

**A CRITICAL AND COMPARATIVE STUDY OF  
HINDUISM AND BUDDHISM WITH SPECIFIC  
REFERENCE TO NEPAL**

**A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE NORTH BENGAL UNIVERSITY  
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IN  
DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY**

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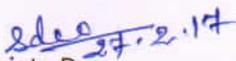
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*Dedicated in  
Memory of My  
Grandmother Laxmi Devi  
Grandfather Dameshawar Narayan Deo,  
Mother Sumitra Devi  
And  
Uncle Narendra Deo*

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## ABSTRACT

The present dissertation is about the comparative study of the two major religions of the world, Hinduism and Buddhism that has given order and peace to our civilization. The significance of the study is that though the two religions appear to be different and at some points even opposite to philosophy but they are essentially the same when we understand the spiritual aspect of these religions. The research study clearly shows that the differences between these two religions are merely cultural and spiritual.

The main text of the study has been divided into five chapters. The first chapter traces the origin of the Newar communities which practice Buddhism in a different manner. Buddhism in Nepal is different from Buddhism been practiced in other parts of the world. Buddhism has been a part of life in many communities of Nepal, more basically in Newar communities.

The second chapter focuses on four major philosophical concepts of the two religions, Hinduism and Buddhism viz, *God, Atma, Karma* and *Moksha* (Nirvana).

In both religions, the word Dharma plays a very important role. The word Dharma (*dhamma*-Pali) denotes not exactly religion but something more than that. It connotes a way of life including the socio-cultural life. Dharma is generally defined as 'righteousness' or 'duty' Dharma is the principle of righteousness. It is the principle of holiness. It is also the principle of unity. Dharma is that which leads one to the path of perfection and glory. Both the religions believe that Dharma is that which makes one divine. *Moksha* is the ultimate goal in both the religions. The path to God or Nirvana may be different, but the goal is the same. According to Hinduism, the ultimate goal is to unite soul, *Atman* to *Paramatma*.

Hindu concept of *Avidya* and Buddhist *Avijja* is also very similar in epistemological sense. Misapprehension (*Mithya-Jnana*), faults (*Dosha*), activity (*pravartiti*) birth (*Janma*) and pain (*Dukha*) constitute the world. False notion or false knowledge is the root of all misery and pain. From *Mithya-Jnana* or false notion comes the fault of like and dislike (*Raga-Dvesha*): from *Raga-Dvesha* proceeds karma or action-virtuous or vicious, which forces a man to pass through repeated births for the sake of its reward or punishment. From these births proceed misery and pain. It is the aim of both the

religions to eradicate the false notion or *mithya jnana* which is the root of all miseries and pains. On the successive annihilation of misapprehension, faults, activity, birth and pain, there follows release (*Apavarga*) of soul.

In Buddhism, the ultimate goal is Nirvana. The attributes of God in Hinduism and realization of Nirvana in Buddhism are essentially the same. It is the state of mind or beyond mind, which is free from worldly defilements, free from ego (*Ahankara*). Hinduism teaches the real or essential nature of God. Buddhists believe that a God is not the highest level of spirituality. Entry into bliss and freedom of Nirvana and emancipation from the world of suffering and rebirth is gained through undergoing Buddhist discipline. In Hinduism, God is absolute and transcendent; this world being merely its manifestation is necessarily fragmental and imperfect. Hence, the essence of both religions coincide here. For self protection, man has created God, on whom he depends for his own protection, safety and security, just as a child depends on its parent. According to Buddhism, our ideas of God and soul are false and empty. Though highly developed as theories, they are all the same extremely subtle mental projections, garbed in an intricate metaphysical and philosophical phraseology. These ideas are so deep-rooted in man, and so near and dear to him, that he does not wish to hear, nor does he want to understand any teaching against them. The Buddha knew this quite well. In fact he said that his teaching is against man's selfish desires. The concept of *Atman* in these two religions posits them in opposite direction. On the one hand, Hinduism believes in the existence of absolute personal *Atman*, and the Godhead, '*Paramatma*'. The salvation of the soul takes by union of *Atma* with *Paramatma*. On the other hand, the Buddha, though believes in the essence of the *atman*, but thinks that it is not absolute. *Atman* too transient in nature. *Anatta* is a Pali term used in Buddhist thought and meaning non-self (Sanskrit, *anatman*). This is one of the three marks of all conditioned existence and is central to Buddhist teaching. For the Buddha, *Atman* is nothing but the five aggregates (*Panca Skandha*) Mind or *Atman* is composed of four elements. *Vigyana* (consciousness) *Sanghya* (Cognition), *Vedana* (Sensations), and *Sanskara* (Volition). The Buddhist theory of no soul is predominantly a rejection of Hindu orthodox philosophy.

The philosophies of Karma in these two religions are very similar. Karma is needed as long as single trace of impurity exists within a soul or *Atman*, right from first manifestation to last. The effort of every soul or *Atman* remains reducing gross impurities within. It is only through complex process of Karma that every soul or *Atman* gains more

purity as one proceeds ahead in cosmic cycle of life. Hindus believe that human beings do their action with good or bad consequences. They might reap the rewards of their action in a heaven or hell in which the self is reborn for a period of time. Both religions believe that human life is precious. It is a marvellous opportunity for spiritual growth. Therefore, they suggest, it should be used wisely. Life must not be frittered away, because it may be cut short, at any time by death. The law of karma is believed to be dynamic, fluid and flexible because it is neither rigid nor mechanical. *Nirvana* in Buddhism is a state of living in which mind is free from any wrong thoughts as anger, lust or worldly desires.

The third chapter discusses about the Vajrayana School in Nepal. The Vajrayani community has special contribution in the evolution of Buddhism in Nepal. For example Vajrayana community has developed the various modes and methods of tantras and yogas.

Tantric Buddhism is another aspect of Buddhism. Around 300 AD, so many tantric works have come out from Buddhism. Vajrayana also is one of the tantric methods which describes in very comprehensive way to attain emancipation.

Chapter four explores religious symbolism and rituals in Nepal. Buddhists and Hindus live together. They understand each other. They worship each other's gods (Buddha, being worshipped as god). They visit temples as well as stupas. It is, therefore, easy for us to understand the practice of animal sacrifices and the ceremony of *Sraddha* performed by the Buddhists living promiscuously among the Hindus.

