

Influence of Buddhism Thought and Culture in India

Archana Rashmi¹, Dr. Jayveer Singh²

¹Research Scholar OPJS University, Churu, Rajasthan

²Associate Professor OPJS University, Churu, Rajasthan

Abstract

The system of Buddhist thoughts consists of Hinayanic and Mahayanic ideas. Generally, Hinayanic thought only mentions the relative truth (samvrti satya). It means that Hinayanists only talk about the impermanence, sufferings and selflessness of all conditioned things. The absolute truth (Paramartha satya) has not been mentioned in their doctrines. The main doctrines of Hinayana are Four Noble Truths, the Theory of Dependent origination, five aggregates, karma, rebirth and Nirvana. All these doctrines are explained according to the relative aspects. Theravddin school is said to be the orthodox school that was established directly by the Buddha at Deer park of Sarnath. Theravadins do not believe in the absolute truth, they only believe in the relative truth. According to Theravadins, the universe was made by four material elements (earth, water, fire and air) and it goes on without maker, without the known beginning, continuously exists by nature of relations of cause and effects, and man was constituted by five aggregates (skandhas). His body belongs to material and his mind consists of feeling, perception, mental function, and consciousness. The so-called body is subject to birth, old-age, sickness and death. Mind is always disturbed by sorrow, grief, sufferings and lamentation.

Keywords: *Buddhism Thought, Culture, India, Theravadins, Hinayanic thought.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The Buddha as a historical person, the historical Gotama' Theravada aims at the individual liberation and believes that only Gotama attained Buddhahood, and they consider nirvana as opposition of samsara. Hinayanists deny the Brahman, atman, God and soul. It only accepts gods (devas) as the good ones, who protect Dharma and to help good men. Especially they believe Arhats as the worthy men, who had already reached perfect Nirvana and had nothing more to learn. Moreover, they believe that when desire, hatred, ignorance are absent from one's mind, he can attain Nirvana, free from rebirth in the realms of existence. The means to the liberation, according to Theravadins, is the practice of sila (precepts) dhyana (meditation) and prajna (wisdom).

Sarvastivada also belongs to Hinayana, it branched off from Theravdda, the orthodox school of Buddhism², because it did not admit the Theravadin theory that all things are unreal.³ Sarvastivadins hold that all things are real and exist at all times: past, present and future.⁴ In fact, they only mention that the attributes, which constitute all things, are permanent. For example, moisture of water, the heat of fire, the move of air, the solid of earth, all are existent according to cause and conditions but they never vanish. The self-nature or the absolute of all things has been not mentioned by the Sarvastivada as yet. Moreover, it believes in the theory of non-self, the absence of any permanent substance in an individual. And it believes in the plurality of all phenomenal things in the universe. Like Theravdda, Sarvastivada denies the existence of God and soul. It believes that the world is constituted by cause and conditions. Especially, it does not believe Arhat as the worthy man, who had already reached perfect Nirvana. It thinks that the life of an Arhat is governed by good or bad karma and he must have something to learn more. Sarvastivada also considers the Buddha as a historical person. He attained Buddhahood and became omniscient at Bodh Gaya.⁵ Its concepts of bondage and liberation, and the means to liberation are the same as in Theravdda. Vaibhasika also belongs to Hinayana, it branched off from Sarvastivada on account of disagreement with the thought of Sarvastivada such as all things are real and exist forever. It advocated that everything is momentary like a dream or a lightning and only the unconditioned things exist forever. According to it, impermanence is the attribute of all conditioned things. The unconditioned thing is the inner principle of all things that exist forever. Vaibhasika believes in the theory of causation, karma, rebirth, Nirvana and denies the existence of Brahman, atman, God and soul. It believes in the reality of dharma in their phenomenal aspect.

