

Buddhism: The Root of Humanity

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Abstract: *Buddhism is the root of humanity without any doubt. It is the output of the Buddha's teachings. It is one of the major world religions with Indian origin. Nowadays Buddhism has been prevailing in the Central Asia, Southeast Asia, East Asian countries of China, Sri Lanka, Tibet, Magnolia, Korea, Japan and Vietnam. The Great Emperor Ashoka played a significant role in spreading Buddhism. His patronization of the Buddha's Dhamma helped to have peaceful wholesome actions to purify and train the human minds. The purification of human sufferings rests on harmlessness and moderation. The roots of humanity are deeply rooted in The Four Noble Truths and The Eight Fold Path. Buddhism is not complex like Vedic religion. Nor does it believe in supernaturalism or the concept of God. There is no place for any kind of discrimination related to caste or gender. Buddhism establishes equality; teaches good qualities like truth, non-violence, non-possession, compassion, brotherhood, etc. It secures humanity. It contributed a lot in the growth of art and architecture. The Buddhist monasteries established human-based Indian culture. Universal brotherhood is the propagation of Buddhism. Buddhism also emancipates and empowers women. It also helps to have national unity and integrity. In spite of all these humanistic qualities Buddhism was abolished from India. Dr. Ambedkar revived and spread Buddhism in the 20th century.*

Key Words: Buddhism, Humanism, Equality, Unity, Integrity

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Buddhism, the teachings of Lord Buddha, the Enlightened One, is one of the major world religions. Buddhism has been prevailing in the Central Asia, Southeast Asia, East Asian countries of China, Sri Lanka, Tibet, Magnolia, Korea, Japan and Vietnam, although it originated in India. The Shakya tribe prince, Siddhartha Gautama left his home to find the cause of human sufferings. At Bodh Gaya, Siddhartha became the Enlightened One, on the full moon day of May called Vaishakh Pournima. After the first sermon at Sarnath, Buddha formed a Community/ Sangha that began to practice Buddhism. Akira says:

A brief survey of the development and geographical spread of Indian Buddhism reveals much about the universal qualities and the distinctive characteristics of Indian Buddhism, as well as providing an overview of its development (2007:1).

Buddhism aims at the principles of harmlessness and self-control in the whole universe. Hirakawa Akira mentions, "In Buddhism, actions are generally divided into three categories: physical, verbal and mental" (2007:189). According to the Buddha 'What we think, we become' is the formation of our mind-set. Mental constituents are at the root of the karma of human beings. Hence Ambedkar mentions, "What are the causes of sufferings which an individual undergoes" (2014:75). So the removal of sufferings and unhappiness is deeply related in the mind of man. For that, the base of Buddhism is The Four Noble Truths: The basic cause of suffering lies in man's life; The suffering of man is due to basic mental attribute of "thrust" (*trishna*); The extinction of suffering concerns the eradication of thrust; and The cessation of sufferings. These Noble Truths are based on The Eightfold Path: Right View; Right Aspiration; Right Speech; Right Action; Right Livelihood; Right Effort; Right Mindfulness; and Right Concentration. Buddhism, in short, is based on form, sensation, perception, mental formation and consciousness. Prakrit and Pali languages are at the base of Buddhism.

The base of the teachings of the Buddha is the truth and scientific viewpoints. Buddhism is not complex like Vedic religion. "The term "Dharma" refers to the Teachings preached by the Buddha. Since the Buddha's Teachings concerned the facts of human existence, Dharma can be interpreted as referring to the true nature of human existence" (Akira, 2007:143). Buddhism follows no rituals at all. Buddha enthusiastically opposed the caste system prevailing in India in the remote phase of history. Only due to the Buddha, the caste system

vanished from the Indian society and humanism arose. Buddhism helped in building up human character through truth, non-violence, non-possession, compassion, brotherhood, etc. Out of the two sects of the Buddhism Mahayanas and Hinayanas, the Mahayanas worships the image of Buddha that might have inspired the Hindus to worship various images of gods and goddesses. So far the Buddha period is concerned, “there were two primary classes of religious practitioners in India: the *brahmanas* and the *sramanas*” (Akira, 2007:16). The *brahmanas* are traditional followers of Vedic religion and there is no mention of the *sramanas* in the older *Upanishads*. Vedas and Brahmanas are part and parcel of Hinduism. Dr. Ambedkar says, “The Brahmins had not only a theory of an ideal religion as contained in the Vedas but they also had a theory for an ideal society” (2014:87). He narrates in *The Buddha and His Dhamma*:

The pattern of this ideal society they named *Chaturvarna*. It is imbedded in Vedas and as the Vedas are infallible and as their authority cannot be questioned so also Chaturvarna as a pattern of society was binding and unquestionable” (2014:87).