Chapter five brings the concluding note. The current thesis tries to show that the essence of these two religions has always been renunciation, meditation and liberation. Both sects give focus on compassion and non-violence towards all living beings. Both sects deal with the existence of hells and heavens and also with higher and lower worlds. Both religious communities present the concepts of the existence of gods or deities but in different ways. Hindus have thousands of Gods, but Buddhists have only one god, that is Buddha himself.

In the post modern world, we need to understand these two religions into their depth and dimension because society is fragmented in terms of all its norms and values. Comparing Hinduism and Buddhism, we find Hinduism addresses those problems which we confront in our daily life. But Buddhism creates a world of its own, of meditation preparing the ground for Nirvana. Buddhism tries to make people away from life of luxury and life of advantage and benefits. Quite contrast to it. Hinduism equips us with proper skills to handle the complexity of life.

## PREFACE

The present dissertation is about the comparative study of the two major religions of the world, Hinduism and Buddhism, that has given order and peace to our civilization. The main text of the study has been divided into five chapters.

The first chapter traces the origin of the Newar communities which practices Buddhism in a different manner.

The second chapter focuses four major philosophical concepts of the two religions, Hinduism and Buddhism viz, *God, Atman, Karma* and *Moksha*. In both religions, the word *Dharma* plays a very important role. God is the centre of Dharma. The term God itself becomes irrelevant in Hinduism as the divine nature of God lies within. Hinduism believes in existence of absolute personal *Atman*, and the Godhead, *Paramatma*. The Buddhist theory of no soul is predominantly a rejection of Hindu orthodox philosophy. Both Buddhism and Hinduism believe in an endless cycle of births, known as *samsara*. They also both seek release from this cycle.

The philosophy of Karma in these two religions are very similar. The law of Karma is believed to be dynamic, fluid and flexible because it is neither rigid nor mechanical.

The third chapter discusses about the Vajrayana School in Nepal. Nepal become not only a focal point where these divergent religious practices converged, but also a melting pot of different kinds of religious thoughts and rituals which were transformed into the Nepali version of Vajrayana.

Chapter four explores religious symbolism and rituals in Nepal. Nepal is the centre point of Hinduism and Buddhism. Lumbini and Pashupatinath join Hindus and Buddhists together.

Chapter five brings the concluding note. Comparing these two religions we find both similarities and differences. In the context of Nepal, we can find that bond between Hinduism and Buddhism is very strong Hindus and Buddhist have regard and respect to each others and both religious groups celebrate their spiritual activities in spirit of togetherness.

The present world faces a great deal of crisis because values and norms of human beings are very quickly vanishing in this world. If we understand both these religions properly, we can instill norms and values to the society.

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## Chapter One

### Introduction

Sir Author Conan Doyle, famous writer once remarked, “No other people on earth, Watson, has produced such intricate beauty in as small a space as the Valley of Kathmandu. One trenchant observer has described it best as a kind of coral reef, built up laboriously over the centuries by unrecorded artisans. As a human achievement, it ranks with the creations of Persia and Italy.”

Nepal is an ancient country in terms of religion, culture and civilization. It is a land of contrast which consists of Himalayas, mountains and Terai. The origin of the word ‘Nepal’ is connected with Kathmandu valley. Newar has been the permanent community in Kathmandu valley. Name of Nepal is linked with Newar communities. According to the legend, Manjushri explored the Kathmandu valley. It was full of water at that time. He drained out the water and made the land habitable. After making the valley habitable, a certain sage called ‘Ne’ protected the valley for a certain period of time. ‘Ne’ is Pali word which means protection. The valley was started to be recognized from ‘Ne’ word leading it to Nepal. There is another description of the etymological meaning of Nepal. The term ‘Ne’ is from Tibeto-Burma language. That is, the term Nepal means the house of wool in Tibeto-Burma Lexicon. The description of the word Nepal can also be found in Kautilya’s *Arthashastra*. In accordance with Kautilya’s *Arthashastra*, Nepal is described as a place of trade, of diamond work and leather.

Nepal has been a fertile land of the development of religion where Buddhism and Hinduism have prospered together. In Nepal, there are many castes that practiced Hinduism and Buddhism simultaneously. The best example can be found in Newar communities. The Newar communities are Buddha Margi and Shiv Margi, Basically in Newar community there are Vajaracharyas who are hereditary priests of Rajopadhaya who are Shiva Margi. That is to say, Hinduism and Buddhism are being practiced by some community. It may not be out place to say that Hinduism has made its impact on Buddhism and vice-versa.

In Nepal, we find temple and monasteries together where Buddha’s images are prayed and in monasteries Hindu Gods are prayed. There is a famous monastery in

Syambhu situated in Kathmandu valley where there is a praying room in which many Gods are prayed. Another example can be found in the prayer room of Pasupathinath. Since it is the most sacred place of Hindu where on the auspicious occasion, Buddha is placed at the feet of Shiva. People believe that Buddha is connected with Lord Shiva. Similarly, there are many Buddhist festivals which are celebrated by Hindus and vice-versa. In the same way on various occasions Monks are invited by Hindus and priests are invited by Buddhist. In most of the cases some people are Hindus and Buddhist. In Kathmandu valley, Daishain (Durga Puja) and other festivals like Laxmi puja and Bhaitika are celebrated by all the people irrespective of Hindus and Buddhist.

Hinduism is the major religion of Nepal right from the start of civilization. Nepal since it has been a place of solitude because of forest and mountains has been the place of meditation and penance Many Saints like Astrabakra, Yagnavalkya, Gargi and others have been important in Hindu philosophy under the reins of King Janak. There are various examples in *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* where land of Nepal has been directly associated. In modern History, Muslim invasion in India paved the way for the migration of many saints and devoted Hindus in Nepal. The growth of Hinduism in Nepal is responsible for the foundation of Kingdom which was totally based on Hindu religion. That is to say, Lord Vishnu had organised Nepalese people and given to them their flag Sun and Moon symbolizing Hinduism. In *Puran*, it is mentioned that Kings are incarnations of God over the long span of the Nepalese history. All kings have been Hindus and they ruled over the Kingdom under the faith of Hinduism. This was the prominent factor that Hinduism became a state religion. Many kings thought themselves as incarnations of God. The words of the kings become the law of land.