Sautrantika also belongs to Hinayana, it branched off from Sarvastivada on account of disagreement with the Sarvastivada's thought that everything exists permanently. They proclaimed on its banner a return to the genuine doctrine of Theravada, denied, therefore, the permanent essence of all things that is suggested by Sarvastivada. It re-established the doctrine that reality consists of momentary flashes that everything appears into life out of non-existence and returns again to non-existence after having been existent for a moment only. It believes that all things in the universe exist by virtue of the interaction; the existence of one thing depends on others. A tree cannot exist, if there are no water, soil, air and sunshine." Sautrantika maintains that there is a difference between an entity, its efficiency and its appearance. The entity emerges from non-existence, exists for a moment and then disappears. Therefore, the Sautrantika developed the Theravadin theory of impermanence into its theory of momentariness. Though it denies the existence of soul, it believes in the transmigration of living being from one body to another body. It holds that among five aggregates of man there is only a subtle aggregate that comes to the transmigration.

2. THE THOUGHT OF BRAHMANISM

The thought of Brahmanism mainly comes from Upanisads because they are the end parts of the Vedas that systematize the ideas of Vedas. The thinkers of the Upanisads seek for truth and resolve the problems that man always thinks about. They hold that one lives here whether in pain or in happiness, all has its cause. If one be covered by ignorance, he certainly lives in suffering whereas if he lives with knowledge, apprehends his atman or inner real self, he is free from bondage. The Brahman, atman must be something ultimate after dissolution of things. It is a self-existent entity from which all things spring, exist and return back to it after their dissolution. The world, mind, knowledge, senses and their objects are all finite and conditioned, and they are governed by the law of impermanence. The pleasures of the world are transient, changed and are cut off by old-age and death. One cannot find his real happiness from the finite, only the infinite gives him the eternal happiness. The infinite is the real-self, which is permanent being, a spiritual reality. In Rgveda, atman is understood as the breath or vital essence, gradually it is developed into the essence of soul or individual self. The self is presented through four kinds: the bodily self, the empirical self, the transcendental self and the absolute self. The absolute self is Brahman or atman that is the foundation of all existences.

3. DEVELOPING THE THEORY OF SUNYATA AND BUDDHAYANA

Theory of Sunyata The term sunyata is variously understood. To phenomenal field, it means the ever changing attribute of conditioned things. To ontological aspect, it is a permanent principle, transcendent and indefinable, immanent in all existences. The former is true nature of the world of experience; the latter belongs to the metaphysical reality. The concept of sunyata in Buddhism consists of the relative sunyata and the absolute sunyata. But Hinayana only mentions the relative sunyata or phenomenal sunyata. It means that they only state the attributes of impermanence, suffering, and selflessness of the phenomenal world. The absolute sunyata or the essence of all things has not yet found in any Hinayana doctrines. The doctrines of impermanence, changing, and decaying of Hinayana answers to the relative sunyata of Mahayanism. Both Hinayana and Mahayana agree that the phenomenal world is unreal and it is subject to flux and change. All things in the world are compared to dew drops, to flash of lightning or froth. They hold that nothing to be self-existent since all are based on an endless series of cause and conditions, all properties of things are relational and changeable. The law of causality conditions all being that is in a state of perpetual, becoming, arising, and passing away. There is sorrow and pain because all things are transient; they vanish as soon as they occur. It is the impermanence of object of desire that causes disappointment and regret. On the other hand, both Hinayana and Mahayana consider five aggregates (skandhas) as empty. Body, perception, mental volition, and consciousness are also impermanent and changing, none of them exists forever. According to them, whatever is considered as self that is only a succession of emptiness, even wife or children, fame or honour, love or worth are also governed by the law of impermanence, none of them is worth pursuing. S.Radhakrishnan⁸⁴ states that what is subject to origination is to destruction. So change is the stuff of conditioned reality, identity of objects is an unreality.

