

Contemporary Buddhism In India

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Abstract

Everyone knows it well that Buddhism was originated in India and disseminated around the globe from here. Initially we can say that Buddhism remained one of the many small sects in India. The main breakthrough came when King Asoka (ca. 270-232 BCE) converted to Buddhism. He did not make it a state religion, but supported all ethical religions. He organised the spreading of Buddhism throughout India, but also beyond; most importantly to Shri Lanka. This occurred after the Third Council.

In this sequence we have observed a marked influence of buddhism on the people of India however most part of the Indian society was following different schools of thoughts and practices rooted in the Vedic wisdom but due to some restrictions it remained and get secured among some specially qualified people not for all classes in the society. Thats why there was a need of hour to spread the equanimous wisdom for all walk of life and Buddhism was absolutely suitable for it. In this paper we will put more attention on the influential issues of Buddhism in India which change the major part of Buddhistic mind set in India.

Key Words- Buddhism, Buddha, Vedic Wisdom, Krishnamurti, India.

Introduction-

In prologue we cannot arrive on any confirmation that whether Buddhism plays any pivotal role in the history of Indian Philosophical system but we can observe and marked tendency of Buddhistic ideas created by the modern scholars combining with the ancient wisdom, which shifts our attention on its development in India as a school of practice and philosophy. We will gradually see its development and dissemination in the Indian soil by the modern scholars and now cannot overlook its significance as system in itself which gives us an understanding of human life.

Buddhist teachings disseminated and highly accepted in India-

As we have already indicated that, previously India was a land of Vedic wisdom and practices since most of the people were engaged in the ritualistic pattern and verbal understandings of the same but due to the emergence of Buddhism somehow people were slowly deviated towards it because the path shown by the Buddha was easy to follow having no any ritualistic injections.

One of the major works of Buddhism cites that-

“Purity is not attained by views, or learning, by knowledge, or by moral rules, and rites. Nor it is attained by the absence of views, learning, knowledge, rules, or rites. Abandoning all these, not grasping at them, he is at peace; not relying, he would not hanker for becoming”.³

There is in this text a rejection of doctrine, rule, and rite that is a critique of the exaggerated claims of those who believed they could become pure and free through ritual, knowledge, or religious status. The lonely ascetic seeks not to become one thing or the other and avoids doctrinal disputes.

If such statements represent some of the earliest moments in the development of the doctrine, then the next stage must have brought a growing awareness of the need for ritual and creed if the community was to survive. This awareness would have been followed in a short time by the formation of a metaphysic, a theory of liberation, and a conscious system of meditation.

Buddhist principles can be summarised also in a doctrine recognised by all schools, that of the Four Noble Truths: sorrow, its cause, its cessation, and the path leading to cessation. Buddhist tradition, therefore, will

spend much of its energy in understanding the causes of suffering and the means to put an end to it, or, in doctrinal shorthand, "arising" and "cessation." Since cessation is in fact the obverse of arising, a proper understanding of arising, or causation, becomes central to Buddhist speculation in India. The most important doctrine for this aspect of the religion is the principle of dependent arising (pratītya-samutpāda): everything we regard as "the self" is conditioned or compounded; everything conditioned depends on causes and conditions; by understanding the causes of our idea of the self and of the sorrow that this idea brings to us we can become free of suffering. This doctrine is summarised in a stanza that has become one of the best known Buddhist creeds throughout Asia:

The Tathāgata has proclaimed the cause,
as well as the cessation,
of all things (dharma) arising from a
cause.

This is the Great Śramaṇa's teaching.⁴

We can see that from which aspects Buddhism get popularity in India even there was a phase in the Indian history when Buddhism was sharply blown and rooted out from this land but in modern age we can see a huge acceptance of Buddhist teachings and techniques spreader all over India. We can summarise mostly accepted teachings of Buddhism in modern India in several categories as-

(a) Meditative Aspects-

Theories of emptiness and Nirvana come with so many practical aspects from the Vajrayana sect of Buddhism which finally culminates into the modern form of Buddhist meditation techniques in India. Vajra in itself is recognized as emptiness in several Buddhist texts⁵. As for instance, the innate quality of the non-dual is also represented by the concept of the "thought of awakening" (bodhicitta). But innate awakening in Vajrayāna becomes the goal : enlightenment is present in its totality and perfection in this human body; the thought of awakening is awakening:

The Thought of Awakening is known to be

Without beginning or end, quiescent, Free from being and nonbeing, powerful, Undivided in emptiness and compassion⁶.