Here we may discuss how Buddhism has developed as an international religion spreading from Nepal, India, Central Asia, China, South Asia and parts of the world. As we know that Buddha was born as a Hindu and developed a new religion through enlightenment, credit of it goes to Maurya emperor role to spread the message of Buddhism. In other word, Buddhism spread through the Silk Road to China and it spread to Korea and Japan.

In Nepal it developed more in mountain area than the Tarain area. On the side of China border of Nepal, Buddhism has been much more in stronger position. That is to say,

Buddhism has been practiced more in Mongolian community. It has been more popular than Aryan communities in Nepal.

In Kathmandu valley there are various places of Buddhist monasteries like Shymbhu, Seto Gumba, Kapan Gumba and others where thousands of Vikshu students are trained.

In Kathmandu valley, there is place called Buddhanilkantha where meditation is also opened and available to the common people. To release the stress, people joined there even from medical point of view. Now a days focus has been more on development of Buddha's birth place Lumbini. Partly because of tourist mission and partly because historical values, it has been a major project of Government of Nepal, supported by China. In days to come, Buddhism in Nepal would be much stronger than before. In Nepal, Lumbini University has also been set up with focusing on Buddhist-literature, Art, Culture and Buddhist Philosophy.

Buddhism in Nepal is different from Buddhism been practiced in other parts of world. Buddhism has been a part of life in many communities of Nepal, more basically in Newar communities; Newar Buddhist Practitioners lead common life. Their attitudes towards food habits are different. They eat both vegetarian and non-vegetarian food. Similarly, some Monks in Newar communities lead the family life too. Denu (Charity) is the main virtue among the sixth perfection. It is the way of developing the nature of non-attachment to material values. Nepal is the only country where true Vajarayana Tantric culture is still alive and practiced today among the Shakya Newar of the Katmandhu valley.

In Newar Buddhist, social male force is associated with karma. They link it with chetna. They believe that Karma ripens and one has to undergo the previous actions. Among the Newar communities Vajrayana gives stress on ritual aspects.

Thus, apart from Newar communities, Lama (Mongolian) practices Buddhism from faith to death. They are more inspired by Tibetan Buddhist than Indian Buddhist.

Ideology of Newar Buddhism is in fact the outcome of gradual changes and modification. They believe in the middle path as the golden way to obtain the objective

life. Newer Buddhist gives emphasis on the ten important rules as part of the fundamental practice of Buddhist dharma.

1. Not to take life
2. Not to steal
3. Not to commit sexual misconducts.
4. Not to tell lies.
5. To take food in proper way.
6. Not eat at a wrong time.
7. Not to watch dancing.
8. Not to wear fine cloths
9. Not to sleep on high and big bed.
10. Not to use perfumes.

Apart from this, Newar Buddhist practice pravrajya ceremony (Monastic initiations) *Pravarjya* is the Sankrit term used in ancient times. It is derived from the root *Vraj* (to go). It is the term which denote the first right of initiation given to a lay man, wishing to become a Buddhist Monk. Those who want to be Bhikshu, they follow it.

The Vajrayana and Sakya follow this very strictly. The Vajrayana receive a *chariya* initiations on the sixth day that entitles the person to become priest and spiritual guide. Similarly, there are various Pujas like-Pancho, Guru Mandala, Kalas Puja, Lokpalabali, Kumari Puja and other practiced by Newar communities. There is use of Tantra in Buddhism too. The Tantric Vajrayana follow the path which are divided in components, *pranayana* and *Upaya* which are symbolized by female and male forces so the Tantric process the way of emancipation. The influence of Vajrayana tradition is traced in the Kathmandu valley in the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> century. As a whole, rituals of Buddhism and structure of Newar are inter-woven and inter linked. The Hinayana and Vajrayana have always been antagonistic towards since the division of various sects in Buddhism. This is indeed an unfortunate historical event that developed in Buddhism. Hinayanist always gave emphasis upon personal realization of Nibbana by rigorous practice of Vipassana meditation in isolation. Whereas, Vajrayanist believed in social involvement and never believed in personal achievement of Nirvana.

Vajaryana is a branch of Mahayana. The philosophy of Vajaryana can be defined in the light of Tantric works. It gives stress to Vajaryana as the causes and Mantra as the effect.

Vajaryana is explained as a path which leads to transcendental perfect enlightenment. Therefore, in the Tantric scripture, Vajaryana is defined as a means not as a goal. Tracing the history of Vajaryana in Nepal, it can be said that Vajaryana as a branch of Mahayana got flourished in Kathmandu valley. The arrival of great Buddhist philosopher, Acharya Vasubandhu (4<sup>th</sup> century) is the evidence of the presence of Tantric Buddhism in Nepal. In the seventh century, in the time of Anshu Barma, Tantrism developed in Nepal. In the age of Santaraksita (The Tantric Preacher), Tantrism developed around 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries. Buddhism had learning centre in Bihar and Bengal. From 11<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> century, Nepal became a testing ground for different systems of religious thought and practices imported from India. The reform led by Shankaracharya had also tremendous impact on Buddhism in Nepal.

In the background of this, Buddhism in Nepal specially in Newar society Tantric Buddhist-rituals are existing side by side. In connection with Vajaryana and their influences, deities were introduced in Vajaryanic Scriptures in the course of time.

Literally speaking, religion is a principle of unification and harmonisation (Latin: Religio-nis: Re=Back; Ligare=bind). The term religion suggests that the two objects of unification were originally unified and have been only temporarily separated. Religion is thus based on the faith in the ultimate unity of man and God, the finite and infinite, and hence, any religion which posits a permanent gap between man and God, covertly denies its claim to be called a religion.<sup>1</sup>

Religion is intricately linked with human civilization. It has its roots in its all climbs, cultures, and ways of life. It is realistic, idealistic, utopian and mythical in its nature and dimension. It is worldwide phenomenon, more than set of beliefs, values. It is not dogma nor is it based on fanaticism. As in this context, Swami Vivekananda remarks, "Religion is realization in life."<sup>2</sup> Obviously, it is sacred engagement with that which is believed to be spiritual reality. An educated understanding of religion must take into account its distinctive qualities and patterns as a form of human experience as well as the similarities and difference in religions across human cultures. About religion there are two

major waves of thinking; one set of thinking is that religion encourages dogmatic and fanatic thinking and attitudes. In this context, Jawaharlal Nehru remarks, “Religion is a shelter of tortured people, is dogma and superstition.”<sup>3</sup> But another wave of thinking stands quite contrast to it. Gandhi takes religion as a tool of discharging one’s own duties and responsibilities towards mankind. He tries to link it with politics. Gandhi remarks, “Those who say religion has nothing to do with politics, they have not understood what religion is.”<sup>4</sup> In other words, religion for Gandhi has been a tool of serving and helping people.

