

Reconsidering Indian Culture in the Context of Buddhism and Buddhist Philosophy

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ABSTRACT:

culture, it not only means language, literature, dance, music etc, the social practices, beliefs, value system, fundamental rights and traditions also come under culture. India has its own ancient culture with a fusion between Hinduism, Buddhism, Muslims and tribal people and somehow it helps to shape India's national identity. India is very rich for its culture, that is beyond doubt. But if we try to understand the roots of this richness and the reason behind its upliftment then we can easily understand how Buddhism, the earliest religion of India, influenced Indian culture from various aspects. Even all the layers of Indian culture is nothing but the struggle of Shramanic and Brahmanic trends. Today's India can't be imagined without Buddhism and it can't be separated from Buddhism. This paper is going to highlight the impacts of Buddhism In Indian culture from several aspects and to find the reason behind the importance of studying Buddhism and Buddhist philosophy in the modern age.

KEYWORDS:Culture, Philosophy, Arts, Literatures, Education, policies.

INTRODUCTION:

Indian culture is an umbrella concept under which India's values, belief system, rituals, languages and practices all come together. As we know India's most famous concept is "unity in diversity". This particular phrase refers to peace and harmony. It indicates the principle of equality irrespective of class, caste, creed, gender, religion and also the unity in cultural and political diversities. But the question is how much that unity in diversity is maintained from the ancient period? People are seen arguing and fighting regarding languages, religions, rituals, festivals, political parties and so forth. Therefore India needs an extensive analysis to find out the truism of the phrase, "unity in diversity". The social structure of the early Vedic period is divided within four varnas and they were not framed horizontally plane, different but equal rather they were on vertical plane, not merely different but also unequal, one standing above the other. The selected works, punishments, customs everything was different for the four varnas without any transmigration and that graded inequality became very prominent in post Vedic society. In the Smriti era, the rules and legislation, the process of punishment, the way of life became more rigorous for the lower and lowest castes and also for the women. The Vedic rituals (yajna) became a vital part of life and therefore Brahmanas started to play a great role in the society. But the non-brahmins didn't agree to imitate those things blindly. Therefore, they were determined to think independently and to walk on the path of movement which was headed specifically by the Kshatriyas. Thus, the intellectual and social

revolution became the cause of the origination of Buddhism. It openly challenged the sacredness of Veda and Vedic sacrifices and propagated the principle of equality and brotherhood.

BASIC PHILOSOPHY OF BUDDHISM:

Karuna (love for human beings) and Maitri (love for living beings) are the pillars of Buddha's religion. According to him Karuna is not enough, we all have to practice Maitri, the fellowfeeling. In fact when his rivals wanted to destroy his public image again and again by staining his character, he remained very silent and at the last truth conquered. He had a very altruistic nature that influenced him to do good for society. Therefore, after getting enlightenment he didn't preserve his Knowledge within himself, but tried to spread his teachings to everyone. The Buddha traveled and preached his Dhamma almost the whole Northern India walked on foot without even using a bullock cart. He saw that conflict is everywhere around our society or family. Our aim should be to choose the perfect way to solve it. He observed the social segregation in his time period and realized how the lower to lowest castes are being deprived from living a peaceful life, getting proper education and other social rights. Buddha was the great who interacted with everyone, from the king and philosophers to untouchables, bandits, even the lowest girls of the society. He accepted the invitation of anyone without any kind of discrimination, took care of a ill person, taught the Dhamma and spread maitri and karuna. He always taught to cultivate a heart which cares for the well being of others. Religions teach so many things and we can see in Mahabharata where Maharaja Dhritarashtra's younger brother, Maha Pandit Vidura has given the command to behave in a very forceful manner. Such as- treat him like he does. The one who does violence to you, you also do violence to him in retaliation! I do not consider any fault in this, because it is beneficial for the side of the remedy to be rude with the rude. (Mahabharat, Vidurniti). Shri Krishna has also said the same. Such as- Hey Pandava! My promise is certain that for the establishment of Dharma I will kill those who are going to destroy Dharma (Mahabharat). But the way of conquering anger with peace, evil with goodness, misery with generosity, and the way of conquering liars with truth is the gift of Buddhism to Indian culture. This is the greatness of Buddha and his Dhamma. It's easy to be kind to our relatives but hardest to do so towards our rivals what the Buddha actually did. We need to achieve compassion and kindness towards an enemy who is still a human being. Cultivation of Mettā-bhāvanā will help to develop the feeling of compassion.

