

## **BUDDHISM – THE PHILOSOPHY, PRACTICE AND CHALLENGES**

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### **THE PROLOGUE**

Buddhism originated in India and has been in existence for almost 2500 years, which later spread to various parts of the world. Today it is the fifth largest religion in the world. In India, during the last six decades much of the talks on Buddhism, its philosophy and practice resurfaced after the conversion of Ambedkar to Buddhism on October 14, 1956. It is believed that he along with 400000 followers converted to Buddhism on that day at Nagpur. The basic premises of the mass conversion was to avoid the caste system – which remains as the edifice of Hindu religious order – and also to have a new identity from that of the earlier one as untouchables. This was the first of a mass conversion in the history of religious conversions, particularly in the context of Buddhism.

The time and location of this mass event had much larger sense. The rains were over and the weather was neither hot nor cold. It was one of the central places. October 14, 1956 was the day of the great Hindu festival Dussara. According to Hindu mythology it is known as Vijaya Dashimi<sup>1</sup>, the triumph of Rama over Ravana, the ten-headed king of Lanka. Sangharakshita (1986:7) one of the contemporaries of Ambedkar, says that, 'so far the date and location was concerned, Ambedkar and his followers were concerned it was a different understanding with the day. It commemorated the Ashoka Vijay Dasami. Thus for Ambedkar and his followers, even more than for the Hindus, the festival of Dussara symbolised the victory of Buddhism over Brahmanism'.

Certainly this particular episode has brought back the basic discussion on Buddhism as a theory and practice to the centre stage. While much of these theories and its pragmatic features almost evades from the Indian surface, one could say that Ambedkar's efforts were also aimed at the revival of this religion. Hence it became pertinent for many sociologists, political thinkers and theologians to go back and search the real meaning and sense of Buddha and his ism.

### **THE OBJECTIVE**

This paper investigates the idea of Buddhism along with the difficulties in its practise, particularly among the Ambedkarite Buddhists in recent times. The Ambedkarite Buddhists who are popularly known as the Navayana Buddhist needs a critical evaluation, as it is almost six decades, with the third generation of neo-Buddhists. It would also bring out the current shift in trends from that of 1956. It also looks at how this

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<sup>1</sup> Vijaya Dashami means the victory tenth.

line of Buddhism is different from other schools as well as how easily it gets co-opted in the present format of Hinduism in India.

### THE METHOD APPLIED

This paper is mostly based on secondary sources, where the historical context is kept intact. Further it exemplifies the post-Ambedkar phase of Buddhism in India, which has taken roots with the conversion of Ambedkar that has continued till today. While looking at the practice, the method has been mostly centred on the practice of various rites and rituals and celebration of festivals other than that of Navayana Buddhism. Therefore the method of participant observation and critical observation is key to this analysis. Apart from these a review of the recent literature have also been done thoroughly.

### THE HISTORICAL & PHILOSOPHICAL CONTEXT OF BUDDHA'S PERIOD

The present geography of northern India never formed a single sovereign state in the sixth century BCE. The land was divided into many states among which some were monarchical and some were non-monarchical<sup>2</sup>. The monarchical states were known as Janapada while the non-monarchical state had come to know as sangha or gana. Sakya is one of the non-monarchical states of which it is not much known about the political nature, whether it was a republic or an oligarchy. One thing could be clearly states that there were many ruling families in the Sakya republic and they used to rule in turns. The head of the ruling family was known as Raja (Ambedkar 1992: 1).

While Kosambi (2008: 165) refers the Sakya state to be an oligarchic one, Ambedkar (1992: 1) has provided some indications that the Sakya state could be a republic. Not much is known beyond these two different positions.

There were many other faith order and religious formations that took place during the pre-Buddha period. It is vital to understand these contexts in order to understand the historical relevance of the Buddha's efforts. Ilaiah (2001: 26) notes that the non-availability of well-documented history of that time is a major problem. Vedic literature presents a social picture of the pre-sixth century BCE. However, since Vedic literature basically dealt with sacrificial hymns and superstitious symbols, it is very difficult to reconstruct the social and economic conditions of that society from that literature.

Kosambi (2008: 163) says that there were several very similar movements that arose in Magadh at about the same time. Of these Jainism survived in India for the same reason that prevented its spread outside the country. Jainism espoused caste and rituals, however, Buddhism did not. The Buddhist emperor Ashoka and his grandson Dasaratha bestowed cave retreats upon the Ajivikas. This sect was relatively unimportant beyond Magadha, though some of its followers had spread as far south as Kolar in the Kanarese-Telegu country by thirteenth century AD. The Ajivikas have long been extinct, even in name. There were others whose doctrines are likewise known only through refutations in Buddhist and Jain documents, or in the equally hostile Brahminical Sarva-darsana-samgraha.