In all cultures, human beings make a practice of interacting with what are taken to be spiritual powers. These power maybe in the form of Gods, Spirits, ancestors or kind of sacred reality with which human belief themselves to be connected. It may be regarded as external to the self, internal and both. People interact with such a presence in a sacred manner that is with reverence and care.

As far as Hinduism is concerned, it is a hub of all important religions. It has distinct nature, covering materialism to spiritualism, pragmatism to idealism, realism to hypothetical ideas. It is a religious tradition of Indian origin comprising beliefs and practice of Hindus. The denoting meaning of the word Hindu is derived from the river Sindhu. It is primarily a geographical term that is referred to India or to a region of the port near to Sindhu as the six century B.C.

Western thinkers associate it only with India as a nation. But literature of Hinduism has deeper roots that can be traced in Sanskrit and Pali. Comparing it to other religion, we find Hinduism as its own start and orientation i.e. to say acknowledgement of Hindus came first and beliefs and practice constitute the content religion. In other religion, beliefs and practice came first and then followers follow. It is in this background, Swami Vivekananda in his characteristic style of expression spotlighted that it is the realization not talk, not doctrine and not a dogma. Therefore, Hindu tradition has been always in quest of spirituality, morality, and other ethical dimension of life. Many saints and sages have practiced it through meditation and devotion. All these things have become a guide book, manifesto and manuscripts of their vision and reason. These saints, thinkers and philosophers have become torch bearer and pathfinder to the society. Some of them have been king, emperors, teachers and even man of streets. It is in this background, Buddhism has evolved.

Buddha was a spiritual philosopher and the founder of Buddhism; he was born in Lumbini, Nepal. He was the son of the head of Shakya warrior caste. His real name was Siddhartha Gautam. He was also known as Shakya muni. The name Gautam Buddha is a combination of the family name Gautam and appellation Buddha, meaning “enlightened one”.

As far as Buddhism is concerned, it is difficult to separate facts from the great mass of myth and legends in which they are embedded. Buddhism is in fact revolt against priest craft, Brahmanism, fanaticism and different superstitions that had paralyzed the society. Buddha’s life itself has been a great revolt. He was forced to follow in the life of luxury, and participated in the world life of court. He hardly found pain and pangs of life at the earliest stage. Later on, he found existence dull and disappointing and restlessness stirred his mind. One day according to the tradition he encounters an aged man, a sick man and a corpse and he suddenly and deeply realized that human life is nothing more than a pool of suffering.

About this very painful and pathetic condition of human beings, western philosophers also tries to find out certain solutions but they do have more negative views about religion and God. Karl Marx says, “Religion is opium of the mass.”<sup>5</sup> He even goes to the extent to saying that, “Religion is rooted in poverty and deprivation.”<sup>6</sup> In western philosophy, Bertrand Russell remarks, “Religion comes out of fear, fear from death, fear from darkness, fear from insecurity.”<sup>7</sup>

Experiencing the above scenario, he broke all the shackles and chains of materialism, family life, illusion of Maya, wealth and power and made a herculean journey in search of ‘Truth’. This decision known in Buddhism as the great renunciation is celebrated by Buddhist as a turning point in history. Gautama was 29 years old, according to the tradition. In state of restlessness and confusion he wandered from pillar to post, interacting with many Hindu gurus and pundits, turning the pages of many gospels and doctrines but he found it futile and swank. He found Hindu caste system repellent. This experience emboldened him to go ahead. About , while sitting under a tree near Gaya, in what is known as Buddha Gaya in the state of Bihar, he experienced the great enlightenment which revealed the way of solution from suffering. For the first time, he preached his first sermon in the deer park near Banaras. This sermon, the text of which is preserved, contains the nectar of Buddhism.

In company with, five disciples, Buddha travelled through the Valley of Ganges River, teaching his doctrine, gathering followers and establishing monastic communities that admitted anyone regardless of caste. He returned briefly to his native town and converted his father, his wife and other kiths and kin to his beliefs. He gave lead to his missionary activities for around forty five years and his soul departed in Kusinagara, Nepal. He was about eighty years old at that time.

Buddha's vision, warm compassion and profound thought did both diagnostic and prescriptive work in the society. He talks about illogicality of logic, rejects metaphysical speculation and takes pragmatic approach about the life. Buddha's teaching has influenced the life of millions of people for nearly twenty five hundred years.

This thesis is directed towards the comparative study between these two religions and the religious philosophy under the following aspects:

1. The existence of *God*
2. The existence of *Atman*
3. The theory of *Karma*
4. The concept of *Nirvana* in Buddhism and emancipation in Hinduism.

If we go through the bird's eye view, we find these two religions seem to be in opposition. But if we dive deep into subject matter, we find that Buddhism has its root in Hinduism. Despite its differences, the research would spotlight both similarities and differences between the two Religions.

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## Chapter Two

# Philosophical Foundations of Hinduism and Buddhism

## Existence of *God* in Hinduism and Buddhism

### Section - 1

#### Existence of *God* in Hinduism

Hinduism was the national and constitutional religion in Nepal till some years before. Still it is the religion of the majority of people in India and Nepal. A significant population of Hindus lives in other countries within and outside the sub continent and has over 900 million adherents worldwide. In some ways, it is the oldest living religion in the world, stretching back many thousands of years. The traditions and culture of Hinduism go back into antiquity and the earliest times.

In most other religions, a single founder is read about like Jesus Christ in Christianity, Lord Buddha in Buddhism, and Mohammad Paigambar in Islam. Hinduism has no single founder, no single scripture, and no commonly agreed set of teachings. Throughout its extensive history, there have been many key figures teaching different philosophies and writing numerous holy books. For these reasons, writers often refer to Hinduism as 'a way of life' or 'a family of religions' rather than a single religion.

