

Intellectualism in Buddhism-A Study

O.C. PROMOD

Assistant Professor, Dept. Of History, St.Cyril's College-Adoor, Kerala
Email: ocpromod@gmail.com

Article History

Received:
2 March 2018
Received in revised
form: 1 May 2018
Accepted:
18 May 2018

KEY WORDS:

Buddhism,
Ideology,
Intellectualism,
critical approach

ABSTRACT

The ideology of Buddhism is relevant even today, because the present world is challenged by some anti-social elements. Buddhism was developed by questioning the existing rules in society. Thousands of people were attracted to the teachings of the Buddha, who were the representatives of downtrodden classes in society in every aspect. When the cruelty and blood-shed was at its extreme level, Gauthama introduced a new ideology, which was against the existing rules in society. Gandhiji, the father of our nation has taken some of the peaceful ideology of Ahimsa from the doctrines of Buddhism. Modern religions copied some of the notable verses of Gautama Buddha and which became part and parcel of their religious belief. The rationalistic ideology of Gautama Buddha is given under the title of this topic.

INTRODUCTION

Even though Siddhartha-Gauthama was born in a *Kshatriya* family and his father was the Chief of *Sakya* clan, but he had abandoned the luxurious family life at the age of 29. By the continuous meditation, he became enlightened at Gaya and became known as Buddha. Afterwards, a sermon was called for at Saranath near Benaras and it was called as *Dharma Chakra Pravarthana* (Turning the wheel of Law). From Saranath onwards, he had preached a new philosophy, which was against the existing laws in society and naturally Buddha's ideas were not easily digested to the higher communities in Hinduism. But it was simply digested to the commons, and thousands of them become part and parcel of the growth of new religion. The speciality of Hinduism is its rituals, ceremonies, customs, different types of prayers, yagas and yajnas etc. offered to innumerable gods. Common people were segregated in Hindu society. Vedic education was denied to the majority of the Hindus. A few minorities enjoyed all the rights and privileges, and lower class in Hinduism were cruelly exploited by the minority upper class Hindus. It was already preached that, all of the privileges attained by the higher communities by the order of God.

Intellectualism in Buddhism

Buddha is the ocean of philosophy for the philosophers. His every word is thought provoking. Among the *Pitakas*, Abhidhamma Pitaka has been composed on the basis of his psycho-philosophical teachings.ⁱ On the words of Buddha, *Sabbe Sankhara Anicca, Sabbe Sankara Dukkha, Sabbe Sankara Anatta* ie. all creations are transient and unreal. Just like the bubbles in the running waters, everything in the world comes into being only to dissolve away.ⁱⁱ According to Buddhist concept, every deed is determined by volition without which no deed can be performed. A good deed yields good results and a bad deed, bad results.ⁱⁱⁱ

Asoka's Pillar Edict at Saranath describes in Brahmi language as follows: 'One should not honour only one's own religion and condemn the religions of others, but one should honour other's religion for this or that reason. In so doing, one helps one's own religion to grow and renders service to the religions of others too.....'^{iv} It is truly the speciality of Buddhism. Most of the other religions in India or abroad are not dare to tell such words like Buddhism. The rationalistic idea begins from there. People always talk of religious tolerance and communal harmony and claiming that all essence of all religions is same. But in practical sense, any of the religious leaders do not ready to embrace other religions as they preached that all are one. And all religions are claiming that, their religion is superior to other religions in every aspect. But Buddhists always stood for eternal communal harmony and maintain non-violence. Buddhist ideologies are simple and can be acceptable to every other religious believes, to attain *Nirvana* or salvation.

In the history of the world, there is no evidence to show that the Buddhists have interfered or done any damage to any other religion in any part of the world for the purpose of propagating their religion. The Buddha's message is an invitation to all to join the fold of universal brotherhood to work in strength and harmony for the welfare and happiness of mankind.^v Buddha never advised his disciples to convert people from one religion to another. His idea of conversion was to introduce a righteous, noble and religious way of life.^{vi}