BUDDHIST ART AND SCULPTURE:

Indian art and architecture is highly influenced by Buddhism. Maurya Emperor the great Ashoka is well known for the constructions of so many stupas, pillars and inscriptions. According to Hiuen-tsang, the region of Pundravardhana, Tamralipta and Samatata various stupas had been built by King Ashoka. Even in Tamralipta, Fa-hien saw twenty-two monasteries. The pillars of stambhas of Sanchi and Saranath are the best specimens of ancient India's architecture. And the most famous monument of Ashoka is the Saranath lion capital having a classy engineering skill. Gandhara was also influenced by Buddhist culture and most of the Architectures are related to Buddha's life and philosophy. To make the layman understand about Buddha and his teachings, the artists had to incorporate several gestures called mudra indicating several meanings. The combination of Gandhara and Mathura styles helped to develop the art of the Gupta period. It is called the golden era of Indian art. The Gupta's constructed Buddhist monasteries and helped to grow Buddhism despite being Brahmanical in faith. Seeing the expressions of Amravati, the artifacts of Mahabodhi Temple of Bodhgaya, the birds of Sanchi, the Dohad of Bharhut and the Ashwamukhi of Bhanj, it seems as if heaven has come down to earth. Buddhist philosophy has

come true in the paintings of Ajanta. From the Buddha-statues of Mathura, Sarnath, Ajanta and Vihar one can easily imagine a developing and prosperous era. The paintings of the first cave Bodhisattva are no less than the best paintings by Michel Angelo and Leonardo. The Buddha's statues of Sultanganj, Vihar which is now situated in Barningham, Britain is the best example of bronze art. The bronze statues of Buddha are mostly found in Tanjore District of South India. Nalanda was of special importance as the center of Buddhism and the source of the arts and styles. Even in the architecture of Hindu temples Buddhist influence is reflected. The temple of Avantisvamin, Avantisvara was made like the Buddhist architecture. Even the idols of Jagannath Temple of Puri and Tirupati Temple in Andhrapradesh are very much similar to the Buddha's idol.

BUDDHISM IN MODERN EDUCATION AND SCIENCE:

One of the world's most holistic education systems is the Buddhist education system, based on the moral, spiritual and intellectual development of the students. The ancient Buddhist Sangha functioned very democratically and the community decisions were taken by voting system in the Sangha. Thus the Sangha maintained a democratic process which is not unknown to the Indians. The concept of inclusive education was the main feature of Buddhist Sangha where any kind of people may join irrespective of their caste, creed, gender and religion to access equal and quality education. In Buddhist viharas monks also played the role of a friend, philosopher and guide for pupils' all round development and the Viharas ensured the life long relationship between students and teachers. The co-curricular activities were already practiced there in the way of Spinning, Weaving, Drawing, Medicine, etc. Last but not the least the concept of primary and secondary education system which is still followed in the modern education system was introduced first in the Buddhist education system with different curriculum. Nalanda was a premier Buddhist institution in the 7th century A.D. where I-tsing studied for a long time. King Dharmapala constructed the Vikramshila monastery and fifty more religious institutions. These monasteries played a crucial role to spread and preserve Buddha's teachings and to observe moral character. The monks and nuns actually worked as social agents. They were the resource of universal love, compassion and wisdom and this is the reason behind not keeping their personal properties and abstaining from marriage. Monastery systems have set up a wealthy example to the pupils as well as the teachers for the modern period to live their lives honestly, build moral character and compassion to all. And without morality, love and compassion education has no value. Modern science is deeply influenced by the theory of mind-science of Buddhism. The technology of meditation offered by Buddhism creates a great impact on modern medicine reducing stress and anxiety, improving sleep and attention span, and it also impacts on psychotherapeutic intervention. Nowadays a number of authors are claiming an affinity between Some aspects of Buddhist thoughts and quantum physics. Even if we try to understand the "laws of motion" developed by Isaac Newton, we can see they are very closely related to the theory of causality though they go beyond the old Buddhist formula and are based on mathematics. The Buddhist principle of causality or Pratityasamutpada is very similar to "formulation" in clinical psychology. Buddha is often referred to "the great healer or physicians" in Buddhist scriptures for his fundamental teachings of four noble truths. Philosopher Alan Watts once wrote that if we look deeply into such ways of life as Buddhism, we do not find either philosophy or religion as these are understood in the West. We find something more nearly resembling psychotherapy. The philosophy of anthropocentrism made Buddhism a pure psychological theory.