The word *Hindu* is of geographical origin and is derived from the name originally given to the inhabitants that settled near the river Sindhu. The word *Hindu* is the Persian rendering of the Indian word Sindhu (the Sanskrit name of the river Indus). The inhabitants were the Aryans, in the second millennium BCE. It is believed that the word *Hindu* came into being in the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. when the territory round the Indus formed part of the Persian Empire. However, with the exit of Persians, the name disappeared from India. Centuries later it came back to India with the Muslim invaders. Subsequently with the Moghul emperors and under the British, the word Hindu came to be applied for those who followed the age-old religion. Nevertheless, the term itself probably does not go back before the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries when it was used by people to differentiate themselves from followers of other traditions, especially the Muslims, in Kashmir and Bengal. The origins of the term 'Hindu' have cultural, political and geographical impression.

Hinduism is the result of multifaceted growth of ideas, rituals and beliefs. The fundamentals of Hinduism are the *Vedas* which are books of wisdom. Hinduism deals with socio-cultural life. It is not actually a religion but a way of life.

Hinduism has basic concepts of *Brahman*, *Karma*, *Dharma*, *Samsara* and *Moksha*. Rituals, caste system and some other practices are vices of Hinduism. In 19th century, Buddhist ideas were incorporated into Hinduism. Historical Buddha was declared as incarnation of Lord Vishnu. Hinduism is the Brahmanical faith. The ultimate aim of all Hindus is to attain *Brahman* which is universal soul.

Hindus have the *Vedas* which have fundamental principles of religious and ritual practices. These are the most ancient books of the Hindus. The word *Veda* means *vid* which means to know. The *Vedas* are book of knowledge and wisdom. There are four *Vedas*. These are *Rigveda*, *Samaveda*, *Yajurveda* and *Atharvaveda*. The *Rigveda* is the most important of the *Vedas*.

Hinduism is *Sanatana dharma*. That means the religion coming down to people through eternity. The word *dharma* (dhamma-Pali) denotes not exactly religion but something more than that. It connotes a way of life including the socio-cultural life. Nearly every religion of the world is linked with a definite personality claimed to be its first originator or founder. Every religion has a definite text which is regarded as its basic religious text. But Hinduism has none. Sir Charles Eliot remarks, "Hinduism has not been made, but has grown. It is jungle, not a building."<sup>1</sup> Similarly, K. M. Sen remarks in *Hinduism*, "Hinduism is more like a tree that has grown gradually than like a building that has been erected by some great architect at some definite point in time. It contains within itself the influences of many cultures and the body of Hindu thought thus offers as much variety as the Indian nation itself."<sup>2</sup> The names of a host of sages and saints are of course associated with Hinduism, but none can claim to be its founder. They have all simply contributed to its growth in their own specific ways. The Hindu scriptures like the *Vedas*, the *Upanisads*, the *Puranas*, the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata* and the *Bhagavadgita* and others enriched Hindu Culture.

Varying beliefs and practices can be found among Hindus. To summarise the main principles, beliefs and practices of Hinduism seem impossible. There are various ways, of which Hinduism more often speaks of three—the way of knowledge (*gyana marga*), the way of action (*karma marga*) and the way of worship and prayer (*Bhakti*

marga) . Anyone according to his temperament may adopt any of these ways and attain to salvation. Hinduism is in its very temperament against any rigid rules of religion. It is very liberal in every way.<sup>3</sup>

Hinduism has generally been recognised as a religion of the Aryans. Yet various ethnic and cultural groups have exerted their influence from time to time in shaping and reshaping the various beliefs and practices in Hinduism. Aryan beliefs and practices themselves assimilated a great deal with the beliefs and practices of both the Dravidians and the aboriginals. So the overall culture or religion which is now known as Hinduism is a gradual growth out of the amalgam and synthesis of beliefs and practices of various strands.

Hinduism is not only a religion, but a social system and a tradition too. The most obvious and important mark of this social system has been its *varna dharma* or caste system. As a matter of fact, traditionally, only a person has been able to be a Hindu who has belonged to any of the four varnas/castes present in Hindu social system. This has been rather the distinguishing mark of being a Hindu.

A good majority of Hindus hold some certain common beliefs and practices. Such beliefs and practices may form the basic features of Hinduism as a religion. Some of them can be summarised as follows:<sup>4</sup>

- (1) Hinduism admits vast differences of beliefs and practices among its followers.
- (2) A Hindu can be polytheistic, monotheistic, monistic and atheistic or all at the same time.
- (3) Hindus have belief in the authority of the *Vedas*.
- (4) A Hindu belongs to one of the four varnas/castes which is an essential mark of being a Hindu.
- (5) Hindus have a belief that there is a spiritual order or realm which is the basic, the essential and the eternal.
- (6) Hindus believe that the bodily aspect of man is only external and superficial. In his inner and essential being man is a soul. This soul in man is immortal. Nothing can destroy it.
- (7) Hindus believe in the transmigration of soul from one body to another.

- (8) Action (*kama*) is the root cause of man's chain of birth and rebirth. *Karma* and *Samsara* therefore go hand in hand.
- (9) Hindus believe that release (*Moksha*) from this cycle of birth and rebirth is possible.
- (10) Release (*Moksha*) is possible by following the path of knowledge or the path of selfless/detached actions or by the devotion to God. By *Moksha*, soul becomes free from all worldly suffering and attains its original pure spiritual nature.

One can be a good Hindu without having any belief in any god or goddess. There is a full-fledged, rather highly esteemed, system of Hindu philosophy, known as the Samkhya system, which is clearly atheistic.<sup>5</sup> However, an average Hindu is a firm believer in God—either in one God or in several gods and goddesses. Hindu belief in God ranges from polytheism through abstract monism to a concrete monotheism. There are said to be thirty three crore (330 millions) gods and goddesses in Hindu pantheon. There is an inherent faith in even the most illiterate of Hindus that, at bottom, there is only one God and the various gods and goddesses are just his various forms or manifestations.

God is *Antaryami*, the inward dweller, the inner soul of the entire universe. He is infinite, eternal and all-pervading. He is omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent. He is the supreme value also and is endowed with infinite auspicious qualities such as truthfulness, knowledge, bliss, tenderness, compassion etc. He is the creator, preserver and destroyer of the world.

Hindu God has three aspects within him—the creative, the preservative and the destructive. His creative aspect is personified as Brahma, the preservative aspect as Visnu and the destructive aspect as Shiva. These three aspects are so often taken as the three deities, although within the one supreme Lord. Brahma, Visnu and Shiva Mahesh therefore constitute the Hindu Trinity.

