

The Two School of Buddhism-An Overview

Dr.S.K.Devegowda

Assistant Professor

Dept Of History

Maharani's Arts College For Women

J.L.B.Road Mysore

Karnataka,India.

Abstract: *Buddhism begins from the northern part of India during the 5th B.C. Buddhism is called Asiatic religion as it has originated from Asia. Although it begins from Asia it has managed to spread across the various places of the universe. The follower of Buddhism religion accepts Buddha as the founder of this religion and considers him as their religion leader. Initially Buddhism is thought to be the only religion without any division but in due course of time it has come to be divided into various types of Buddhism which is practiced by the people across the world. The two different types of this religion are Theravada and Mahayana System of Buddhism.*

Key words: *Buddhism, Theravada, Mahayana, Enlightenment, Nirvana, Buddha-hood, Samsara, Arrant, Sangha, Bhikhu*

The two major schools of Buddhism, Theravada and the Mahayana, are to be understood as different expressions of the same teaching of the historical Buddha. Because, in fact, they agree upon and practice the core teachings of the Buddha's Dharma. Buddhism begins from the northern part of India during the 5th B.C. Buddhism is called Asiatic religion as it has originated from Asia. Although it begins from Asia it has managed to spread across the various places of the universe. The follower of Buddhism religion accepts Buddha as the founder of this religion and considers him as their religion leader. Initially Buddhism is thought to be the only religion without any division but in due course of time it has come to be divided into various types of Buddhism which is practiced by the people across the world. The two different types of this religion are Theravada and Mahayana System of Buddhism.

Buddha the founder of this religion teaches to his disciples that life is bounded by different kinds of suffering and this suffering is caused by different human aspirations. The aim of Buddha was the solution of life problems like suffering and miseries. He says that all these suffering and miseries can be removed when human stop craving and desiring from all kinds of passions. Buddha preaches that good and evil things that people experience in life is the result that comes out from the nature of his or her desires pursued. He said though the world is full of suffering and pain it is the duty of every individual to strive for enlightenment or extinction of suffering from this painful world. He preached in a positive assurance that it is possible to attain

nirvana which is the highest goal in Buddhism through proper conduct, wisdom and meditation. The basic teaching of Buddhism says that people should understand the effects of their actions. Gautama Buddha was born into a royal family of Kapilavastu in the 6th Century B.C. He gave up all the pleasures of the world when he was very young. After seeing a man with disease, becoming old age and death the young prince was left to believe that the world was full of suffering, but seeing the life of a care-free Sanyasi begging for his survival struck his mind that there is a possible way out from suffering. Siddhartha became restless and wanted to know the real cause of all suffering and how one can liberate oneself from all sufferings. He went out from his comforts zone and sought the help of religious teachers and learned scholars and one who practiced great austerities- but no one could answer to his queries to his satisfaction. Lastly he trust himself and threw him back on his own strength and efforts and went into deep meditation of finding the solutions for all suffering, and atlas succeeded and became Buddha or the Enlightened.

Buddha gathered his followers and taught them face to face through oral conversation. He would cleared all the doubts of his followers and make them understood with some practical examples. His teaching was going on smoothly when he was alive for quite a long period of years. But after he passed away, his followers start dividing among themselves into different sects or groups. The divided schools are Mahayana and Hinayana (Theravada). Theravada Buddhism becomes popular in Ceylon, Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam. Whereas Mahayana Buddhism flourished in Tibet, China, Japan etc. Buddhism religion not only spread in some few countries but it has spread far and wide and became one important universal religion.

Theravada Buddhism

Theravada Buddhism focused more on the personal salvation through individual efforts. This sect of Buddhism is thought to be in the most conservative forms of nature in following Buddhism. They adhere to pali scriptures and the non-theistic ideal of self purification to enlightenment called Nirvana (Nibbana). Theravada Buddhism advocates that all people should make their own efforts to help own self and to attain common good ‘Nirvana’. One of the most unique elements of Theravada Buddhism is its highly conservative nature. Even today it sticks to the original teaching of the lord Buddha. That is how Theravada means followers of the elder’s doctrine or adhering to the main teachings of Buddha only. The teaching of Theravada encourages that every individual should realized the concept of suffering and how one should come out from the bondage of suffering. The main principle teaching of Theravada Buddhism circled around wisdom, morality and mental training. The Theravada is a religion which denies the existence of God so they are atheistic. In place of God Dharma has taken the position. They are of the view that it is unethical to allow the act of abortion, euthanasia, as they compromise the value of life. Theravada Buddhism preaches that an individual self to attain liberation is possible only through one’s own efforts. To attain the highest goal “liberation” one needs to follow the path of meditation and concentration. The ideal method to follow Theravada Buddhism is to cheer up oneself to a full time monastic life. About the food habits they don’t usually eat meat, fish and also even in some of the countries the Theravadins

abstain themselves from eating some vegetables like garlic, onion, chives, leek etc. because they believed that by eating these items it increases one's sexual desire and anger too.