Kosambi (2008: 163) quotes A. Shakespeare to mention,

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<sup>2</sup>Ambedkar (1992) gives a full list of monarchical states and non-monarchical states. The monarchical states were sixteen such as Anga, Magadha, Kasi, Kosala, Vriji, Malla, Chedi, Vatsa, Kuru, Panchala, Matsya, Saurashtra, Asmaka, Avanti, Gandhara and Kambhoja. The non-monarchical states were the Sakyas of Kapilvatsu, the Mallas of Pava and Kushinara, the Lichhavis of Vaishali, the Videhas of Mithila, the Koliyas of Ramagam, the Bulis of Allakapa, the Kalingas of Resaputta, the Mauriyas of Pippalvana and the Bhaggas with their capital on Sumsumara Hill.

‘The opening sutta reports sixty-two such inhostile summary. The next sutta narrates how the parricide Ajatasatru reviewed eight major doctrines, finally to lend favourable ear to the Buddha. That kings of the day were deeply interested in religious matter and protected these sects is provided by the reported friendship of Bimbisara for both Jainism and the Buddha. Ajatasatru of Kasi was comparable to Janaka as patron of Upanishadic Brahmins’ (ibid. 163-4).

Pasenadi made friends with the Buddha, but also performed yajna sacrifices. It follows that the new beliefs were the expression of some urgent need, some change in the productive basis (Kosambi 2008:164).He (ibid, 164) goes on to mention,

‘Alara Kalama was a Kosalan Kshatriya who taught seven steps of Samadhi (intense concentration and thought control), while Uddaka Ramaputta taught the eighth step. The Kasyapa purana preached that no action had any consequence of sin or merit’.

‘Makkhali Gosala founded the Ajavika sect on the belief that effect led to no fruit, that every being has to pass independently of his volition through 8400000 cycles of existence after which his sorrows would terminate automatically. Just as a ball of thread cast away unrolls till the end, so existence had to pass through these cycles. The sects of Purana and Gosala approximated to each other, and perhaps merged. The Ajivikas were popular with the southern Jains, while others had similarities with Samakhya philosophy’.

‘Even closer to the Jains was the agnosticism of Sanjaya Belatthiputta, a Brahmin who neither affirmed nor denied that good and evil deeds had good and evil fruit, or that there was (or was not) a world beyond. Sanjaya’s principal disciples, the Brahmins, Sariputta and Moggallan accepted the Buddha’s doctrine to become its leading apostles. The proto-materialist Ajita Kesakambala believed that there was nothing in charity, yajna, ritual, good, good or evil deeds. The elements of which man is made dissolves into the original components earth, water, radiance, air, when he dies. Nothing is left of his virtues soul or personality. Pakudha Kaccavana’s doctrine which resembles that of the later Vaisisikas, maintained the permanence of these four components plus three more: happiness, sorrow and life; none could kill, know, describe or influence these fundamentals in any way whatever; the sharp weapons which cut off a head merely passed through the interstices between these components. The far older Jain traditions went back to Parva Thrthamkara, a couple of centuries earlier, who had preached non-killing (ahimsa), truth, non-stealing, renunciation; to these Mahavira added sexual continence. Absolution could be obtained from sins committed in former births by these observances and by asceticism’ (Kosambi2008: 164-5).

While Kosambi deals at length with the political context and the varied philosophical positions emerging out of it, it is essential to look at the socio-economic aspects too. Ilaiah (2001) mentions the methodological aspects of studying the pre-Buddhist society encompassing of understanding the construct of socio-economic conditions leading to the construct of power. Kosambi (2008: 163)while challenges the authenticity of the Jatakas to understand the pre-Buddhist history, Ilaiah (2001: 26) strongly banks of the Jatakas for the same.

Kosambi (2008: 163) says, ‘nevertheless though the tradition maybe old, the Jatakas cannot be utilised directly for a picture of social relations at the time of the Buddha. The reason is that the Jatakas were written down much later, in a trade’s environment – perhaps during the Satavahana period. They have, in addition, been influenced by the lost Ceylonese version of Buddhist stories from which the present text was again reduced to Pali’. Contrary to this Ilaiah (2001: 26-7) considers the Jatakas as a more reliable source of information and could be applied to understand the socio-political situation of pre-Buddhist society. He considers Jatakas as, ‘the collection of Buddhist stories of the previous births of Buddha... these stories undoubtedly depict society of a period of time prior to that of Gautama Buddha’. Kosambi’s

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assumptions of the Jataka stories emerge from his understand of archaeological evidences. However many social scientists have opted to omit or ignore his position, although not completely, on multiple counts.