Let's have some historical analysis of perception of God in Hinduism. The Sanatana Hindu system of thought can be appropriately called a synthetic tradition as it accepted varieties of systems and subsystems in the long run of its history. Although, one important feature of the Hindu system of philosophy is its acceptance of authority of *Vedas* and God, it has always shown flexibility and tolerance towards all the schools of Indian religion, including the Charvakas and Buddhism. For example the original Samkhya

system of philosophy is completely silent about the possible existence of God, although it speaks of the traditional indemonstrability of his existence. The *Vaisesika* and the *Yoga* systems admit of existence of God, but deny him the creation of the universe. The *Mimansa* system speaks of God but denies his importance and efficacy in the moral ordering of the world. The Charvakas deny God without qualification, while the Buddhist system rejects God. These philosophies complement each other, and Hindu system of philosophy accepts them as being in harmony with one another and never in contradiction. Ultimately, all these philosophies believe in liberation or emancipation as the end goal of life, liberation of samsaric cycle of birth and death. The basis of life is non-attachment, moral and virtuous life and spiritual superiority to worldly values.

The Sanskrit words *Bhagavan* and *Ishwara* mean 'Lord' or 'God' and indicate an absolute reality who creates, sustains and destroys the universe over and over again. It is too simplistic to define Hinduism as belief in many gods or 'polytheism'. Most Hindus believe in a Supreme God, whose qualities and forms are represented by the multitude of deities which emanate from him. God, being unlimited, can have unlimited forms and expressions. In the history of Hinduism, God is conceptualised in different ways, as an all knowing and all pervading spirit, as the creator and force within all beings, their 'inner controller' (*antaryamin*) and as wholly transcendent.

The notion of God in both early *Rig-Veda* and *Upanishads* is monotheistic and the nature of God is more philosophical and spiritual in nature. The 'Song of Creation' of *Rig-Veda* clearly shows cosmological conception which is wholly impersonal, without any theistic component—

*Then there was neither Aught nor Naught, no air no sky beyond  
What covered it all? Where rested all? In water gulf profound?  
Nor death was then, nor deathlessness, nor change of night and day.  
That One breathed calmly, self-sustained; naught else beyond if lay.  
Gloom hid in gloom existed first-one sea, eluding view.  
That One, a void in chaos wrap, by inward fervor grew.  
Which nothing with existence links, as sages searching find.  
The kindling ray that shot across the dark and drear abyss—  
Was it beneath? or high aloft? What bird can answer this?  
There fecunding powers were found, and mighty forces strove—  
A self-supporting mass beneath and energy above.*

*Who knows, who ever told, from whence this vast creation rose?  
No gods had been born-who then can e'er the truth disclose?<sup>6</sup>*

The Upanishads define God as "Brahman" which is the culmination of their many gods into one "Reality" beyond comprehension. Brahman became known as "Ishwara" through the "Trimurti" (three manifestations) of Brahman. These three manifestations are: Brahma- the creator, Vishnu- the preserver, and Shiva- the destroyer. *Ishwara* became personified later by ten mythical incarnations of Vishnu called "Avatars." *Bhagavad Gita* says, "When goodness grows weak, When evil increases, I make myself a body. In every age I come back To deliver the holy, To destroy the sin of the sinner To establish righteousness."<sup>7</sup> Some of these Avatars have been said to have been Krishna, Rama, Buddha and Jesus Christ, however they must be born in India to be a full Avatar. Hinduism says that Christ was more a "messenger of God" than an Avatar.

In *Yajurveda* the God is envisioned as Omnipresent, Omniscient Being who is his own cause:

*He is pervasive everywhere. He shines. He is bodiless, He has no wounds; He has no muscles, no sinews, no nerves. He is pure. He is untouched by sin. He is all knowing. He is witnesses everywhere (Manishi). He is present everywhere (pritivu). He is causeless cause, self-existent. He created for creatures without end things for the world as they should be.<sup>8</sup>*

In *Advaita Vedanta*, the nature of God is described as Universal Consciousness. Various names are attributed to God as Brahma, Self, God, One without the second. The true and absolute supreme God has four most important personal virtues. He is all-Gracious. He is all-Kind. He is all-Blissful and all-Loving, with all of his virtues. He is omnipresent. Apart from that he is also almighty because the mighty power *Maya* is under him. He is the creator because he enlivens the power, *Maya*, which manifests the universe. He is omniscient because he knows each and every action of the unlimited lives of all the unlimited souls of this universe, and so on.

According to Hindu scriptures, God is beyond any attributes of form, color and shapes. He does not have any specific form or name and is referred to as *Nirguna Brahman* (attribute-less god). However, God can take any form. He can be strong and powerful, the provider of boons, the destroyer or the savior. These forms provide a basis for the Hindu worshipper to easily pursue the otherwise inconceivable supreme deity. In general, Hindu

followers believe that God is Omnipotent, Omniscient, and Omnipresent. Hinduism postulates the existence of a supreme being called *Ishwara* with qualities such as infinity, compassion, and bliss. How is *Ishwara* different from *Brahman*? Far from the abstract nature of *Brahman*, *Ishwara* or God is a personal, loving being that can be considered a reflection of *Brahman* as seen through the veil of Maya.

Some of the earliest Rigvedic hymns, such as the following, clearly reflect the elements of monotheism developing in early Vedic religion—

*They call him Indra, Mitra, Varuna and Agni; He is the heavenly bird Garutmat.  
To what is One, the poets give many a name. They call it Agni, Yama,  
Matariswan.*<sup>9</sup>

In the hymn addressed to Hiranyagarbha (the cosmic golden germ), we find the following expression:

*Who is our Father, our Creator, Maker, Who every place doth know and every  
creature; By whom alone the gods were given their names, To Him all creatures  
go, to ask Him.*<sup>10</sup>

### **The Concept of God in Mimansa**

In *Mimansa* school of thought, God the Brahman, the Ultimate reality or Supreme Spirit is accepted as having the nature of Advaita, ie, non-duality. According to Samkara,

*The world is the effect of something which is absolutely real, eternally conscious  
and infinite. The diversity of the universe is an impossibility without a cause which  
is absolutely perfect and self-sufficient. This cause of self-cause is Brahman, which  
expresses itself through an infinite number of things and patterns, all of which are  
merely appearances that have some practical or empirical truth but lack any  
metaphysical status. All these appearances, however, depend upon and are  
implicitly related to Brahman, which is both their material cause (uapadana-  
karana) and their efficient cause (nimitta-karana).*<sup>11</sup>

As we can see Samkara accepts the theory of cause and effect but attributed it to the Supreme God. For him the world is neither real nor eternal. It is not unreal either, for it is objectively perceived by the beings. It is something other than the real and unreal (*sadasadvilakshana*). The world is just an illusory appearance which cannot be logically established and must, therefore, be described and explained in terms of some higher reality. It is this higher reality, that he calls Brahman. Although *Brahman* is what is assumed as foundational, it is in no sense substantial. It is everywhere and all things imply and depend

on it, but it cannot be located anywhere, and since it is not a thing and cannot therefore have spatial relationship with anything else. It is also nowhere.