4. BUDDHAYANA

Buddhayana or Buddha-Vehicle is one of three vehicles of Buddhism. The Sravato-vehicle and pratyekabuddhahide of Hinayana are only the means to the Buddha vehicle (Buddhayana). The Saddharmapundarika sutra states that as Buddha appears in the evil age of five impureness, one's mind is very vile, being covetous and envious, bringing to maturity very root of badness, he cannot teach the teaching of one-vehicle to humankind. But he, by

tactful powers (upaya kausalya) in the teaching of one-vehicle (Buddhayana), discriminates and expounds into the teaching of three vehicles, really there is only one-vehicle without other vehicles, neither the second nor the third. The sutra affirms that the Buddha expounds the teaching of three vehicles (Triyana) in order to reveal the one-vehicle (ekayana) or the Buddha-vehicle. To humor one's disposition, to the seekers of the Svavaka-yana, the Buddha expounds them the Four Noble Truths and helping them to know the suffering, the cause of suffering, and the path to the cessation of suffering and the attainment of Nirvana. To the seekers of the Pratyekayana, the Buddha teaches them the theory of Dependent Origination to lead them to apprehension of the cause of rebirth and the cessation of it. To the seekers of Bodhisattvayana, he expounds them the six perfections (paramitas) to help them performing the self-benefit and the benefit of others. But after attaining some result of cultivation, they are satisfied with the achievement attained, without expectation of the higher prospects. By this reason, the Buddha expounds them the one-vehicle and to encourage his disciples to reach the Buddhayana or Buddhahood. Mahaydnists hold that Hinayanic Nirvana is but the means to the union with one's original enlightenment.

The ideal of Mahayana is Bodhisattva as distinct from the Arhat of Hinayana. Bodhisattva literally means one whose essence is to benefit him and others. In other word, Bodhisattva means a man, who is going on the way to the future Buddhahood. In Hinayanic doctrine, the term Bodhisattva is only used for Gautama during the period of his search for truth. It is to say, in Hinayana doctrine, there is only one Bodhisattva Gautama before his becoming a Buddha while in the Mahayana doctrine this term is opened for those who render benefit to other creatures. Out of compassion for suffering humankind, Mahayanic Bodhisattva denies entering into Nirvana and promises himself in the task of bringing off men from the worldly sufferings.

5. CONTRIBUTION OF BUDDHISM TO INDIAN CIVILIZATION

(i) Mahayanic Contribution to Indian literature

During the period from the first century B.C to the sixth century A.D., Mahayana has an active contribution to Indian literature with its various sources of literature. Among Mahayana literary sources, the system of prajha paramita sutras or the perfect wisdom sutras is most important. Andrew Skilton gives four phases of the growth of the literature. According to him, the Astasahasrika paramita sutra in 8000 slokas (lines) is the oldest sutra that was composed at the first phase about 100 B.C - 100 A.D. A.K. Warder maintains that the Astasahasrika compiled in the south of India and it was re-written from the prose part of the Salla text. The sutra, which now extant in Nepal, includes thirty two chapters. Its content reveals the relative and absolute sunyata (emptiness) and the practice of Bodhisattva path. Sangharakshita holds that the Astasahasrika sutra constitutes the original nucleus of the whole system of the prajha paramita sutras. There are at least six Chinese translations of the sutra, the first is Lokaksema's version made about 179- 180 A.D., the following versions are made by Dharmapriya in 382 A.D., Chih Ch'ien in 225 A.D., Kumarajiva in 408 A.D., Hsuan Tsang in 660 A.D. and Danapala in 985 A.D. Among these versions, Kumarajiva's one is most popular. The sutra was also translated into Tibetan, Mongolian, Japanese and English. Dr Conze has produced an English version of the sutra in 1958.¹⁴⁵ The sutra of this class composed in the second phase, from 100 A.D. to 300 A.D. were the Maha prajha paramita sutras, e.g. the Satasahasrika or the Perfect wisdom sutra in 100,000 slokas, the Pahcavimsti-sdhasrika or the Perfect wisdom sutra in 25,000 slokas and the Astadasa-sahasrika or the Perfect wisdom sutra 18,000 slokas (lines) and the Vajracchedika or the Perfect wisdom sutra in 300 slokas. There is a tradition that the Perfect wisdom sutra in 100,000 slokas was brought back from the world of Nagas by Nagarjuna in the second century A.D. But Hinaydnists hold that Nagarjuna himself wrote the prajha paramita sutra (in 100,000 slokas).^{U1} In fact, there seems to be no reference by Nagarjuna. He wrote simply and trying to establish the correct interpretation of the Tripitaka as recognized by all Buddhists. Even his Madhyamikakarika is only a re-explanation of the original Middle way of Tripitaka and avoidance of extremes of speculative opinion and conduct. Apart from that, Sangharakshita maintains that Nagarjuna wrote a commentary of the prajna paramita sutra in 25,000 slokas in the second century A.D., named Maha prajna paramitopadesa sastra. Nagarjuna did not, in fact, write this commentary. It was written by Nagarjuna II or Nagarbodhi (Nagarjuna I's disciple) in the second century A.D. Nagarbodhi's important works are Maha prajna paramitopadesa and Dvadasadvara, now extant in Chinese translations.