Chaturvarna in Hinduism made discrimination and established hierarchy of one Varna over the other. But Buddhism rejected the Varna system and created humanity. The Buddha opposed Brahmanism and the four stages of man as mentioned in the Vedas – Bramhacharyashram, Grahastashram, Vanaprastaahram and Sannyashram. Buddha believed in the path of truth and predicted, “Nothing was infallible and nothing could be final. Everything must be open to re-examination and reconsideration whenever grounds for re-examination and reconstruction arise” (Ambedkar, 2014:89). This suggests the path of truth. Further Ambedkar explains, “Man must know the truth and real truth. To him freedom of thought was most essential thing. And he was sure that freedom of thought was only way to the discovery of truth” (2014:89). Vedas denied the freedom of thought. Hence the Buddha rejected the Vedic ideology along with the *Upanishads* and their teachings.

Buddha did not claim that whatever the path he indicated is absolutely true and compulsorily followed by his followers. He gave liberty to everyone to test everything as per one’s own knowledge. He never considered himself Mokshadata. He never believed in the salvation of the soul. He also rejected rites, ceremonies and sacrifices to obtain moksha. He never believed in God or supernatural elements. He trusted in the ‘cause and effect’ theory.

Ambedkar says, “He discarded the theory that all deeds committed in some former birth have the potency to produce suffering, making present activity impotent. He denied the fatalistic view of Karma. He replaced the view of Karma by a much more scientific view of Karma” (2014:104). According to the Buddha, “Mind precedes things, dominates them, creates them. If mind is comprehended all things are comprehended. Mind is the leader of all its faculties. Mind is the chief of all its faculties. The very mind is made up of those faculties (Ambedkar, 2014:104). This clearly indicates that mind plays a very significant role in every activity – positive or negative. Behind every activity stands only mind. The forms of meditation in Hinduism and in Buddhism are *Yoga* and Enlightenment respectively. The believers in *yoga* consider it a form of spiritual wisdom but Buddhists believe in *dhyana* (meditation) that leads to the enlightenment. So Akira writes, “The definition of Buddhist enlightenment as “seeing things as they actually are” suggests the dynamic nature of Buddhist meditation” (2007:29). Many years of Gautama’s training are clearly indicative to the meditation that made him Enlightened. We must accept as truth: “The mind was considered to have an innate wisdom” (Akira, 2007:29). All the sculptures and architectures found in India and in the neighboring countries are related to the meditation and enlightenment. They clearly indicate that they are producing wisdom. The wisdom can never support any kind of discriminations but supports the humanity, equality, liberty and social justice too.

In the growth of art and architecture, Buddhism played a very significant role. The art and architecture available on Buddhist philosophy narrates the social and religious environment that establishes humanity and gives no place to any kind of discriminations at all. According to Akira, “Many of the objects found suggest that Indus civilization substantially influenced Hinduism; but the sudden decline of the Indus civilization has left unanswered questions about how its people contributed to the development of later Indian civilization” (2007:13). It is quite indicative that Hindu culture and Indian culture are quite different. As per the historical proofs, by 1200 B. C. E. the Aryans entered India. Their religion was based on *Rg-veda*, a form of polytheism. Other three texts – *Sama-veda*, *Yajur-veda* and *Atharva-veda* – came into existence by 1000 B. C. E. and they are related to sacrifices. From various historical architectures all the religious based issues narrate the supernatural elements that take human beings towards blind beliefs. The Great Emperor Ashoka, the Buddhist follower helped greatly in creating art and architecture. Akira claims, “The king believed the Buddhist

teaching that all men were essentially equal. Hence, all men, including himself, were to observe the Buddha's Teachings (Dharma)" (2007:97). Further Akira mentions:

People were to follow a moral code of compassion and sincerity. Among the recommended activities were having compassion for living beings, speaking the truth, acting with forbearance and patience, and helping the needy. Although these prescriptions are simple, Ashoka believed that they were immutable truths that all should follow (2007:97).

The moral code of compassion for living beings adds the point of humanity. Speaking the truth, acting with forbearance and patience, helping the needy and showing sincerity are the characteristics of humanity, the root of Buddhism. The Emperor Ashoka constructed on rock various Stupas, Chiatyas and Pillars during his life time. Sanchi, Saranath, Dhauri, Kanheri, Mathura, Gandhara, etc. have the imprint of Buddhist art and architecture related to images of the Buddha and other natural things like trees, birds, creepers etc. The Buddhist carvings and paintings in Ajanta, Ellora, Karle, Bhaje and other places show the skill of Indian sculptures and painters. Even Ashoka repaired a *stupa* belonging to the past Buddha Konakamana (Konakamuni). The Chinese pilgrims, Fa-hsien and Hsuan-tsang, travelled through India and mentioned about many *stupas* in India. This is the historical proof that art, architecture, painting etc. grew in our country due to Buddhism. The Buddhist monasteries also played a very important role in establishing humanity.