To live a monastic life is very important for any age group and they can join monastic communities. The beginner monks are called Samanna and the mature monks are called Bhikkhu. The whole group comprising of all the Monks, young and old is called the Sangha. All the monks need to practice the monastic order which consist of 227 rules. From these rules or precepts are five which are compulsorily to be followed by all the monks. The following are the five precepts.

- i) One should refrain from taking life. Not killing any living being
- ii) One should refrain from taking what is not given and avoid stealing from anyone.
- iii) One should refrain from the misuse of the senses. Not having too much sensual pleasure from sexual misconduct/ immorality
- iv) One should refrain from false speech.
- v) One should avoid from intoxicating drinks and drugs as it cloud the mind.

These five moral precepts of Buddhism are the code of conduct or rules to help people to live a moral and ethical life. Monks are strictly to follow these five precepts so as to live a life of good moral life. This also paves a path for the Buddhist to get rid of suffering and achieve enlightenment. It is been preached in Buddhism that the practice of the precepts should be continuous as they are not always easy to carry out. The main reason in following Buddhism is to rid of suffering and reach the goal of enlightenment.

Mahayana Buddhism

The other group or school of Buddhism is known as the Mahayana Buddhism which they were pleased to call themselves as "Greater Vehicle" opposing to the other orthodox school of Buddhism Hinayana (Theravada) meaning "Lesser Vehicle". By the crowding of the number of people coming to the fold of Mahayana Buddhism, it deserves the name as 'greater vehicle' because it has been designed as the religious collection where it can accommodate all kinds of people with different testes and cultures. This school explained about God, Soul and human destiny in a positive manner. The main goal of a Mahayanist is to attain the state of Boddhisattva or Buddha-hood. In this school of Buddhism Buddha is been projected as the idol of worship and consider him as the real existence, for them Buddha is God. It is their philosophy that every being should attain liberation or enlightenment without been left out. They also do believe that Buddha can help them to reach its final goal Enlightenment or Nirvana. It denies the ultimate reality of this world and says that the world is phenomenal, but they do accept in the transcendental reality which they identified Buddha as the one. Mahayana Buddhism celebrates the Buddha as a meditative tool or object of devotion.

The main differences between Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism are Theravada Buddhists aim to become Arhants and gain freedom from the cycle of Samsara, whereas Mahayana Buddhists wish to stay in the cycle of Samsara out of love and compassion for others in helping them to reach 'Enlightenment' or 'Nirvana'. Mahayana praised Buddha as God but Theravada says Buddha was an ordinary person like every others, and Buddha he himself announced that he is not a super human or different from others but he is the same like any other humans.

But the two schools of Buddhism admit the basic teachings of Buddha as same, the preaching of Buddha on the Four Noble Truths, The Eight Noble Paths, and Dependent Origination are accepted by both the schools as true, both the schools seek for enlightenment but their approach is different.

Reference

1. Ashvaghosha, *Awaking of fait*, trans by D.T.Suzuki, Chicago;1900
2. Davids. R., *Buddhist India*, New York, 1903
3. Coomaraswamy, A, *Buddha and the Gospel of Buddhism*, New York.,1916
4. Radhakrishanan, S., *Indian Philosophy*, The Macmillan, New York, 1923
5. Pratte, J.B., *The pilgrimage of Buddhism*, The Macmillan, New York; 1928
6. Mohapatra, A.R, *Philosophy of Religion: An approach to world religions*, Sterling Publishers Private Limited, New Delhi; 1985
7. Satischandra Chatterjee and Dhirendramohan Datta, *An Introduction to Indian Philosophy*, University of Calcutta Press, Calcutta; 1984
8. Eckel, M.D, *Buddhism*, The Rosem Publishing group, New York ;'2010