(ii) Mahayanic Contribution to Indian philosophy

It is a matter of historical truism that the doctrine of two fold truth, relative truth (samvrtisatya) and the absolute truth (paramartha satya) was firstly expounded by Nagarjuna, Aryadeva, Bhavaviveka, Candrakirti, Santideva, Maitreyanatha, Asanga, Vasubandhu, etc. though its seeds be perceivable in the prajndparamita sutras. According to

L.M Joshi, the classical Vedanta schools took this twofold truth theory from Mahayana as foundations of their philosophy. The doctrine states that this phenomenal world to be not eternal and its appearance is due to illusion (mdya). This thought is very well known to the Heart sutra and Madhyamikakarika as well as to other Mahayana sutras and sastras. In the Saddharmapundarika sutra¹⁹⁵, the world is said to be impermanent and is compared to a house set on fire. The teaching of one vehicle is often understood as means to the extinction of this fire born out of thirst (tanha). The Vajracchedika or Diamond cutter sutra says that the conditioned world is always changing as a current and exists in four moments of production, existence, changing and destruction. Madhyamikas regard external objects and subjective cognitions to be equally essenceless with the sunyata as their eternal basis. Nagarjuna I used the word sunyata for both, relative and absolute truths. According to Madhyamikas, all things in the world are relative and conditional but they are depended on the absolute sunyata. Yogacdras recognize the reality of external objects, which are constituted by consciousness (the seeds of phenomena), are impermanent. According to them, only alayavijhana is real and eternal but all things manifested from it are transient.

6. THE CONCEPT OF ATMAN AND JIVA

Atman: The atman is originally the term of the Upanisads but in Mahayana doctrine, this term is replaced by other terms such as prajna, sunyata, self-nature, Buddhanature, tathata, absolute Nirvana, true-mind, the nature of tathagatagarbha, etc. Atman or Buddha-nature or self-nature is known as substratum of all experiences, it is absolute nature of man. Hinayanists deny atman since they only mention the relative truth; atman is not found in any separate parts of transient things. For example, when the pole, axle, wheel, frame-work, spokes of the wheel are separated, the chariot is not seen but when they are combined, the chariot is seen. Atman or self-nature is not necessarily the same as egoism, even when selfishness or egoism is destroyed, the selfnature remains. Hinayanists always think about the destruction of self, in reality, the self that they try to destroy is the self-attachment to external object; it is not self-nature of all things. It is this self-attachment that makes them to suffer. The real-self or atman cannot be destroyed. If the self-nature or atman were destroyed, there would not have any existence. Owing to atman or self-nature, everything exists and acts in orderly/ manner. Owing to atman or real-self, eyes, ears, tongue, nose, body and mind perform their functions. The affirmation of self-nature or atman in all things is the specific property of Mahayana. To translate the term atman always by ego or self may be wrong. The theories of ego and non-self in the Hinayana doctrine only belong to ethics, they are not the metaphysical concepts. The atman is known as sunyata in the Madhyamikakarika. This sastra holds that sunyata is absolute, the basis of all existences. According to Nagarjuna I, atman or sunyata is wonderful and bright. One tries to think about it or to describe it by any language, he is like trying to catch space with his hand because space cannot be caught or touched by him.