Gauthama Buddha denounced the existence of God, Soul, rites, ceremonies, sacrifices, system of *Chaturvarna* etc.^{vii} It is saying that, the place Kapilavastu, where the Buddha was born, may have the land of great rationalist, Kapila.^{viii} According to him, it is a delusion, which one develops because of one's ignorance. Buddha had no faith in Prayer, *Yajna*, sacrifices etc. Man is arbiter of his own destiny and not any God or Gods and they have no power to control the life of a person. Instead of these matters, he preached that, by following the 'Noble Eight Fold Path' and some of the allied philosophy, everyone can get goodness throughout their life and attainment of *Moksha*(*Nirvana*) by aloof of intermediary (Priests) in life to get goodness in one's life or death. The Noble Eight-Fold Path are: Right Action, Right Meditation, Right Livelihood, Right Determination, Right Speech, Right Observation, Right Exercise and Right Memory.^{ix} If he does good-deed in his life, he will get eternal peace and flourishment in his life. Hindu community has given importance to the animal sacrifice as the part of their ritual life. But Buddhism has given importance to Ahimsa or Non-violence and blood-bath in wars. The concept of Ahimsa was taken by Gandhiji from the principles of Buddhism. It also denounced the casteism and *Chaturvarna* system in society. In Hindu ideology, Sanskrit is the base of all rituals and it was the language of the minority higher community and Sanskrit studies were denied to the lower class untouchables, even though, they were majority in number. That is why, the verses of Vedas were misinterpreted by the priestly class. But Buddhism preached everything in the language of Pali, which was the language of the commons during those days. The language has no script and depended to Ardha Magadhy script to write those documents.

In the Ancient and Medieval times, stealing was somewhat glorified at least during the time of war. Almost all holy books of different communities supported it. But, Buddhism strongly believes in Ahimsa. Gauthama strongly opposed sealing, adultery, polygamy, polyandry, drinking liquor and using intoxicants etc. which were common, even among

saints during those days. Before the entrance to Buddhist Sanga, a member should abstain from killing, stealing, adultery, speaking falsehoods, drinking liquor or intoxicants, acceptance of gold or silver^x. Gauthama always stood against both, richness or severe poverty. Gauthama always stood for maintaining 'Middle Path' (*Madyama Pratipat* or *Tathagarh Marg*).^{xi} Buddhism never discriminated individuals on the basis of caste, colour or sex.

According to Buddhism, man's position is supreme and he is his own master and there is no higher being or power that sits in judgement over his destiny^{xii}. According to Buddha's teachings, doubt (*vicikiccha*) is one of the Five Hindrances (Nirvana) to clear understanding of truth and to spiritual progress. Five Hindrances are: Sensuous Lust, Ill-will, Physical & Mental torpas & languor, Restlessness & worry and Doubt. Doubt, however is not a 'sin', because, there are no articles of faith in Buddhism.^{xiii} But most of the other religions are blindly support their faith. They are considering the 'doubt' as a sin.

According to Buddhism, the ideas of God and Soul are false and empty.^{xiv} For self protection, man has created God, on whom he depends for his own protection, safety and security just as child depends on its parent. In his ignorance, weakness, fear and desire, man needs these two things to console himself. Hence he clings to them deeply and fanatically.^{xv} There is not even a word about God or Soul and not a word about Buddha or Buddhism in Asokas's Rock Edicts or Pillar Edicts, but it illustrates the good messages to his subjects such as, keeping away the bad deeds and do good things to purify the mind of human beings.^{xvi} Lord Buddha never tried to present himself as a supernatural being but as a human being who had realised the absolute truth namely, the secret of life and the real cause of suffering and happiness.^{xvii}

Prayer and worship are the integral part of many religions. Buddhists do not believe in such a god and they also have no prayer in that sense. Buddhists believe in the 'Law of *Kamma*' (Karma), which declares that the happiness and unhappiness are alike the results of our own actions. Prosperity and adversity are produced for each individual by his own deeds, words and thoughts. The Law of *Kamma* is impersonal; it has no agent behind it, directing it or administering it. Being impersonal, it shows no mercy or forgiveness. Evil can only be redeemed by doing good thing, which will overcome the effects of the evil deed. Human beings are responsible only to themselves for their good and evil, happiness and misery and to no other.^{xviii} Buddhists have temples and there is no special day to visit there, but the *Full Moon Day* and the *New Moon Day* are popular among many Buddhists. On such days, they are normally in white clad, which is the symbol of simplicity, purity and humanity and undertake the *Eight Precepts* of Lord Buddha. To the Buddhists, an image in itself is not an object of worship but it is a symbol and representation of the Buddha. In worshipping an image, the Buddhist is therefore not an idolater praying to wood, clay or stone and this charge of idolatry made against Buddhists is due either to ignorance or deliberate misrepresentation.^{xix}

According to Buddha, there is no God or any other religious teacher who can send people either to heaven or hell. Man creates his own heaven and hell through his own thoughts, words and actions. Therefore, praying to a third party for salvation without removing the evil thoughts from the mind is of not much use.^{xx} Buddha never accepted that the God is the Creator of Universe. He had also rejected the doctrine of the existence of God. He argued that the doctrine of God is not based on truth. He also added that the world

has evolved and is not created.^{xxi} He was against religious rites, ceremonies and observances because they are the home of superstition and superstition was the enemy of Samma Ditthi, the most important element in his *Ashtangamarg*^{xxii}. Belief in God is the most dangerous thing. For belief in God give rise to belief in the efficacy of worship and Prayer and the efficacy of worship and Prayer give rise to the office of the priest was the evil genius who created all superstition and thereby destroyed the growth of *Samma Ditthi*.^{xxiii}