Ilaiah too has opted to omit this argument of validating or not validating the Jatakas as per Kosambi, since he was more focussed on generating the argument based on the socio-economic and cultural contexts. However in his detailed analysis, he is in fact legitimising the Jatakas in multiple ways. In his study (2001: 26-48) carefully looks into the social conditions based on the Varnashrama and caste system (ibid: 27-33), the economic conditions based on the advancement of culture and civilisation (ibid: 33-37) and investigates the political conditions that led to the transfer of political power in ancient India which was also one of the pre-condition that led to the emergence of Buddhism (ibid: 37-40).

Ilaiah (2001: 28) categorically mentions the context of the emergence of Brahminism under varna system and also indicates the emergence of class distinction within it. He quotes Digha Nikaya,

‘within the Brahmin class some were “proper” that is, who corresponded closely to the ideal, sketched in the older scripture and others “worldly” that is those who did not conform to the strict rule of their class, and followed all sorts of occupations’. Slowly the ‘proper’ or puritan Brahmins pushed the improper or non-puritan worldly sections, which were engaged in other professions either into the Vaisya or the Sudra classes. This indicates that during that phase of history, Brahminism was becoming an ideology than a religious sect. The formation of a class is accompanied by the creation of its own ideological superstructure, though no doubt that of the Brahmins could not go far beyond a ritualistic framework (ibid: 28).

On the other hand Shudra were already turned into a slave mass, mostly providing ‘free labour’ and service to the three upper segments. This class was also disintegrating into different artisanal and professional groups. Jataka stories indicate the emergence of professional such as dancers, musicians, potters, smiths, ivory carvers, smiths and weavers, who moved from village to village and were slowly settling. There were also snake charmers and mongoose tamers making a living out of these professions. There were fishermen and basket makers engaged in these professions for their living (Ilaiah 2001: 32). The division of labour in agrarian economy was crystal clear which was at par with a sub-human slavery system. Further these lower castes had no right to have family life of their own.

The economic development during the period was also a key factor for the development of the caste and slavery system. Agriculture began to slowly develop into tribal plot system where individual families marked out patches of land for cultivation. However the major land was under the supervision of the Kshatriya families. The rulers employed slaves to do actual work. The masters were supposed to give them a bare minimum of food and also shelter in the form of sheds. Sometimes they lived in groups at the master’s house (Ilaiah 2001: 32).

Untouchability was slowly introduced during this period by the Brahminical masters into the society. By establishing this specific practice the Brahminical school codified the laws of the various social groups and perfected its control over the Indian system. The Brahmins found it convenient to link the stigma of impurity to the profession of a given group. Of course, all Shudras were untouchables for Brahmins and Kshatriyas. This culture of untouchability reached its acme when it became applicable even among Shudra caste/ class groups (Ilaiah 2001: 32). Altogether the entire Indian subcontinent was faced with multiple complications.

### **CONTROVERSY AROUND BUDDHA’S BIRTH**

There is not much unknown about the life of Buddha. The dates concerning the birth and death the Buddha are still contested and there looms a definite uncertainty with regards to this. In the early

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twentieth century, most of the historians date his lifetime between circa 563 BCE to 483 BCE (Cousins 1996). Some of the recent historians opine that his death between 486 and 483 BCE, while some others also refer it to be between 411 and 400 BCE (Narain 2003).

In an excavation in November 2013 a Buddhist shrine assumed around 550 BCE was discovered at Mayadevi temple, Lumbini. This would possibly push back the birth date of the Buddha. Nepalese authorities favour Buddha's birth around 623 BCE (Vergano 2013). According to Hilaire (Undated: 12), he was born in the year 622 and died in 543 BCE at eighty years of age. The majority of historians till date has not accepted all these dates and chronologies now.

### **THE MAKING OF THE BUDDHA**

Towards the end of the seventh century BCE, in the city of Kapilavastu, the capital of the same kingdom of the same name, situated in India, at the foot of the mountains in Nepal, the Buddha was born. His father Suddhodana was from Sakya tribe, a descendant of the great solar race of the Gauriades ruled over the country (Hilaire [Undated]: 31). Suddhodana was married to Mahamaya. He was a wealthy person and a man of great military prowess. When he had shown his martial powers he was allowed to take a second wife and he chose Mahaprajapati, the elder sister of Mahamaya. Siddharth Gautama was born to Suddhodana and Mahamaya (Ambedkar 1992: 1-3). Whatever be the debate with the birth of the Buddha, there is no doubt that he was born in a grove of trees sacred to (the mother goddess) in Lumbini (Kosambi 2008: 153).