BUDDHIST OUTCOMES ON LANGUAGE AND LITERATURES:

In ancient India Sanskrit language was basically used by the intellectuals and higher caste people. The layman was not permitted to use this language and it was unintelligible to them; even the Brahmins claimed monopoly on the Vedas and other spiritual texts and they didn't allow lower caste people to read those sacred texts which were written in Sanskrit language. Therefore, to avoid this kind of language barrier, Buddha had to spread his teachings to all the common people so that they can read the spiritual texts as well as understand the logic, science, history and so forth in their own vernacular. The impact of Buddhist literature is not much noticeable to the common eye, but it is not as such. The jataka tales highly enriched Indian literature and it can be hypothetically stated that Panchatantra which is nothing but a collection of animal stories got influenced by Jataka tales and both teach moral values. It is needless to say, how Ambedkarite dalit literatures emerged from the influence of Buddhism and how do it carry the notion of Buddhist philosophy. Krishnarao Arjun Keluskar wrote a book 'Goutam Buddhache Charitra' which is extensive work on the life and philosophy of Buddha and Dharmananda Kosambi wrote 'Buddha Dharma Aani Samgha'. The writings of Mahatma Phule, Shri Ma. Mately, Tarkatirtha Lakshman Shastri and so on were greatly influenced on Buddhism. Bengali literatures, by the end of the nineteenth century was greatly influenced by Buddha and Buddhist culture. Girish Chandra Ghose's Buddhadev Charita, Satyendranath Datta's Buddha Baran and Buddha Purnima Nabinchandra Sen's Amitava Kabya, and Satyendranath Tagore's Buddha Dharma are examples of highly literary works based on Buddhism. Tagore had been made a Buddhist follower by Rajendralal Mitra's "The Sanskrit Buddhist literature of Nepal". In his critical appreciation of the Dhammapada Tagore says: "As the preceptor of the Geeta has endowed in it Indian thought with a precise religious shape, so in the Dhammapada a picture of the mental make-up of India has been delineated." Even he introduced Buddhism as a part of curriculum in his own school of Santiniketan. Just like the Buddha, wisdom played a crucial role in Tagore's drama "Achalayatan" and novel "Gora". Tagore wrote about the human religion in his "Atma Parichay" echoing the Buddha. Among the modern Hindi literature, some literary works of Jaishankar Prasad, Suryakant Tripathi, Hajariprasad Dwivedi, Rahul Sankrityan are directly related to Buddhism. The events of some dramas (Rajashri, Visakha, Ajjatshatru etc) written by Jayshankar Prasad are related to those kings who patronized Buddhism. The Buddhist tenets of suffering and compassion is clearly observed in the writings of Mahadevi Varma. "Vaishaliki Nagarvadhu" is one of the greatest documents of Chaturshen Shastri which is based on the life events of Amrapali, the city courtesan of Vaishali in Buddha's period. Sanskrit literatures are no doubt, highly based on Buddhism. In "Naganda", a drama written by Harshavardhan the Buddhist principles of love, non-violence, kindness are reflected, in its introduction Bodhisatwa Charitra is mentioned, even the Naandi of this drama, the Buddhist philosophy is highlighted. The literatures of Asvaghosa like "Buddhacharita", "Saundarananda", "SariputraPrakarana" are totally based on Buddhist philosophy. In "Vajra Suchi" he criticized the caste system very extensively. During the period of Sudraka, beside Sanskrit, Prakrit language was also used in Mricchakatika (one kind of social drama) due to the impact of Buddhism. If we carefully read specific 18 verses (2.55- 2.72) of Bhagavad Gita from chapter -two (Sankhya Yoga) we can understand the concepts already traced on Dhammapada and Sutta-Nipata. For example- nastibuddhirayuktasyanachayuktasyabhavana! The words "Ayuktasya" and "Bhavana" come from Buddhist origin. Even the word "Nirvana" also appears in the last (2.72) of this chapter with the same meaning that it has in Buddhism. In chapter three Krishna was saying to Arjuna-