In the theory of *Uttara-Mimansa*, the evolution of the universe is taken as the *lila* (drama) of God. Creation and dissolution are thus only relative and refer to different conditions of Brahman. Accordingly, souls and matter have a causal existence and an effect existence. Creation is God's way of enabling the souls to reap the fruits of their past deeds (karma). The law of karma necessitates creation. And yet, for God, the creation of the world is said to be mere *lila*. The entire process of creation is a drama in which god throughout remains just the witness and the supervisor. Ramanuja comments on the nature of God, in a certain specific sense:

*The ruling element of the world, ie, the Lord, finally who has the sentient and non-sentient beings for his modes, undergoes a change in so far as he is, at alternating periods, embodied in all those beings in their alternating states. The two modes, and he to whom the modes belong, thus undergo a common a change in so far as in the case of all of them the causal condition passes over into a different condition. (Ramanuja's Bhasya on Vedanta-sutra)<sup>12</sup>*

Ramanuja believed that the true relation between soul and body is beyond any arguments. For him creation is absolutely real. The world and souls are neither created nor destroyed. He believes in the Samkhya theory of *sat-karya-vad*, according to which every effect pre-exists in its material cause and is therefore only an externalization of what it was already existing in an implicit form. Ramanuja believes in the *parinama-vada*, according to which the effect is only a transformation of the material cause. Thus, the entire universe of matter and souls is a real and not just apparent—transformation or modification of Brahma and yet, though matter and souls are the modes of God, they enjoy the kind of individual existence which is theirs from all eternity. And they cannot entirely be resolved into Brahma.

Here the concept of *Avidya* of Samkara is interesting to note and compare with Buddhist notion. It is his well-known argument that *Brahman* appears as the world of *Maya* because of ignorance (*Avidya*).

*One who does not know the Vedas, cannot know God. Therefore, let us first refer to what the Vedas have to say about knowing God. yasydmatarh tasya matam matam yasya na veda sah avijnatam vijnatdm vijnatamavijnatdm (Veda).<sup>13</sup>*

One who thinks that God can be understood, does not understand Him. And one who thinks that God cannot be understood, he understands. In other words, no one can understand God. But again, we have the Vedas emphasizing the need to know Him.

*Beyond the senses are the sense objects, beyond the sense objects is the mind, beyond the mind is the intellect, beyond the intellect is the soul, beyond the soul is Maya, and beyond Maya is Brahman (God).<sup>14</sup>*

Thus, God is totally beyond the realm of the senses, mind and intellect, which are the only means the individual possesses. Therefore, He cannot be grasped by them.

### **Concept of God in Dvaita Vedanta**

Dvaita (or dualistic) Vedanta came as a reaction to Samkara's advaitism. This system of thought is related to Madhva, also known as Anandatirtha and Purnaprajna, is regarded by his followers as an incarnation of *Vayu*, the son of *Vishnu*. He is regarded as the propounder of dualism and he advocates the five great distinctions of God and the individual soul, God and matter, the individual soul and matter. Madhva's philosophy is a defense of dualism and pluralism.

God is the efficient and not the material cause of the universe, and as such, does not create the soul and matter. An unintelligent world cannot be produced by a supreme intelligence. God's activity is the result of his perfection. Though everything exists because and for him and functions for him, he has nothing to gain through them, he being intrinsically perfect. God is guided in his soul-related actions—condemning some and rewarding others—by the karma of the individuals. He is not dependent on karma. In his commentary on *Brahma-Sutra*, Madhva writes:

*Though the Supreme Being and Karma are both the cause of fruit, karma does not guide the Supreme Being; on the other hand it is the Supreme Being that guides and rules our action.<sup>15</sup>*

*Brahman* is the efficient cause of the world and not its material cause. Material cause is the modified cause and it is against scriptures to speak of Reality as having transformations. Hence, according to Madhva, *Brahma* is the efficient cause alone. In this way, the conclusion is arrived at that the ultimate Reality behind this universe is one Absolute Self-conscious personal Being, who through the modification of His power creates and preserves this universe and at the same time retains His immutable

transcendent character by dint of which he regulates and illumines it. *Brahman* is the all pervading self-luminous Reality that is the cause of the Universe and also he is immutable.

### **Concept of God in Vaisesika**

In Hindu religion, the Vaisesika system is realistic, practical and analytical which make it very much different from other schools of Hinduism. Vaisesika system tries to incorporate rational-critical inclinations that include ancient atomic theory but it doesn't take universe as mechanical that is devoid of soul. Vaisesika believes both moral and physical orders require the intervention of divine energy.

Although *Kanada*, the founder of Vaisesika system, didn't explicitly mention the form of God, he attributes Vedas on the supreme energy, that is God. In Vaisesika system, God is included within Atman. To distinguish the *Atman* of the common beings, the *Atman* of God is called the Supreme Self or Paramatma. The Paramatma of God has the quality of eternality and omnipresence.

In Vaisesika system, the presupposition of God is a logical necessity. God is responsible for the cause of the world. The concept of *Adrsta* takes the Vaisesika to logically conclude the necessity of God as the supreme cause of everything. The system believes that Karma and everything that happens in the universe must be controlled by some unseen power which they call it *Adrsta*. And since this, *Adrsta* is unseen and transcendental to the Universe, the Vaisesika infer God's existence from the invariable 'order and arrangement' and 'the existence of a creator'. The moment we believe that the Universe has some sort of order, it directly points to the existence of some creator that controls the order. The analogy is given to that of 'pot'. If there is a pot, there must be someone that must have made it. The existence of pot implies the 'potter'. Hence, the world, which is an effect and has an order and arrangement, has a creator, God.