Siddharth was only seven days old when his mother died. He had a younger brother named Nanda, born to Suddhodana and Mahaprajapati. He had several cousins, Mahanama and Anuruddha, sons of his uncle Suklodan, Ananda, son of his uncle Amitodan, and Devadatta, son of his aunt Amita. Mahanama was older than Siddharth and Ananda was younger. Gautama grew up in their company (Ambedkar 1992: 8-9).

He began his studies at the age of eight under the same eight Brahmins who interpreted Mahamaya's dream. They had long ago predicted that her son would leave the kingdom and become a holy man and wander in beggary and in want Siddharth quickly justified the high repute in which he was held. When he was sent to writing school, he displayed more talent than his masters and one of them Visvamitra under whose care he was more especially placed, soon declared that he had nothing more to teach him. In the midst of companions of his own age, the child took no part in their games; he seemed even then absorbed in higher thoughts. Often he remained aloof to meditate and one day when he had gone with his comrades to visit the agricultural village, he wandered away alone in the great wood, where he remained for many hours while no one knew what happened with him. (Hilaire [Undated]: 32-3).

Suddhodana sent for Sabbamitta of distinguished descent and of high lineage in the land of Uddikka, a philologist and grammarian, well read in the Vedas, Vedangas and Upanishads. Having poured out water of dedication from a golden vase, Suddhodana handed over the boy to his charge to be taught. He was his second teacher. Under him Gautama mastered all the philosophies prevalent till date (Ambedkar 1992: 9).

Suddhodana was aware of the prophesy about his son and tried to bind him to the throne by an early marriage. He was conscious of the early humanitarian traits in the mind of Siddharth. They hoped to bind the young Siddharth to the throne by an early marriage. Siddharth was married to Yashodhara and she gave birth to a son who was named Rahula (Ambedkar 1992: 14).



In order to prevent the prophesy of Asita, Suddhodana thought to engross Siddharth in the pleasures and carnal joys of life. Therefore, Suddhodana built three beautifully furnished luxurious palaces for his son to live during the three seasons; summer, rains and winter. Each palace was surrounded by an extensive garden beautifully laid out with all kinds of trees and flowers. Based on the advise of the family priest Udayin, Suddhodana arranged for harem inmates – women to cajole, win and divert the mind of the young prince. Udayin was in-charge of diverting the mind of Siddharth. However all such efforts turned out utter failure. Udayin made many other efforts and each of those failed one after another (Ambedkar 1992: 15-22).

According to the rules in place of the Sakya Sangh, any male who has reached the age of twenty could be a member of the same. Siddharth was now twenty, which meant that it was time for him to be initiated into the Sangh. A meeting to enrol Siddharth as a full member of the Sangh was convened and as per the norms he was inducted into the Sangh. Rights and duties of the Sangh members were read out to Siddharth. Eight years down the lane as a member of the Sangh, there was a dispute between the servants of Sakyas and the Koliyas (one of the bordering states) on the first right over water from the river Rohini. There was a bloodbath in which both the sides suffered casualties. Both the sides wanted to have a war. Siddharth opposed this move strongly. In the later voting his resolution not to have a war and to negotiate with the Koliya could not find its feet. Even after that Siddharth consistently opposed the proposition of war. He was firm not to join it. The Senapati grew angry and instantly warned of punishing him along with his entire family. Siddharth appealed to the Sangh not to punish the family for none of their mistake. He took the responsibility of being guilty against the Sangh and asked them for a suitable punishment like death or exile and expressed willingness to stick to it without appealing before the king of Kosalas (Ambedkar, 1992: 22-8).

Siddharth assured the Sangh of turning a Parivrajaka (going into exile). He parted with his parents and wife. While his parents were unhappy with his decision, his wife was rock solid and supported him in his future sojourn. The family remained in mourning and was under the impression that someone could persuade Siddharth to return home. Siddharth makes sure that everyone who wanted to accompany him to see him off went back to home including Kanthaka and Channa. Kanthaka returned home with a heavy heart. After having heard both Channa and Kanthaka, Suddhodana fell struck down by sorrow (Ambedkar 1992: 28-42).

Leaving Kapilavatsu Siddharth decided to go to Rajagraha. On the way he accepted the hospitality of several Brahmins in succession, the young Siddharth reached Vaisali. He had now to prepare himself for the long conflict he had to undertake with the Brahminical doctrines. He was too modest to believe himself sufficiently prepared for the contest and wished to put himself on test. He sought out the Brahmin Alara Kalama, who was the renowned as the most learned of professors. Kalama admired the learning of Siddharth and besought him to share with his work of teacher. Young Siddharth after going through this doctrine had a thought, 'this doctrine of Alara is not truly a deliverance. The practice of it will not completely free hum from misery. In rendering perfect this doctrine, which consists in poverty and the subduing of the sense, I shall attain true freedom, but I must still make further researches' (Hilaire [Undated]: 45-6).

