as the ruler of the state increased. Ksatriyas were responsible to rule and maintain social order as well as to defend the

country. This caste consisted of kings, mandarins, officers and soldiers. In the time of Buddha, Ksatriyas were placed higher than Brahmins. Vaisyas, the third class, traded and held an important part of social properties. This caste included landlords, businessmen, and small traders, etc. Sudras included workers, hunters, menials and serfs etc. This was the lowest class in the society and they were the property of three higher castes. It means that they were subservient to other castes. Generally, they lived and died like animals.

CONTRIBUTION OF BUDDHISM TO INDIAN THOUGHT AND CULTURE

The Thought of Buddhism The system of Buddhist thoughts consists of Mahayanic ideas. It means sufferings and selflessness of all conditioned things. The absolute truth (Paramartha satya) has not been mentioned in their doctrines. The main doctrines of Hiragana are Four Noble Truths, the Theory of Dependent origination, five aggregates, karma, rebirth and Nirvana. All these doctrines are explained according to the relative aspects. The universe was made by four material elements (earth, water, fire and air) and it goes on without maker, without the known beginning, continuously exists by nature of relations of cause and effects, and man was constituted by five aggregates. His body belongs to material and his mind consists of feeling, perception, mental function, and consciousness. The so-called body is subject to birth, old-age, sickness and death. Mind is always disturbed by sorrow, grief, sufferings and lamentation.

Theravadins regard the Buddha as a historical person, the historical Gotama. Theravada aims at the individual liberation and believes that only Gotama attained Buddhahood, and they consider nirvana as opposition of samsara. Hinayanists deny the Brahman, Ētman, God and soul. It only accepts gods (devas) as the good ones, who protect Dharma and to help good men. Especially they believe Arhats as the worthy men, who had already reached perfect Nirvana and had nothing more to learn. Moreover, they believe that when desire, hatred, ignorance are absent from one's mind, he can attain Nirvana, free from rebirth in the realms of existence.

The means to the liberation, according to Theravadins, is the practice of precepts, meditation and wisdom. Sarvastivada also belongs to Hinayana, it branched off from Theravada, the orthodox school of Buddhism, because it did not admit the Theravadin theory that all things are unreal. Sarvastivadins hold that all things are real and exist at all times: past, present and future. In fact, they only mention that the attributes, which constitute all things, are permanent. For example, moisture of water, the heat of fire, the move of air, the solid of earth, all are existent according to cause and conditions but they never vanish. The self-nature or the absolute of all things has been not mentioned by the Sarvastivada as yet. Moreover, it believes in the theory of non-self, the absence of any permanent

substance in an individual. And it believes in the plurality of all phenomenal things in the universe.

Like Theravada, Sarvastivada denies the existence of God and soul. It believes that the world is constituted by cause and conditions. Especially, it does not believe Arhat as the worthy man, who had already reached perfect Nirvana. It thinks that the life of an Arhat is governed by good or bad karma and he must have something to learn more. Sarvastivada also considers the Buddha as a historical person. He attained Buddhahood and became omniscient at Bodhi Gaya. Its concepts of bondage and liberation, and the means to liberation are the same as in Theravada.

Vaibhasika also belongs to Hinayana, it branched off from Sarvastivada on account of disagreement with the thought of Sarvastivada such as all things are real and exist forever. It advocated that everything is momentary like a dream or a lightning and only the unconditioned things exist forever. According to it, impermanence is the attribute of all conditioned things. The unconditioned thing is the inner principle of all things that exist forever.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

According to D.N. Jha (2012), the first three castes, Brahmin, Ksatriya and Vaisya, were twice-born and they were more privileged than Sudras and untouchables who were outcaste. Generally speaking, ancient Indian rulers used the ideology of Brahmanism to consolidate their authority to run the social order. Asoka, the great king of Mauryas, embraced Brahmanism before converting to Buddhism. Though he followed Buddhism, castes system still existed in his empire. The caste division was, however, not severe in his kingdom. D.N. Jha holds that during the reign of Mauryas, four castes became endogamous and their rigidity, which generated tension, would not be found.

In the time of Asoka, a section of Sudras for the first time in India history were aided by the state in setting down as farmers in the agricultural settlements and were granted lands and the fiscal exemption as well as the supply of cattle, seeds, and money in the hope of future payment. On the other hand, in industrial activities, artisans and craftsmen played their role in the production of commodities.

On the basis of Milindapanh, D.N. Jha holds that in the time of Mauryas there were seventy five occupations, out of which nearly sixty occupations were connected with various kinds of crafts. And the rest were connected with mining of products such as gold, silver, lead, tin, copper, iron and precious stones or jewels. The artisans and craftsmen were largely drawn, in this period, from Sudras, who gained in wealth and status on account of the progress of crafts and commerces.

N. Dutt (2011) asserts that after the third Buddhist council, Asoka's son and daughter were sent to

Ceylon to introduce Buddhism in that island and the sacred books carried there by word of mouth that were reduced to writing in 88 B.C. in the form in which we have three pitakas of Ceylon to this day.

The earliest religion in India was the Vedic religion that took shape and crystallized over an extremely long period of time and particular stages of that process are reflected in various Vedic writings. Vedic religion can be regarded as well-defined system, a whole complex of religious beliefs together with corresponding rites and ceremonies. It also reflected the development of Vedic society itself in the period when the first Indian states were taking shape. Buddhism emerged in the most developmental stage of the Vedic religion and both were developing abreast without exclusion.