Lokasamgrahame vapishampashyankartumarhasi

"Lokasamgraha" is also a Buddhist terminology which describes Dana (charity), Piya-Vachana (gentle speech), Arthacharya (to be of help to others), and Samanta (to work for equality). In chapter six (6.16-17) the concept of middle way and the word "dukkha" is mentioned. All those words used in Gita highly indicate Buddhist influence on that particular tenure. Even Krishna used the analogy of Lotus (which keeps itself detached from the muddy water) which didn't appear in any Vedic literature before the Buddha, he declared himself as the ficus tree which became popular after getting enlightenment of Buddha, before that it was not a famous one. Bhagavad Gita used so many Buddhist concepts just to force Arjuna to fight, which is an objectionable one, because Buddha is a symbol of peace and a great opponent of war. Now a little focus can be given to the Puranas that have created so many misconceptions about Buddha and Buddhism. It described Buddha as "Mlecchaprashastha", the destroyer of Mlecchas and one of the tenth incarnation of lord Vishnu. From this statements of Puranas it can be said that, they don't have much idea about the Buddha and they tried to portray Buddha differently by twisting their little knowledge. Buddhadatta and Buddhaghosha, the two Buddhist monks hailed from the Tamil country. Buddhaghosha wrote a commentary on MajjhimaNikaya, namely PapancaSudani. Dingnaga who belonged from Kanchi was a extensive reader of Tripitaka and wrote PramanaSamucchaya and Nyayapravesa. Even Dharmapala, an outstanding Buddhist scholar was also a native of Kanchi. Dharmakirti, a towering personalities in the history of Buddhism was from Tirumalai.

BUDDHISM AND EQUALITY:

Buddhism and equality are co-related to each other. Buddhism as a philosophical articulation, established equality in society. He preached Dhamma irrespective of class, caste and gender. He accepted Upali, the Barber, Sunita, the Sweeper, Sopaka, and Sumangala the Untouchables, Amrapali, the city courtesan to become his disciple. He even opened the door of Sangha for the women and it worked as an abode of women. It is beyond doubt that the most powerful and successful movement against casteism was carried out by the Buddha in his historical period. Tathagata's intellectual light of knowledge emerges equally irrespective of class, caste and religion like the sun or moon which shines upon all over the world without any kind of partiality. In the AswalayanSutta and Vasettha Sutta, Buddha very beautifully described his thoughts against caste or class. According to him it is the good and bad actions of a person and not his birth that should determine his caste-

Na yaccha brahmano hoti na jaccha hoti abrahmano||

Kammana brahmano hoti kammana hoti abrahmano||

BUDDHISM AND INDIA'S FOREIGN POLICY:

Buddhism has established an intimate link between India and foreign countries. The gospel of Buddha had been carried to the foreign countries from the 3rd century BC when Buddhism started to be destroyed from India. So many foreign scholars also came to India to gain knowledge from Nalanda, Taxila, Odantapuri Viharas. India already adopted religion as the soft power tool and Buddhism plays a crucial part in India's foreign policy. India is not only the birth place of Buddha, it is also enriched with the great Buddhist sites like Bodh Gaya, Saranath, Nalanda etc which are considered as Buddhist tourist places. Nowadays Buddhism has become the perfect tool to build bilateral relationships in the region. We can't deny that Buddha is present in India's DNA, without Buddhism we can represent neither India nor Indian culture.

CONCLUSION:

From 600 BC to 400 BC is an important period in Indian history. In this period, so many changes took place in Indian history. Today, we are living in terrible moments and man is becoming man's enemy. It becomes difficult to protect human rights, as well as a safe human environment. Because of this, not only instability is increasing, but the pace of development is also slowing down. Even humans are questioning the future. If we pay attention to these challenges, and look to ancient traditions and ideas then the thoughts of Lord Buddha come in front of us a gem. He made the people understand about the non-relevance of speculations as well as being conscious to think everything rationally and logically. In today's complex situation the words of the Buddha lead us to the forefront of the creditable path in the defense of human rights. We hope that a lifestyle complemented by these messages of the Buddha will secure the future of humanity and therein lies the possibility of life. In the words of Babasaheb that although his name has gone out of India the impression of his teaching still remains.

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