Rajagraha was the capital of the kingdom of Magadha. Siddharth selected a spot at the foot of the Pandava hill and put up a small hut made of leaves of trees for his sojourn. Rajagraha was a place of great philosophers and leaders of thoughts. King Bimbisara comes to meet with Siddharth at the Pandava hill. Both of them have a long discussion. Bimbisara offers him a part of his kingdom. Gautama remained like a firm mountain. His reply to all could be concluded in these words, 'I have been wounded by the strife of

the world and I have come out longing to obtain peace; I would not accept any empire in this third heaven, for saving me from all the ills of the earth and how much less amongst men?' (Ambedkar 1992: 45-55).

Soon Siddharth learns from five Parivrajias that the war between the Koliyas and Sakyas had ended up in a peace pact after he left Kapilvatsu. This was a great victory for Gautama in his pursuit for peace making between the two sides. While the conflict between the Koliya and Sakya clan came to an end, Buddha's mind still wandered to understand the fundamentals of conflicts that broke human relationship. He thought that how far the old established philosophies of Vedic Brahminism could provide a solution to the problem of conflict within human mind. The decision to examine and find solution from within was the biggest strength of the philosophy that he evolved for the permanent solution of the problems and crisis that the world faces. His search for this new light led him to the study of sankya philosophy under Arada Kalam, getting himself trained in meditation according to the methods of Samadhi marga.

The turning of Gautama to Buddha came up with the realisation that the desire to have more and more accumulation of wealth and power is the basic reason for all pains and sorrows. This realisation came through his personal exposure in Kapilvatsu and later in other places wherever he sojourned. The Buddha was already in the making; right from the ten stages of Bodhisatta to Buddha.

### **THE PHILOSOPHY OF BUDDHISM**

The Buddha was the most radical social revolutionary in ancient Indian history. Any study of Indian rational political philosophy should begin with him. Regretfully, political thinkers, academicians, parties have not included Buddha's philosophy in their thought process. The political philosophy of a given thinker, in a given period of time, must address the institutions that structure power relations at that point in time. In India for example, before the state became visible as a strong framework for society, the institution of caste originated, developed and began this structuring. The notions of justice, authority, rights and duties were understood and addressed within the domain of caste. Therefore, from ancient times, thinkers conceptualising and philosophising caste were also in their own lives divided and ruled by caste (Ilaiah 2001: 11-2).

In ancient India thinkers had to engage with caste, either for or against it. Those who supported it like Kautilya and Manu constructed a notion of justice (dharma) to suit their political agenda. The state was assigned the dharmic duty to protect caste and varnashram dharma. Thus the central theme of their speculation was meant to establish power relations in such a way that the lower caste Shudras and Dalits as well as women were completely subordinated to the hegemonic power of Brahminical forces (Ilaiah 2001: 11).

While Kautilya and Manu were systemisers of post-Upanishadic speculation, Buddha, a forerunner of both, challenged the Upanishadic dhrama philosophy. He opposed the caste system and constructed a diametrically opposite notion of justice (dhamma) to speculate and assign a whole range of new tasks to the state and to society. He differentiated politics from religion, science from myth, reason from belief, class from caste, right from wrong. In this process he threw up a whole range of political philosophy that became the foundation of progressive philosophies that have emerged at different stages of Indian history (Ilaiah 2001: 12).

Kosambi notes (2008: 147) that the philosophy inscribed in Buddhism through the canon was mostly formed about the time of Ashoka, some part even later. Only the fact that society and its means of production changed slowly, that there was no special reason to invent the particular details cited, allows

part of the canon to be used as evidence for conditions at the time of the death of Buddha.

Buddhism chose the middle path between full satisfaction of the senses and the ascetic's extreme self-mortification; the primitive fertility orgy and the medicine man's self torture for witchcraft were both unsuitable for the new society. The nucleus of Buddhism is the noble eightfold path; proper activity of the body (avoidance of taking life, of stealing, of fornication); proper speech (truthfulness, not carrying tales, no cursing or vituperation, avoidance of idle chatter); proper vision and proper thought (not hankering after the wealth of others, absence of hatred, belief in rebirth as fruit of good and evil deeds). To these must be added four more: rightful mode of gaining a livelihood, proper exertion self-control and active cultivation of proper thoughts. This was the most active as well as the most social of creeds, without belief in a personal all-powerful God or ritual of any sort (Kosambi 2008: 165).

