



## An analysis on contribution of Buddhism to Indian Culture

Vinna Narasimha Swamy

Lecturer in History, P.R. Government College (Autonomous), Kakinada, East Godavari District, Andhra Pradesh

**Abstract:** Thus Buddhism exercised a tremendous influence on Indian culture. It enriched religion, art, sculpture, language and literature of India. Buddhism is a missionary religion and aims at converting the whole mankind to the doctrines of Buddha. The most important fact is that Buddhism proved to be one of the greatest civilising forces which India gave to the neighbouring countries. Buddhism broke the isolation of India and established an intimate contact between India and foreign countries. It was India's greatest gift to the outer world. Indian culture and civilisation was carried by the Buddhist missionaries into China, Mongolia, Manchuria, Korea, Japah, Burma, Java, Sumatra and other countries from the time of Asoka.

**Key words:** Buddhism, Language and Literature, Character Building

### 1. Introduction

The culture of India is one of the oldest and unique. In India, there is amazing cultural diversity throughout the country. The South, North, and Northeast have their own distinct cultures and almost every state has carved out its own cultural niche. There is hardly any culture in the world that is as varied and unique as India. India is a vast country, having variety of geographical features and climatic conditions. India is home to some of the most ancient civilizations, including four major world religions, Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism. The practice of Buddhism as a distinct and organized religion lost influence after the Gupta reign (c.7th century CE), and declined from the land of its origin in around 13th century, but not without leaving a significant impact. Except for Himalayan region and south India, Buddhism almost became extinct in India after the arrival of Islam in late 12th century. Presence of Buddhism is still found in the Himalayan areas such as Sikkim, Ladakh, Arunachal Pradesh,

the Darjeeling hills in West Bengal, and the Lahaul and Spiti areas of upper Himachal Pradesh. According to the 2011 census, Buddhists make up 0.7% of India's population, or 8.4 million individuals. Traditional Buddhists are 13% and Navayana Buddhists (Converted or Neo-Buddhists) comprise more than 87% of Indian Buddhist community according to 20x11 Census of India.

### 2. Concept of Buddhism

Buddhism is a path of practice and spiritual development leading to Insight into the true nature of reality. Buddhist practices like meditation are means of changing yourself in order to develop the qualities of awareness, kindness, and wisdom. The experience developed within the Buddhist tradition over thousands of years has created an incomparable resource for all those who wish to follow a path-a path which ultimately culminates in Enlightenment or Buddhahood. An enlightened being sees the nature of reality absolutely clearly, just as it is, and lives fully and naturally in accordance with that vision.



This is the goal of the Buddhist spiritual life, representing the end of suffering for anyone who attains it. Because Buddhism does not include the idea of worshipping a creator god, some people do not see it as a religion in the normal, Western sense. The basic tenets of Buddhist teaching are straightforward and practical: nothing is fixed or permanent; actions have consequences; change is possible. So Buddhism addresses itself to all people irrespective of race, nationality, caste, sexuality, or gender. It teaches practical methods which enable people to realise and use its teachings in order to transform their experience, to be fully responsible for their lives.

### 3. Major Contributions of Buddhism to Indian Culture

Buddhism greatly influenced the Indian religion. It gave to Indian people a simple and popular religion. It rejected ritualism, sacrifices and dominance of priestly class. It has also left its permanent mark on Indian religious thought. Buddhism appealed to the masses on account of its simplicity, use of vernacular language in its scriptures and teachings and monastic order. Buddhism left deep impact on the society. It gave serious impetus to democratic spirit and social equality. It opened its doors to women and shudras. Buddhism encouraged abolition of distinctions in society and strengthened the principle of social equality.

The Buddhist viharas were used for education purposes. Nalanda, Vikramshila, Taxila, Udyantpuri, Vallabhi and others cities developed as high Buddhist learning centres. Buddhism helped in the growth of

literature in the popular language of the people. The literature written both in Pali and Sanskrit were enriched by scholars of Hinyana and Mahayana sects. The Buddhist texts like Tripitakas, Jatakas, Buddha charita, Mahavibhasa, Miliand panho, Lalit Vistara are assets to Indian literature.

Like Jainism, Buddhism went a long way in influencing the Indian culture. The life and teachings of Buddha cast spell over the Indian mass. The kings patronized Buddhism and the people rendered their support to this religion. In due course of time Buddhism made great contribution to Indian society and culture.

### Development of Language and Literature:

Gautam Buddha preached his ideas in simple languages. From the beginning he was using Prakriti language. Later on, he resorted to Pali language. With the gradual march of time, Sanskrit became the medium of preaching Buddhism. In this way, languages developed.

The Buddhist Canonical texts like 'Sutta Pitaka', 'Vinaya Pitaka' and 'Abhidhamma Pitaka' and several others were written in Pali language. 'Mahabivasha' was another book on Buddhism written in Sanskrit. 'Sariputta Prakarana' 'Vajra Suchi' and 'Sutralankara' etc. were other Sanskrit books on Buddhism. Thus, literature also flourished due to rise of Buddhism.

### Simple Religion:

Buddhism was very simple. Its principles were very simple. It was easily followed by the people. It was not complex like Vedic religion. It also had no rituals. Due to the magnetic personality of Buddha, it



spread throughout India. People accepted it due to its simplicity.

#### **Opposition to Caste System:**

Buddha vehemently opposed the caste system in Indian society which was an ugly practice during that remote phase of history. Due to his opposition the complexity of the caste system vanished from the society. The society breathed a healthy atmosphere. This trend continued and Mahatma Gandhi and Ambedkar also adopted this principle of Buddha and became popular inside the society.