Though Vedas are the authentic work of the Hindus, the Buddha never accepted its authenticity. He denied that the Vedas are sacred. To him, Vedas are a waterless desert, and pathless jungle. No man with intellectual and moral thirst can go to the Vedas and hope to satisfy his thirst. He said the subject must be to examination and re-examination.^{xxiv} He did not tell people that their aim in life should be to reach some imaginary heaven. The kingdom of righteousness lies on earth and is to be reached by man by righteous conduct.^{xxv}

Buddha had the courage to attack popular religion, superstition, ceremonial and priest-craft and all the vested interests that clung to them. He condemned also the metaphysical and theological outlook, miracles, revelations and dealings with the supernatural. His appeal was to logic, reason and experience; his emphasis was on ethics and his method was one of psychological analysis, a psychology without a soul. His whole approach comes like the breath of the fresh wind from the mountains after the stale air of metaphysical speculation. Buddha did not attack caste directly, yet in his own order he did not recognize it and there is no doubt that his whole attitude and activity weakened the caste system.^{xxvi}

Criticism on Buddhism:

Even though Buddha and his earlier followers stood against ritualism and accepted rationalistic ideas, but gradually his followers become divided into many groups, such as Mahayanism, Heenayanism, Vajrayanism etc. Heenayanism was the only group somewhat followed the orthodox ideas of their Guru, Buddha. Other groups gradually deviated from the orthodoxism and followed other methods and most of those methods were against the original Buddhist philosophy. Mahayanism accepted 'Buddha' as their God and made idols in the name of 'Bodhisatwa'.

There is also a counter-argument on this issue. Worshipping Bodhisatwa image is just like to fix the photograph of our departed parents or grand-parents, teachers, heroes, political leaders and the beloved persons to cherish our memories. When we see the photograph, we can recall their great qualities and remember with pride the sacrifices and services rendered by them, while they were alive and offered flowers on their graves and tombs. If such practices can be justified, why should some people ridicule the followers of Buddha as idol worshippers, when they pay respect to their religious teacher, who has served mankind without harming others. This practise is not a compulsory one to the Buddhists. The most important aspect in Buddhism is to put into practise the advice given by the Buddha. In this respect, it makes no difference, whether Buddhists pay homage to the Buddha or not.^{xxvii} It is true that, Vajrayanism had given importance to arms and violence and stood against the principles of Gauthama Buddha.

The foreign Buddhists changed their diets gradually and included non-vegetarian items on their dining table. The entrance of women to the Buddhist monasteries were prohibited earlier, but some of his followers began to admit ladies at the monasteries and

these Buddhist saints looked them as the object of lust. The Buddha is reported to have said to his favourite disciple Ananada, “If women were not admitted into the monasteries, Buddhism would have continued for one thousand of years, but because this admission has been granted, it would last only five hundred years.”^{xxviii}

The strong opposition of the orthodox Hindu rulers and Brahminical community compelled the Buddhists to deviate from their ideology and the team work of the Hindus under Sree Sankaracharya assimilated or absorbed most of the Buddhists to Hinduism. The disintegration of Buddhist Universities in Nalanda, Vikram sila (both in Bihar), Valabhi (Gujarat) and Taxila (Peshawar) also paved the disappearance of Buddhist ideologies in the hearts of Indians. The Buddha denounced the Vedic Sanskrit language and accepted the Pali, the language of commons, but his followers in Mahayanism gradually, embraced Sanskrit and written most of their documents in Sanskrit language. Gradually the rationalistic elements have disappeared in Buddhism and became one among the ritualistic religion in India.

Impacts of rationalistic elements of Buddhism in India:

1. Buddhism promoted free-thinking in society.
2. It questioned existing order of hierarchy in Hinduism.
3. It stood against all kinds of rituals, ceremonies considered as superstitious.
4. The concept of Ahimsa or non-violence was introduced first by the Buddha in this universe. So many world leaders and prophets assimilated the ideas of Ahimsa from Buddhism.
5. The ideas of Buddhism gradually accepted by the Hinduism and started the work for self-purification.
6. The borrowed principles from Buddhism became the part and parcel of Hinduism and claimed that it is their own. The master-brain behind it was Sree Sankaracharya and he became known as ‘Prachanna Buddha’.
7. In later ages, the Hindus claimed that the Buddha is one of their incarnations. And assimilated or absorbed majority of Buddhists to the concept of Hinduism.
8. Even though Buddhism has wiped out from almost all parts of India, its ideologies and philosophies can be seen in society even today. On the basis of its relevance, the Buddha is called as ‘the Light of Asia’.
9. Today, Buddhism is found in Ceylone, Burma, Tailand, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, Tibet, China, Japan, Mongolia, Korea, Formosa and some parts of India, Pakistan and Soviet Russia. The Buddhist population of the world is over 500 million.^{xxix}