The Buddha never claimed to promulgate a new religion as such, but rather expounded what seemed to him as an underlying and fundamental order in all nature (i.e. society), which he had observed, and which seemed to him to transcend every particular set of group observance, which also enjoyed the same name dhamma. This was a scientific advance as it analysed in a rather elementary way the causes of social suffering and showed the way to its negation. Understanding of the necessity led to freed from the necessity, to the extent that the analysis was accurate (Kosambi 2008: 165)

In the whole of Buddhism, from beginning to end, there is not a trace of the idea of God. He reached his completed doctrine after years of painful asceticism, while squatting on his heels in the blazing sun in a Licchavi field. The thirty-five year old Buddha abandoned parents, wife and child, along with the life of a Sakyan oligarch, and possibilities of a military or ministerial carrier at some upstart court, for years of meditation, study, penance, before developing his own system (Kosambi 2008: 165).

During meditation, Buddha attained enlightenment. This was a turning point where he found the reasons and measure to solve the problems related with pains and sorrows of human beings. He came up with certain principles, which emerged as the pillars of Buddhism. He went on to practice and preach these principles, which turned to be universal guidelines to all those followed Buddha and Buddhism. These principles could be broadly explained under the following categories.

### **1. The Four Noble Truths**

The Buddha's core teachings could be summarised under this category, which are mentioned below.

- a) Suffering is common – Birth, sickness, old age, death, etc.
- b) Cause of suffering – ignorance and greed
- c) End of suffering – to cut off greed and ignorance
- d) Path to end sufferings – the Noble Eightfold Path

Hilaire (Undated: 96-7) gives a detailed narration on the four noble truths. First, the state of suffering, which assails man under some form or another, whatever maybe the condition of his birth. This unfortunately an undeniable fact, although it does not entail all the consequences that Buddhism ascribes to it but it is given an impregnable basis, sad but true, on which the whole building of the system reposes. Secondly the cause of sufferings attributes to the passion, to sinful lusts. The third truth is that the sorrow would cease only by attaining Nirvana, the supreme goal and reward of all human engagements. Finally the last truth leads to the mitigation of sorrow – the way that leads to Nirwana (Hilaire Undated: 97).



## **2. The Noble Eightfold Path**

The method by which one could end suffering is by adopting and following the Eightfold Noble Path, which is key to the philosophy of Buddhism. It is a set of conditions that every human being should fulfil in order to ensure his eternal deliverance. The practical proposition of the Buddha's teaching is never ending. It always leads to the central point of the wheel of change. The eight spokes on the wheels represent the eight different aspects of the Noble Eightfold path. They are –

- a) Right view
- b) Right thought
- c) Right speech
- d) Right Conduct
- e) Right Livelihood
- f) Right Effort
- g) Right Mindfulness
- h) Right Concentration

Hilaire (Undated: 97) says, according to the Buddhist phraseology, the first one is right view, which means a balance between faith and orthodoxy. The second one indicates right judgement, which dispels all doubts and uncertainty. The third is right speech that is perfect truthfulness – meaning the strict avoidance of falsehood and such speech under whatever form. The fourth path is aimed towards right aims to pursue a pure and honest line of conduct. The fifth right mode of livelihood seeking for maintenance in an upright and sinless occupation – in other words by a religious profession. The sixth is the right application of the mind to all precepts of the law. The seventh indicates a right memory, which retains a clear and exact recollection of past actions. The eighth and the last is meditation which leads the intellect, that brings one very close to Nirvana.

## **3. The Panchashila**

Following these Four Noble Truths require a certain number of precepts. There are five key precepts as per Buddhist doctrines. These are commonly known as the Panchashila. The Panchashila is based on the fundamental principles of good conduct and prohibits their followers to indulge in the misconduct and misbehaviour that could harm the society at large. Therefore it is complete control of body, brain and mind along with one's emotions, feelings and sensations. The following are the five precepts of Buddha

- a) No killing – meaning that one would have fully respect towards human life.
- b) No stealing – meaning that one would evolve respect for other's property.
- c) No sexual misconduct – meaning respect for one's pure nature and allowing the natural flow of human emotions.
- d) No lying – meaning no false speeches or falsehood under any given circumstances. Following the path of truth seeking and honesty.
- e) No intoxication – referring to keeping the body without any external influence that would spoil the functioning and also impact the mind. This also refers to the need for keeping a clear mind.

Truth, justice, non-stealing, non-encroaching upon the possession of others shows that a totally new concept of private as well as individual property has arisen. In the older traditions, the most valuable property within the tribe was cattle, which was held in common, assigned to clans or households by mutual consent, property of strangers was not recognised. The injunction against adultery denotes a rigid concept of family and the passing of group marriage. Without such a morality, taken for granted today, trade would have been impossible. The staunchest of the Buddha's lay followers were traders (Kosambi 2008: 167).