Jiva: Jiva or soul is also the term used in the Upanisads. In Buddhism, it is called by many names such as consciousness, patisandhi vijhana, pudgala, gandhava, etc. these terms are used for the empirical self that is the governor of body, sense organs, mind and intellect. It is neither female nor male, nor yet is the neuter. Whatever body it takes to itself by that it holds. Owing to past karma it assumes successively various forms in various conditions. It is without beginning and without end; it is the knower, enjoyer, thinker and doer of the good or bad karma and experiences the result of karma. It is unborn, conscious, and eternal, it does not perish while its body dies. When a man dies, whose body is burnt, the material elements of his body return back to the four elements in the universe and he remains only his soul or gandhava.

According to the Ksitigarbha sutra, after death, one's gandhava (soul) is free from his body and lives continuously for forty nine days; it will then go to rebirth according to its past karma except the very evil and the very good men. The very evil man falls into the hells immediately after death and the very good man is reborn into the heavenly worlds just after death.

The Upanisad says that the soul is led by karma into the mother's womb there it connects with the father's self that was left there, then a new fetus to be taken shape and a new life is continued. After throwing this body again, it also get an appropriate body in accordance with its karma. When the thirst of lust is rooted out from one's mind, his soul becomes one with his atman or self-nature and the immortality is attained.

7. CONCLUSION

The ideal of Bodhisattva is considered as the kernel of Mahayana. Hinaydnists believe in one Bodhisattva, who was before the enlightenment of Buddha. While Mahayanists believe in an infinite number of Bodhisattvas who ever volunteer to enter into the suffering world in order to save living beings could become Bodhisattvas. There is the

difference between Arhat and Bodhisattva in the Mahayana doctrines. After attaining Arhatship, the Hinayanic Saint enjoys happiness of Nirvana and never turns back to the suffering world saving beings. Though a Bodhisattva may be not led by Karma into rebirth, out of compassion, he denies the happiness of Nirvana and enters into the suffering world to save living beings. According to Mahayana, Nirvana is not nihilism. It is an enlightened entity neither positive nor passive, neither egolessness nor non-egolessness nor both nor neither. So samsara is not different from Nirvana. Enlightenment, according to Mahayana, does not mean simply the understanding Four Noble Truths in their positive states, but the experience of the absolute Sunyata that creates the original enlightenment of all living beings. The images of Buddha, Bodhisattva, god, and goddess have become the worshipped objects of Mahayanists. Besides the tenet of virtue, meditation, and wisdom, a doctrine of salvation by faith is emphasized in the Mahayana sutras; especially, Mahayanists do not believe in Arhatship as the final liberation. An Arhat only attains partial liberation and he must have something more to learn.

Indian Buddhism of thought, Hinaydnists only mention the relative truth and recognize the impermanence, suffering, and selflessness of all phenomenal things, whereas, Mahayanists reveal both, the relative truth and the absolute truth. According to them, the absolute truth or absolute Sunyata is foundation of all existences and all things spring up from the absolute, exist in it and return back to it after their dissolution. The absolute Sunyata is forever but all things manifested from it are impermanent and perishable. Of the practice, Hinaydnists only expound the practice of Eightfold Path and attainment of Arhatship, whereas, innumerable means are opened in the Mahayana doctrine. Apart from the practice of Sila, dhyana, and prajha or ten paramitas, Mahayanists also practise devotion (bhakti) and impartial service (anabhogacarya) towards creatures. Mahayanists hold that it is the devotion and impartial service that purify the mind and achieve the knowledge of the absolute Sunyata. It means that, through the performance of devotion and impartial service, one can root out all attachments and defilements from one's mind thereby one can unite with one's Buddha-nature. The purpose of Hinayana is individual liberation; whereas, the end of Mahayana is based on universal liberation.

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