All scholars agree that firstly Vedic Aryan conquered the aborigines of Punjab and settled on the banks of the Indus and its tributaries. In recent years the interesting archeological findings have brought to light the concrete evidence on the Indo Aryan of the Vedic age.

K. Antonova (2011) affirms that Vedic Aryan extended throughout Punjab, in the upper reaches of the Yamuna and Ganges and the valleys of these rivers.

R.C. Dutt (2010) holds that before the rise of Magadha, Brahmin was only a number of colonist tribes on the Ganges but after the rise of Magadha that brought all Northern India to the rule of a nation and Brahmanism was spread the whole north India.

R.S. Sharma (2010) gives a more detail report that after the spread of Brahmanism to Magadha, its surrounding areas such as Anga, Vanga, Berares, Kosala accepted this religion. And in subsequent centuries, Brahmanism spread to Bengal, Orissa, Assam and other provinces of western India. These places received the first rays of Vedic civilization.

According to G. Kotavsky (2011), by the end of the fourth century B.C., Bengal, Orissa and the whole western India belonged to Vaisnavism and Shaivism (two branches of Brahmanism). Gujarat was early colonized by Vaisnavism and it would appear from the legends of Krishna in the Mahabharata that the country was colonized from the banks of the Jumna by some the races, who had fought in the great war and by the fourth century B.C., the Surashtra of Gujarat had been powerful nation of Brahmanism.

Malwa too was early assimilated by Brahmanism and the kings of Ujjain were reckoned among the civilized Brahmin powers after the fourth century B.C. The waves of Brahmanism continued to roll further and the Vindhya mountain was crossed. In Andhra, a great and powerful kingdom of Brahmin was founded in the country between the Nerbada and the Krishna rivers

and capital of this southern empire was near modern Amaravati. And the country beyond the Krishna river received the Aryan civilization and religion. Three kingdoms (the Cholas, the Cheras and the Pandyas) had arisen in the extreme southern part of India also followed Brahmanism.

R.S. Dutt (2010) holds that wherever Aryan came, they introduced cultivation, manufactures and arts. They spread the Sanskrit language, Vedic religion and rites. And they founded the school of law, religion and learning. Upto the third century B.C., the Vaisnavism and Shaivism developed in the whole country. Though R.C. Dutt holds that these new religions aimed at the image worship, rites and ceremonies but the image worship, in fact, started from the first century B.C. and it was certainly influenced by Mahayana Buddhism.

ECONOMIC BACKGROUND OF BUDDHISM

The period from the post Maurya to Gupta ages, is known for round development of Indian economy. It could be seen in terms of cities teeming with industries, handicrafts, and commerces and numerous agricultural settlements in the countryside. Buddhism emerged and grew in India in this economic background of the period. It was a favourable age for its propagation inland as well as outside India.

Agriculture consisted of both cultivation of crops and breeding of animals. Cultivation: The cultivations of wet paddy, wheat and barley were produced at mass a large scale in the plains such as the plains of Indus and its tributaries; the areas of Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan; the plains of Godavari river; and the plains of Krishna river in south India. Specially the Gangetic basin blessed with perennial flow of water in the river Ganges as well as abundant amount of rains. This area was suitable for cultivation of wet paddy.

R. S. Sharma(2010) holds that: the sandy and loamy soil of these plains helped peasants to produce sufficient surplus not only for their own needs but also to meet the needs of the people living in towns and engaged in trade and commerce. Although, the soil was fertile yet rice was just sufficient for the needs in the country. There was not surplus that served for trade and urbanization. As a result, there is not any impressive godowns or grain storehouse to be documented in the excavations or in the literature. It seems the urban centers depended on the seasonal supply of rice and in cases of scarcity, villages and the common masses had to bear the brunt.

The main products of agriculture, during the period of study, were rice, wheat, barley and some kinds of pulses that were planted across India; pepper, musk, and saffron were major items of export. Romila

Thapar states that the exchange of pepper brought back many golden and silver coins from Roma. The cultivation of cotton in the neighbourhood of Benares served for the inland weaving industries and export. Sugarcane and coconut were also important products served for industries. Millet was planted popularly in the south plains where the climate is drier and soil is not fertile.

Equipped with the iron ploughshare and implements in large quantities, intensive cultivation of fields was done. R.S. Sharma maintains that fields were ploughed twice or thrice and the peasants divided their lands according to crops. A significant development in cultivation was the beginning of transplantation of wet paddy. From the later Vedic time, paddy was only planted directly as a rainy season crop that ripened in 90 days. The peasants did not know the use of agricultural technique for their transplantation. Again, the periodical droughts and floods caused scarcity that not only ate away the surplus but also caused famine conditions, making the accumulation of surplus impossible. The producer, therefore, suffered more than the privileged consumers in the city who had enough money to buy food from producers from distant areas where conditions have not been adverse.

It is said that, after the time of Mauryas, agriculture became the main form of productive labour. The ancient Indians were skilled cultivators. They were well-versed assessing the nature and properties of the various soils. In areas with the more fertile soil, cultivators succeeded in reaping two or even three crops in one year. Paddy was perhaps, main product during the period of study. G. Kotavsky (2011) shows that rice grains were found in the layers of earth related to the Maurya period when archeologist excavated the settlements in Northern and Central India.

According to D.N. Jha (2012), the fertility of the soil in Ganga valley and the large plains in the south led to the rise of a new class of rich peasant proprietors in the post Mauryan era. These rich peasants were in a position to pay taxes and thus contributed to the growth of the state revenue system.

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