Usually the doctrine of emptiness was developed by the various philosophical schools, but clearly inspired by the tradition of the Mahāyāna sūtras. Thus we read: "Even nirvāṇa is like a magical creation, like a dream, how much more any other objects or idea (dharma)? Even a Perfect Buddha is like a magical creation, like a dream⁷"

Doctrine of emptiness later developed in the form mindfulness or thoughtfulness which was first coined by S.N.Goenka as Vpasyana. Some of the investigations in this direction are worth appreciating which reflects its significant effect on neuro-physiological mechanism.⁸ Nowadays many modern yogic offshoots are employing these techniques in their practices. The core idea of this concept was taken from some rare Mahayana Texts. This experience can be described as awareness that nothing is self-existent. Dialectically, this means that there is no way that the mind can consistently think of anything as having an existence of its own. All concepts of substance and existence vanish when they are examined closely and rationally.

(b) Reformer Aspects-

Publicly we see a rapid change in the Hindu mind set when on the basis of cast some group of people were separated as lower in India. They were recognized as Dalits. Actually they belonged to lower servant class or sometimes misinterpreted as untouches.

B.R. Ambedkar, who was also from a lower cast moved with a revolutionary idea to introduce Buddhism as religion for the Dalits in India. He himself followed Buddhism and instigates Buddhist teachings for these people.⁹

(c) Theosophical aspects-

Theosophical society was established in India by Madam Blavatsky in 1875 aiming to rediscover the mystical schools of Indian philosophy and practices later a renowned personality of 20th century in India, J.

Krishnamurti revolutionaries this concepts and finds its closeness to Buddhist teachings of rebirth.¹⁰ However he was not a academic scholar but some how his teachings got famous not only in India but also across the globe. Even in his teachings he never cited from the canonical texts of Buddhism but modern researchers found a close connection of his teachings to Buddhism.

In general the idea of reincarnation and rebirth was highly explained by the theosophist which has its roots from the Buddhist concepts. Although we know that Buddhism has become increasingly popular in the West but some vital concepts remain abstruse. Naturalistic Buddhism has arisen mainly as an attempt to demystify certain aspects of Buddhist philosophy, with the idea of rebirth being a particular case in point. We can see the difficulties of the naturalisation of karma, but can understand the concepts of karma with rebirth which is coherent with the core teachings of the Buddha. We argue that the concepts of rebirth and karma were not only taught to encourage virtuous behaviour for the sake of future benefit, but also to reinforce the practitioner's commitment to moral discipline. Although Buddhism allows

for different perspectives on rebirth from a modern point of view, a reinterpretation of the concept should not focus on rebirth as something to be explained away. Instead, new perspectives can be used as an additional means to enhance moral education and spiritual development.¹¹

Conclusion-

We can see a marked tendency in Buddhist teachings as the evolution of all human being and this might be the reason it was accepted by all in India. Nowadays we see Only some small remnants of Buddhist communities, like in the Himalayan areas, Buddhism remained alive.

During the English Colonial Rule, there was a small resurgence of Buddhism in India. In the 1890's, for example, Dammapara of Sri Lanka founded the Mahabodhi Society, and Ayoti Daas founded the Buddhist Society of South India, as well as other unrelated Buddhist activities in Bengal and other places in India. The effects of these activities were localised, never spreading widely but anyway some of the teachings of Buddhism still have a space in several yogic and modern meditative practices in India.

References:

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3. Advayavajra Saṃgraha, p. 24
4. Guhyasamāja 18.37
5. Aṣṭasāhasrikā, p. 40
6. See details- Berkovichohana, Aviva, Joseph Glicksohn, and Abraham Goldstein. "Mindful-ness-induced changes in gamma band activity – Implications for the default mode network, self-reference and attention." *Clinical Neurophysiology* 123.4 (2012): 700-710.
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