



A STUDY ON INFLUENCE AND IMPACT OF BUDDHISM IN INDIAN CULTURE

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Abstract

The influence of Buddhism on Indian culture and society is undeniably great. Because it promoted equality and non-violence along with free will. Even though it has disappeared from India, it has influenced the intellectual, artistic, literary and architectural spheres as well as the mindset of the people. As a popular religion, Buddhism is a simple, intuitive and popular religion that has attracted people due to its emotional aspects, easy moral code and use of the local language, the practice of Buddhism puts the individual in the role of a “scientist”. They conduct experiments on their own mind to see what works for them.

Key words: - Buddhism, Intellectual, Artistic, Literary And Architectural, Stupas, Chaityas , Pillars, Gandhara and Mathura.

It is a generally accepted fact that Buddhism was one of the major religions of the ancient world. Buddhism was founded by the great Guru Buddha in the 6th century BCE. Originally named Siddhartha Gautama, according to some legends his royal life did not satisfy him and observing the ills, old age, monk and death around him, but Dr.B.R.Ambedker refuted this view and it was because of Rohini river dispute he left palace, became a wanderer seeking solutions to the sufferings of mankind and eventually renounced everything under the Bodhi tree and attained supreme enlightenment on the 49th day of his continuous meditation. He was thereafter called the Buddha. His teachings are elaborated in the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path. Buddhism had a profound impact not only on the social, political, religious and cultural life of India but also on other countries too.

The influence of Buddhism on Indian culture and society is undeniably great. Because it promoted equality and non-violence along with free will. Even though it has disappeared from India, it has influenced the intellectual, artistic, literary and architectural spheres as well as the mindset of the people. As a popular religion, Buddhism is a simple, intuitive and popular religion that has attracted people due to its emotional aspects, easy moral code and use of the local language, the practice of Buddhism puts the individual in the role of a “scientist”. They conduct experiments on their own mind to see what works for them. This process

is called mental training. The idea and Buddhist doctrine is that a person can achieve inner peace, happiness comes from inner peace.

Through its moral teachings, Buddhism teaches good qualities such as compassion, non-violence and truthfulness. These qualities shape human personality and character-building. Buddhism is largely based on the belief that monks follow a common rule and live together under a common code of discipline. Gradually, this Buddhist monastic system was also adopted as a monastic system in Hinduism.

In the development of language and literature, the Buddha preached his message in Pali, the language of the common people. During the time of king Kanishka, Buddhist monks preached the message of the Buddha in Sanskrit. Buddhism enriched these languages and its literature. In the field of Art, Architecture, Sculpture and Painting, Buddhism contributed stone sculpture and architecture to India. Many examples of Buddhist art and architecture are reflected in the construction of stupas, chaityas and pillars. Sculptures of Buddha and Bodhisattvas are made according to the art of Gandhara and Mathura. Buddhists dedicated cave temples, a practice followed by Hindus and Jains. Buddhist monks, as a link between India and foreign countries, have been carrying the gospel of Buddha to foreign countries since the third century BC. Foreign Buddhist pilgrims came to India in search of knowledge. Foreigners who came to India often abandoned their names and religions and adopted Hindu names and Hindu beliefs. Thus, Buddhism contributed to the synthesis of the foundations of modern Hindu society.

As the universities developed, Buddhist monasteries were used for educational purposes. Buddhism promoted education through famous residential universities. Buddhism emphasized non-violence and the sanctity of animal life as a way of respecting animal life. Buddhism advocates the protection of livestock. Hindus became vegetarians under the influence of Buddhism. Buddhism had a great influence on Indian culture. It enriched the religion, art, sculpture, language and literature of India.

Caste and Social Structure

Buddhism has made significant contributions to the political, social, religious and cultural life of India. Buddhism contributed to egalitarianism in social life. It raised its voice against caste discrimination and social oppression. It helped women to rise up by giving them access to religion and education. It focused more on truthfulness, charity, purity, self-sacrifice and control over desires, love, equality and non-violence. As it spreads, Buddhism changed the prospective of communities and re-arranged. Buddhism challenged social hierarchy, created opportunities for women and gave a role in spiritual practice to individuals of all classes. However, Buddhism itself changed as it changed each new society it touched.

Buddhism dealt a major blow to traditional Vedic system. Buddhism had a profound impact on shaping various aspects of Indian society. It developed a popular religion which has a broad vision without any complex, elaborate and incomprehensible rituals. It necessarily required a priestly class. This was one of the reasons for its mass appeal. The moral code of Buddhism was simple, based on charity, purity, self-sacrifice, and truthfulness and control over the passions. It laid great emphasis on love, equality and non-violence. It became an article of faith for the followers of Buddhism. It focused the fact that man is the architect of his own destiny. It did not have any elaborate concept of God. Although Buddhism could never able to dislodge

Brahmanism from its high position, but it certainly undermined it and prompted institutional changes in Indian society.

Rejecting the caste system and its evil practice, including rituals based on animal sacrifice, protection, fasting and pilgrimages, it preached complete equality. The promotion of social equality and social justice helped Buddhism transcend the boundaries of the Indian subcontinent and become a world religion. In the field of education, Buddhism sought to make education practical, active and geared towards social welfare. The ancient Indian universities of Nalanda and Takshashila were products of Buddhism.

The teachings of Buddhism raised its voice against the infamous caste system, challenging the superiority of Brahmins, social oppression, oppression of women and inequality. It gave women the opportunity to access education and religion. It strongly opposed the practice of caste system, which inspired future leaders like Mahatma Gandhi and Ambedkar to do the same. The principle of '**Ahimsa**' promoted kindness and compassion among the people.