The ahimsa doctrine first expressed the basic fact that agriculture can support at least ten times the number of people per square mile than a pastoral economy in the same territory. It affected the caste, which lived by ritual killings, to the extent of being written prominently in the epic remains devoted entirely to the glory of yajnas, universal conquest, and a murderous civil war fought to mutually annihilate as per the vedic traditions of sacrifices (Kosambi 2008: 167).

On the other hand, this new ideology was equally against tribal exclusiveness. Because of good or evil karma, a living creature would be reborn; not into a special totem but into any species particularly suited to and measured by the action, from the vilest insect to a god. Karma was therefore a religious extension of an elementary concept of abstract value, independent of the individual, caste or tribe (Kosambi 2008: 167).

Finally the new religions were at the beginning to challenge vedic Brahminism. The sramana monks and ascetics took no part in production, as their creeds forbade them to labour but neither they exercise the least control over production. They were forbidden ownership of houses, fields, cattle, the touch of gold or silver and trade. The monk lived on alms, which amounted to one doubtful meal a day of soiled food from any hands, or going hungry. Incidentally, the monk thereby broke the commensal taboo retained by tribe and caste (Kosambi 2008: 167-8).

### **THE PRACTICE OF BUDDHISM AND ITS CHALLENGES**

Since the beginning of the practice of Buddhism, the monks and other clergies constitute the key aspects of its institutional existence. Though in the discourse there were multitudes of schools and doctrinal differences that emerged, the fundamental life style remained the same to a certain extent. It is without any doubt that the schools of Mahayana and Hinayana differed in its fundamental attitudes and this impacts the tradition in a big manner. This also impacted the philosophical understanding, core values and life style of not only the monks and other clergies, but also the layman who had been a core part of Buddhist practices. The earlier presumptions on the theological, practical and optimal aspects amidst these schools seemed to have completely missed in the later stage due to the arisen differences.

After the first three councils, it was during the reign of Kaniska the fourth Buddhist council was held. This council led to the major split in the doctrinal adoption of two lines. These two schools of Buddhist thought of which the northerners claimed the Great Vehicle (Mahayana), corresponding precisely to the activities and tastes, which might have been expected by nobles and satraps that continued to pile gifts upon ancient monastic foundations. This Mahayana school changed its language to Sanskrit, though not always the carefully developed Parunian type; Buddhist hybrid Sanskrit forms an idiom by itself. They drifted further away from the common people in their refinement of doctrine, research into science and higher abstract philosophy (Kosambi 2008: 261).

The conservative Hinayana (Lesser Vehicle; contemptuously so labelled by the versatile northerners) retained a primitive, austere Buddhism, with its simpler Pali language –which was nearly as distant as Sanskrit from the common people's idioms in the south where these monks continue to preach the Law. The division was not sharp for several Hinayana monasteries that persisted in the north, while the Mahayana had, by the second century AD come as far south as the lower Krishna river in the person of the great scientist and theologian Nagarjuna (Kosambi 2008: 261-2).

However in either case the monks constituted the key of either school. These monks differed from the Brahmin mode of vanaprastha, a retreat to the forest. The Brahmin need not be a hermit, as one or more wives, and a group of disciples would accompany him. Moreover he lived in the forest by pasturing cattle,

and food gathering. Not only the family but caste and tribe were also renounced by the monk upon ordination, which meant adoption into a quasi-tribal sangha. A monk's maximum possessions were three cloth garments (preferably stitched from rags), the almsbowl, needle and thread, a razor, perhaps a bottle of oil and if he were delicately made, a pair of sandals. He was enjoined to dwell in a rude shelter during the four months of the rainy season, but had to wander on foot the rest of the year to preach the doctrine to new ears. The Buddha himself followed the rule till his death at the age of eighty. His disciples went along new trade routes, even into the tribal wilderness, bearing the message of peace (Kosambi 2008: 168).

In the political field, the new religion was the exact parallel for the same economic reasons, of the move towards 'universal monarchy' the absolute despotism of one as against the endlessly varied tyranny of the many. Social friction was certainly reduced below that caused by the 'natural rights' of the four-caste class division, partly because of the new, highly respected class above and beyond all caste, partly because the monks successfully contested Brahmin pretensions to innate superiority (Kosambi 2008: 169).