#### **Character Building:**

Buddhism taught many good qualities like truth, non-violence, non-possession, compassion, brotherhood etc. All these virtues were meant to build up human character. These qualities were largely cultivated by the people in the society. The society grew with noble thought. The people, by building their character, helped in the creation of a healthy society.

#### **Galvanised Hinduism:**

Buddhism gave an impetus to the existing Hinduism. The Mahayanas worshipped the image of Buddha. This inspired the Hindus to worship various images of gods and goddesses. Instead of complex rituals, the Hindus prayed to God through meditation and prayer. This became possible due to the influence of Buddhism on Hinduism.

#### **Growth of Art and Architecture:**

Buddhism went a long way in contributing to the growth of art and architecture. For the first time, Ashoka used rock to create art and architecture. Many stupas, Chaityas and Pillars were

constructed on rock. Sanchi, Saranath, Dhauri, Kanheri, Mathura, Gandhara bore the imprint of Buddhist art and architecture which grew from time to time. The images of Buddha and Bodhisattva, Gandharva, Yaksha, trees, birds, creepers etc. carved out on rock marked the growth of art and architecture in our country. The Buddhist paintings in Ajanta, Ellora, Karle, Bagh show the skill of Indian painters. So, art, architecture, painting etc. grew due to Buddhism.

#### **Monastery System:**

The Buddhist monasteries played a vital role in Indian culture. The Buddhist monks and nuns stayed in those monasteries. For the first time, a democratic procedure was found inside a Buddhist monastery. The head of the monastery was elected, not by selection but by vote, which exhibited a democratic spirit. Later on, the Hindus also followed this system. Sankaracharya set up four mathas in four parts of India. Later on, others followed this system. It was possible due to the contribution of Buddhism.

#### **Preaching of Brotherhood:**

Buddhism propagated universal brotherhood. Ashoka took keen interest to spread universal brotherhood through the propagation of Buddhism. Even he sent his own son Mahendra and daughter Sanghamitra to distant Ceylon for the spread of Buddhism. In due course of time, Buddhism spread to Burma, Japan, China, Tibet, Java, Sumatra, Bali, Borneo, Champa and so on. Thus, Buddhism spread a unique feature of Indian culture abroad, that is universal brotherhood.



### **Influence on History:**

Buddhism exerted its influence on the course of Indian history. The land of Kalinga changed Chandasoka to Dharmasoka Buddhism also attracted Kaniska and Harshavardhan. Mahatma Gandhi also learnt the lesson of Ahimsa from Buddhism and started the struggle for freedom against the Britishraj by following the path of nonviolence.

### **Emancipation of Women:**

Buddha was the incarnation of mercy. In his monastic order he also received nuns. By this he made a noble attempt for bringing the social emancipation of women. Now the women did not consider themselves as inferior to man. In every sense, Buddha was responsible for the upliftment of the women.

### **National Unity:**

Buddhism spread in the nook and corner of India It fostered the idea of national unity and integrity. Asoka, Kanishka and Harshavardhan became the ardent champion of nationalism and they tried to unite India under one umbrella. This was followed by the Moughals and also by the British. Thus, Buddhism undoubtedly brought national unity.

In every sense of the term, Buddhism exerted tremendous influence on Indian society and culture. It freed the people from the clutch of Vedic religion. It raised voice against caste system and propounded the idea of peaceful co-existence inside the society. In the field of art, architecture, painting, sculpture, literature and so on. Buddhism left its marks.

### **Contact between India and Foreign Countries:**

Buddhism established an intimate contact between India and foreign countries. The Buddhist monks carried the gospel of the Buddha to the foreign countries from 3rd century B.C. onwards and foreign Buddhist pilgrims and students came to India in search of knowledge. The foreigners who came to India were conquered by the rich culture of India and gave up their names and creeds and adopted Hindu names and Hindu faith. Thus Buddhism contributed largely to the synthesis which produced the modern Hindu society.

### **Respect for Animal Life:**

Buddhism laid emphasis on non-violence and the sanctity of animal life. It popularized the creed of Ahimsa Paramo Dharma. The earliest Buddhist text 'Suttanipata' boosted the cattle wealth as it declares the catties to be the givers of food, beauty and happiness. Buddhism pleads for the protection of catties. The Hindus were originally meat eaters but due to the influence of Buddhism became vegetarian.

## **4. Conclusion**

Thus Buddhism exercised a tremendous influence on Indian culture. It enriched religion, art, sculpture, language and literature of India. Buddhism is a missionary religion and aims at converting the whole mankind to the doctrines of Buddha. The progress of Buddhism exercised considerable influence in shaping various aspects of Indian life - cultural, social, religious and political. Buddhism gave a popular religion, without any complicated, elaborate and unintelligible rituals such



as could be performed only by a priestly class. The doctrine of ahimsa, so strongly stressed, devoutly preached and sincerely practised by the Buddhist, was incorporated bodily in their teachings by the Brahmins of later days. The practice of worshipping personal gods, making their images and erecting temples in their honour was adopted by the Hindus in imitation of the Mahayana Buddhists. The finest contribution of Buddhism to Indian life was made in the realm of architecture and sculpture. The stupas at Sanchi, Bharhut and Amravati, the stone pillars of Asoka and the cave temples of Kanheri (Bombay), Karle (Pune) and Nasik are considered the best

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specimens of Buddhist art. The stupa at Sanchi is world-renowned for its gateways, and railings which are profusely covered with sculpture. The most important fact is that Buddhism proved to be one of the greatest civilising forces which India gave to the neighbouring countries. Buddhism broke the isolation of India and established an intimate contact between India and foreign countries. It was India's greatest gift to the outer world. Indian culture and civilisation was carried by the Buddhist missionaries into China, Mongolia, Manchuria, Korea, Japan, Burma, Java, Sumatra and other countries from the time of Asoka.

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