In ancient times, Buddhist monasteries and later Buddhist universities played a major role in developing Buddhist education. The teachers in the institutions were highly qualified and sincere to their duties. The main aim of Buddhist education is to make mankind a liberal, intelligent, moral, talented, non-violent and secular. Buddhist education makes a man rational, humanistic, logical and free from superstitions.

It is a matter of pride that Buddhist education has spread beyond the Indian subcontinent to China, Korea, Japan, Tibet, Mongolia, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, Malaysia, Singapore. In those countries, Buddhism has made great progress with the inclusion of modern subjects in the curriculum. Today, more useful and modern subjects like English, Science, Medicine, Engineering, Commerce, Computer and Information Technology need to be included to become more popular. The countries mentioned here have made tremendous progress in Buddhist education with the inclusion of modern subjects.

Impact on Vedic Religion

Buddhism condemns superstitions and practices followed by Hinduism, especially animal sacrifice to appease the gods. Buddhism promoted idolatry after King Kanishka. This was later adopted by Vedic religion. Mahayana followers worshipped images of the great Guru Buddha. This was later adopted by Hindu worshippers. Hindus were originally non-vegetarians, but became vegetarians under the influence of Buddhism.

Impact on Art and Architecture

The development of art is one of the greatest influences of Buddhism on Indian culture. Buddhism enriched the architectural heritage of India through the stupas of Sanchi, Amaravati, Gaya etc. A lot of historical information can be gathered and interpreted from the Buddhist caves and pillars of Ashoka. A good example is; Sarnath pillar with an inverted lotus. During Ashoka's reign, a stupa depicting Buddhism was created. It was modified by other Rajput rulers and merchants from the later period. The drawings and depictions of Buddha, Bodhisattva or Buddhahood, Gandharvas, Yakshas, trees, birds, vines etc. carved on the rocks influenced the development of Indian art and architecture. The Ajanta, Ellora, Karle and Bagh caves depicting Buddhist paintings reflect the talent of historical Indian artists. This can be interpreted as the

expression of art, architecture, painting, etc., influenced by Buddhism. Genres like poetry and drama were encouraged. This is evident from the literature in the language of the common people.

Impact of Buddhism on Education

The biggest impact of Buddhism on Indian society is, Buddhists carried their belief in equality and compassion by universalizing education for women and Shudras in the field of education. Buddhist preachers travelled all over India to spread literature, language and culture. Education in Buddhism is geared towards social welfare, rationality and action. Takshashila, Nalanda and Vikramashila are all ancient Indian universities inspired by Buddhism. Buddhism produced ancient scholars of the highest order like Charka, Nagarjuna and Vasumitra. The main aim of Buddhist education is the all-round development of the child's personality. This includes child's physical, mental, moral and intellectual development. Other aims of Buddhist education are to make a liberal, intelligent, wise, moral, non-violent and secular mankind. They greatly enriched Indian literature. They throw light on the social and political conditions of the people in the 3rd and 4th centuries BC. Mahayana Buddhists composed their religious literature in Sanskrit. Buddhist monasteries became great centers of learning.

The Buddha's teachings were also the attainment of wisdom was the main aim of Buddhist education. In Sanskrit, the language of ancient India, Buddhist wisdom was called “**Anuttara-samyak-sambodhi**” which means perfect ultimate wisdom. The Buddha taught that the main purpose of practice or cultivation is to attain this ultimate wisdom. The Buddha taught that everyone has the potential to realize the state of ultimate wisdom. Because it is the internal part of the nature. But it is not acquired externally. The students became rational, humanistic, logical and free from superstition. The students became free from greed, attachment and ignorance. Buddhist education was wide open and available to all classes of people. The main goal of Buddhist education was to transform the ignorant into the wise and the beast into a priest.

The Buddhist education system aims to regain the inner qualities of person. It teaches complete equality. It arose from the recognition of the Buddha's. All sentient beings have this innate wisdom and nature. The teachings of the Buddha help us realize the innate, perfect, ultimate wisdom. After becoming wise, all our problems can be solved and suffering can be transformed into happiness. During Buddhist times, education was given great importance through religion. The main purpose of education was the propagation of religion and the inculcation of religious sentiments, and education was a means to attain salvation or nirvana. In preparation for life, religious education was accompanied by the provision of rhetoric and practical knowledge. This enabled students to earn their livelihood when they entered everyday life.

Influence of Buddhism on Nationalism

Buddhism spread Indian culture throughout India and supported the concept of national unity and universal brotherhood. Mahatma Gandhi adopted the ideology of '**Ahimsa**' and used it in the struggle against British rule for independence. The Indian flag features the Ashoka Chakra and the national emblem is adapted from Buddhism. Ashoka encouraged the expansion of Buddhism by sending Buddhist monks to surrounding areas to share the teachings of the Buddha. A wave of proselytization began and Buddhism spread not only in India but also internationally. Some scholars believe that many Buddhist practices were simply absorbed into the tolerant Hindu faith.

Conclusion

Buddhism has undoubtedly brought about many changes and has inspired the philosophy, art, architecture, literature and politics of India and other countries like Nepal, China, Japan, Tibet, Sri Lanka, and Burma etc. It has given people a simple way of life. A rational and moral mindset of Buddhism has helped in eliminating many vices of society like inequality and violence, bringing together Indians to create a sense of unity and brotherhood.

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