The democratic procedure was there in the Buddhist monasteries. Buddhist monks and nuns used to stay in those monasteries and the head was elected not by selection but by vote. That is the democratic spirit. The base of humanity is brotherhood and it was spread by Buddhism in the whole universe. In this matter Ashoka sent his son Mahendra and daughter Sanghamitra to Shri Lanka to spread of Buddhism and then it spread to Burma, Japan, China, Tibet, Java, Sumatra, Bali, Borneo, Champa and so on. Thus Buddhism helped in spreading a unique feature of Indian culture in the other countries that is universal brotherhood. Buddhism left its indelible impact on the Indian history. Mahatma Gandhi took the lesson of Ahimsa from Buddha's Dhamma. Buddha was the incarnation of mercy. Inclusion of nuns in monastic order shows Buddha's noble attempt to emancipate and empower women. "The Buddhist Order is called "*sangha*" in Sanskrit. In Buddhism texts, it is often referred to as the "harmonious order" (*samagra-sangha*) to indicate that it is organized to promote peace and

harmony among its members” (Akira, 2007: 60). All the members of the *sangha* made no discrimination all but helped in establishing humanity. Today, in every nook and corner of India Buddhism has been spread that marks national unity and integrity. Ashoka, Kanishka and Harshavardhan are considered as the devoted champions of nationalism, which was prevailing during the Buddha’s time also. Buddhism helped the citizens of India to be free from the grip of Vedic religion. It also worked for abolition of caste system and peaceful co-existence on the basis of humanism. Thus we find that Buddhism left its indelible marks on Indian culture.

Buddhist practices, religious and cultural, make no discrimination and help to establish universal brotherhood on the basis of humanity. Religious freedom and mutual respect for all religions are integral parts of Indian culture. That is the gift of Buddhism. But today we find that many staunch followers of Hindutva are creating chaos on the term called ‘secularism’. Secularism is nothing but to have liberty to follow any religion of our choice in our life. It has nothing to do with the nation or the national culture. This indicates to have multiculturalism and democracy in our country. Buddhists believe in the Law of Karma and not in fate. In Buddhism, there is no place for Gods or Goddesses or any supernatural being. Buddhists accept the truths of science and not the blind beliefs. They follow compassion in their life. The Five Precepts in Buddhism tell us to refrain from intentional killing of any living being; to refrain from any form of stealing; to refrain from sexual misconduct; to refrain from any form of lying; and to refrain from taking alcohol and non-medicinal drugs. Akira asserts, “Hindu *dharmashastra* works on the *Laws of Manu*” (2007:99). But Ashoka used the term *dharma* completely based on Buddhist tradition. “Although Ashoka had converted to Buddhism, he treated other religions fairly” (Akira, 2007:100). This suggests that Ashoka never made discrimination with any religion. Buddhism always establishes humanity. Akira writes, “Ashoka was fair in his treatment of all religions, but he was particularly devoted to Buddhism, as is illustrated by the inscriptions concerning his own life” (2007:100). On regulations concerning the Dharma and quiet contemplation of the Dharma, Ashoka began spreading of Buddhism. In this regard, Akira clears:

The main teaching of Ashoka’s Dharma, respect for life, was based on the realization that other beings were also alive and had feelings. The other virtues stressed by Ashoka – kindness, giving, truthfulness, purity of action,

obedience of parents, just treatment of others, gratitude to society – all arose out of that basic realization (2007:99).

The qualities mentioned here the part and parcel of *Ten Parmitas* in Buddhism. Buddhists people put the palms together and raise them to the chin to greet people. They believe in humanism only. They give importance to the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha – the Triple Gem.

Dr. Ambedkar suggests that ‘religion’ has many meanings but he clarifies how Dhamma differs from Religion. In his opinion,

Religion, it is said, is personal and one must keep it oneself. One must not let it play its part in public life. Contrary to this, Dhamma is social. It is fundamentally and essentially so. Dhamma is righteousness, which means right relations between man and man in all spheres of life (2014:316).

Dr. Ambedkar clearly mentions that the purpose of Religion is related to explain the origin of the world. On the other hand the purpose of Dhamma is to reconstruct the world only on the basis of humanity.

To conclude, Buddhism is deeply rooted in humanism. Universal brotherhood, the foundation of humanity is the cultural identity of India all over the universe that has left indelible mark. It is the credit of the Buddha’s Dhamma. For the revival and spread of Buddhism in India, Dr. Ambedkar played a significant role. Only because of him, Buddhism has been survived in India.

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