### **REFLECTION & CONCLUDING NOTES**

In the current phase these equations has drastically changed to unpredictable magnitude. While the Buddhist practice in Zen Buddhism is entirely different from those of Mahayana and Hinayana, Ambedkar's Navayana proposes a different model altogether. While converting to Buddhism, Ambedkar came up with a charter of 22-vows –which is perhaps the most carnal part of the methodology followed by him. The 22-vows are more rational than the other schools of Buddhism under practice. However it has not been much validated by the majority of Buddhist schools. While taking a close study of some of the practices, one could find that the rational component of Buddhism is neither practised by other schools nor even followed by the present day Navayana Buddhists.

Myanmar (Burma) is a Mahayana Buddhist practicing nation, but what is the methodology of understanding the Four Noble Truths, practicing the Noble Eightfold Paths as well as the Five Precepts of Buddha. The truth is that in most part of Burma it is the mainstream Buddhist who has been consistently attacking the ethnic minorities like the Karens and Shana. They have been subject to multiple killings, arson, women to rape and gang rape. The Burmese military is the fighting these ethnic groups at large. Regretfully these military actions have the full-fledged support of the Buddhist religious leaders. There are several evidences to trace that such outrageous plans are even designed inside the Pagodas.

Srilanka is another classical case of strong anti-Buddhist practices by the Buddhist community. Here the Sinhala nationalists had been the most violence killers of the Tamil ethnicity. Right from the beginning of early eighteenth century, there existed a sore Interestingly the fundamental point of argument between the two ethnic groups is their understanding of origin. The story of conflict is long and has been in existence for the past two hundred years or more and since then the Sinhalese has been considering the Tamils as slaves. The Tamils have been multiple times denied the right as human being in the land of their birth and origin. They have been told that they have only secondary right and therefore they are only secondary citizens. The reasons are related with the theory of purity of blood; that the Sinhalese hail from the Aryan origin and the Tamils are Dravidian. Yet again, that, the Sinhalese by virtue of their origin and birth hold a higher category and rank, while the Tamils are from a lower category and rank. The Sri Lankan army fights with the Tamil people till today.

Both in Burma and Sri Lanka the political system are conditioned in order to suit the majoritarian principles of domination. The domination of the social system is vibrant within the mainstream of which

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the reflection could be seen in the sub-stream. The reflections of such aspects come back and forth on the communities that are victimised. In mobilising and manipulating an army to fight against one's own countrymen is not a new thing. But the Buddhist orientation to such phenomena is the real question, where Buddha himself denounced the fundamental premises of war and conflict.

The resurgence of the Navayana Buddhism was certainly a big success in India, particularly for the Dalits and other lower castes under the leadership of Ambedkar. We have a few observations in this regard. Incidentally, today anyone who is a Buddhist is automatically understood to be an untouchable. Further the Dalits who have converted have also been indulged in habits of corruption, wrong methods of earning money, application of short-cuts and so on. The trendsetters amidst the ones who follow the Navayana Buddhism are the one's who are well educated, have reached a position in the society and attained certain economic upward mobility. The ideas placed by these people are to attain, achieve and accumulate as much as possible in all possible way. In other words it is a method to defeat others by applying all possible means and methods.

Governed by this idealism, the ones poor Dalits in the urban slums and rural areas also follow a similar path or are willing to follow the same path. Therefore there is a two-way question. How is it that following of the Noble Eightfold Path, acceptance of the Four Noble Truths and holding oneself close to the Panchasheela possible within the framework of Buddhism and how does it easily adhere and fall into the trap of wrong, violent and corrupt practices? How is that all the neo-Buddhist live with the idea of accumulating more and more wealth to turn themselves into petit-bourgeoisie and if possible every single person among the neo-Buddhist want to become a capitalist, where Buddhism gives the premises of scientific method and standards of sharing, caring and cooperation through the precepts of Buddha (wisdom), Dhamma (insights) and Sangha (collective).

Today human society and cosmos as a whole has been faced with multiple types and levels of problems, which needs critical intervention. As a human being, the primary responsibility is to prevent the wounds on human society and nature as well as to enter into a healing process of the already incurred wounds. Ideally this would evolve a harmonious relationship between the human and nature. It is a method to get back to nature and human. It hardly has the notions of competition, rivalry, antagonism, uncaring and accumulation. It needs an altogether different attitude and vision, which could be found within the ambit of Buddhism. However it is a difficult task much beyond the general perceptions of any school of Buddhism.

The philosophy of Buddhism is more visible when one reduces their needs, takes the minimum from the nature and cause no hurt to human beings as well as nature. Further it also engages in a process of healing the wounds of human beings and nature. With the overwhelming loam of individual centric culture at present, where everything is evaluated through the prism of market and commodity, the premise of Buddhism is either drifting or shifting or getting completely lost. Maybe it is not Buddhism; or something else in the name of Buddhism. Today due to the multiple level forces and practices, seven Ambedkarite model is not left out of this individualistic approach.

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