End Notes

ⁱ Silananda Brahmachari, *An introduction to Abhidhamma Pitaka - Buddhist philosophy & Psychology*, The corporate body of the Buddha Education Foundation, Taiwan. 1990. p.1

ⁱⁱ *Ibid.* p.2

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid.* pp.7,8

^{iv} Cited/Quoted in Dr. B.R Ambedkar’s *The Buddha and his Dhamma*, Buddha Boomi Publications, Nagpur.2016.p.502

- ^v Dr. K.Sri Dhammananda, *Buddhist attitude towards other religions*-Gems of Buddhist Wisdom, Buddhist Missionary Society, Kuala Lumpur, Malasia.1996.p.499
- ^{vi} *Ibid*.p.500
- ^{vii} Dr. B.R Ambedkar, *op. cit*.p.103
- ^{viii} *Ibid*. p.2
- ^{ix} Silananda Brahmachari, *op. cit*.p.26
- ^x L.P Sharma, *History of Ancient India*, Konark Publishers Pvt. Ltd. Delhi. 1990.pp.75-76
- ^{xi} *Ibid*. p.74
- ^{xii} Walpola Sri Rahula, *What the Buddha taught*, The corporate body of the Buddha Education Foundation, Taiwan & London. 1972. p.1 (ISBN .967-9920-02-X)
- ^{xiii} *Ibid*.p.3
- ^{xiv} *Ibid*.p.52
- ^{xv} *Ibid*.p.51
- ^{xvi} T.W Rhys Davids, *Buddhist India*, The corporate body of the Buddha Education Foundation, Taiwan.1997. p.297
- ^{xvii} Dr. K.Sri Dhammananda, *What is Religion?-Gems of Buddhist Wisdom*, Buddhist Missionary Society, Kuala Lumpur, Malasia.1996.p.21
- ^{xviii} Dr. G.P Malalasekera. *Prayer and Worship-Gems of Buddhist Wisdom*, Buddhist Missionary Society, Kuala Lumpur, Malasia.1996.pp.337,338
- ^{xix} *Ibid*. pp.338,339
- ^{xx} Ven.Dr.K. Sri Dhammananda, *Are Buddhists Idol-worshippers? -Gems of Buddhist Wisdom*, Buddhist Missionary Society, Kuala Lumpur, Malasia.1996.pp.348-349
- ^{xxi} Dr. B.R Ambedkar, *op. cit*.p.251
- ^{xxii} *Ibid*.p.254
- ^{xxiii} *Ibid*.pp.254,255
- ^{xxiv} *Ibid*.pp.275,276
- ^{xxv} *Ibid*.p.283
- ^{xxvi} Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi.1998.p.120
- ^{xxvii} Ven Dr. K.Sri Dhammananda, *op. cit*.pp.354-356
- ^{xxviii} Ram Sharan Sharma(Ed), *Ancient India*, National Council of Educational Research & Training (NCERT), Govt. of India, New Delhi.1993.p.78
- ^{xxix} Walpola Sri Rahula, *op. cit*.p.xvi

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. B.R Ambedkar. (2016). *The Buddha and his Dhamma*. Nagpur: Buddha Boomi Publications.
2. G.P Malalasekera. (1996). *Prayer and Worship-Gems of Buddhist Wisdom*. Kuala Lumpur: Buddhist Missionary Society.
3. Jawaharlal Nehru. (1988). *The Discovery of India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
4. K. Sri Dhammananda. (1996). *Are Buddhists Idol-worshippers? -Gems of Buddhist Wisdom*. Kuala Lumpur: Buddhist Missionary Society.
5. K.Sri Dhammananda. (1996). *Buddhist attitude towards other religions*-Gems of Buddhist Wisdom. Kuala Lumpur: Buddhist Missionary Society.
6. K.Sri Dhammananda. (1996). *What is Religion?-Gems of Buddhist Wisdom*. Kuala Lumpur: Buddhist Missionary Society.
7. L.P Sharma. (1990) *History of Ancient India*. Delhi: Konark Publishers Pvt. Ltd.
8. Ram Sharan Sharma(Ed). (1993). *Ancient India*. New Delhi: National Council of Educational Research & Training (NCERT), Govt. of India.

9. Silananda Brahmachari. (1990). *An introduction to Abhidhamma Pitaka - Buddhist philosophy & Psychology*. Taiwan: The corporate body of the Buddha Education Foundation.
10. T.W Rhys Davids. (1997). *Buddhist India*. Taiwan: The corporate body of the Buddha Education Foundation.
11. Walpola Sri Rahula. (1972). *What the Buddha taught*. Taiwan & London: The corporate body of the Buddha Education Foundation.