The Vaisesika even believes the worship of God as essential for the individual's emancipation and mentions that even a logical investigation into God's existence would amount to his worship. Vaisesika also believes, just like a Buddhist, in the liberation and salvation of individual self from the cycle of Samsara. But due to ignorance, the individual is constrained to do karma that produces merits and demerits, moving the cycle of life and death. But, unlike a Buddhist, Vaisesika believes that God is very important for the

salvation of the individual. Self-surrender and ultimate faith on God help the person to attain his salvation.

### **Concept of God in Bhagavad Gita**

The notion of supreme spiritual being Krishna in *Gita* as Purushottama is worthwhile mentioning. Krishna as Purusottama is the manifestation of the supreme *Brahman* himself, who is involved in the work of creation and preservation of mankind whenever dark forces/evils threaten the existence. *Avatara* descends on earth whenever there is a decline of righteousness, to maintain harmony and peace. The purpose of the *Avatara* is to establish Dharma and restore the right. *Avataras* are revelations of God himself. They are self-manifestations of the divine God in form of human being. Krishna in the battle ground of Kurukshetra reveals himself in the form of Vishvarupa to convince Arjuna and testify him to be the divine God. But the message of Krishna to Arjuna and the mankind is very much compatible with the message of the Buddha. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Krishna explains Arjuna how someone can realize him,

*When the mind of the Yogi is in harmony and finds rest in the spirit  
within, all restless desires gone, then he is a Yukta, one in God.*

*Then his soul is a lamp whose light is steady,  
for it burns in a shelter where no winds come.*

*When the mind is resting in the stillness of the prayer of Yoga, and  
By the grace of the spirit sees the spirit and therein finds fulfillment.*

*When all desires are in peace and the mind, withdrawing within gathers  
The many straying senses into the harmony of recollection.<sup>16</sup>*

*(Bhagavad Gita)*

Further, Krishna admonishes to Arjuna—

*Not by Vedas or by penance*

*Not by gifts or acts of worship*

*As I seen in such a manner,*

*As you have seen me. "*

*(na ham vedarina natapsa*

*Aham evean vidho'rujana*

*Jnatum drastum ca tattvena*

*Pravestum ca param tapa.)<sup>17</sup>*

*(Bhagavad Gita)*

The definitions of God in Hinduism clearly shows the similarity of principles between the two religions (Hinduism and Buddhism)—

*The Supreme Lord is situated in everyone's heart. O Arjuna, and is directing the wanderings of all living entities.*<sup>18</sup>

*Bhagwan is He who possesses without limit the six types of opulence—strength, fame, wealth, knowledge, beauty and renunciation.*<sup>19</sup>

This is also the doctrine of Buddhism. The Buddha has always warned his disciples not to be engaged in scriptures alone that can never achieve Nirvana.

*He who constantly recites the texts  
But does not act accordingly,  
That heedless man, like a cowherd  
That counts the cows of others,  
Is not enriched by the virtuous life.*<sup>20</sup>

Thus, it is clear that the concept of God becomes irrelevant when it comes to the realization of one's emancipation in both the religions.

The concept of Avatara and deliverance of suffering of human beings is not accepted by Buddhism which believes in individual's karmic effort in attaining Enlightenment. So the Buddha claims—

अत्ता ही अत्तनो नाथो, कोही नाथो परोसिया

You are your own master, who can be otherwise?....

तुम्हेही किच्चं आत्तप्पं, अक्खातारो तथागता ।

You have to strive yourself, the Tathagata can only show the path.<sup>21</sup>

*Samkhya*, one of the six schools of Hindu philosophy founded by the sage *Kapila*, believes the universe as consisting of two eternal realities: *Purusha* (the universal self) and *Prakriti* (the basic matter of the universe). *Purusha* is the centre of consciousness whereas *Prakriti* is the source of all material existence. The *Samkhya* School of philosophy says that the *Purusha* is a state of pure consciousness which presides over every individual mind. *Purusha* refers to a state of emancipation which is incomprehensible and transcendental. It is above all kinds of human experience. *Samkhya* School of philosophy regards that is the ultimate state of metaphysical liberation. It is a state of culmination whereby the mental

faculties of an individual are freed from all kinds of grossness and is in the state of renouncement. Rather it can be said that is the absolute tranquility of the mind.

*Purusha*, in *Samkhya*, is an eternally free, absolutely independent principle, inexplicable and unknowable by the help of ordinary experience. The *Purusha* transcends all experience and stands outside the phenomenal world as a mere witness.

Bibhu Padi, in his work *Indian Philosophy and Religion*, states that Vaishesika system explains the whole framework of the universe in terms of twenty five categories, all of which can be brought under four major categories:

1. That which is neither produced nor produces;
2. That which is not produced but produces;
3. Those which are produced and do produce; and
4. Those which are produced but do not produce.

The *Samkhya* theory concludes that God is neither produced nor produces. If God is something that is produced, there must be a cause before god which undermines the omnipotence of God. God, *Purusha*, is the point beyond which the explanation of the world cannot proceed. It is thus uncaused and unproduced. God is neither "before" nor "after".

Similarly, *Purusha* is also unproductive. Producing involves activity and comes under karma. But is inactive and doesn't do any karma. The absence time and space, Karma in God eliminates any possibility of God as actively involved in the creation of the universe. *Purusha* remains as pure and non-attributive. *Purusha* cannot be related to anything but itself.

It is evident, from the inactive nature of *Purusha* in *Samkhya*, that they logically conclude another important concept for the creation of universe, *Prakriti*. It is *Prakriti* that is responsible for the creation. The external world is the result of the process of evolution, which involves the transformation of a thing into a different form of the same thing, all the while its substance remaining the same. The world is the effect which lies latent in its material cause, *Prakriti*. The transcendental Self, *Purusha*, remaining outside the world, cannot be its cause and, hence, the other ultimate reality *Prakriti* is supposed to be the first cause, which nonetheless acts under the influence and supervision of *Purusha*.

The philosophy states that, unless the mind becomes free from all kinds of bonds and falsehood, it cannot achieve the state of Moksha. *Samkhya*, like all other systems of Indian Philosophy, regards ignorance as the cause of bondage and suffering. It emphasizes the fact that a pure mind is essential to make living in this universe worthwhile. The philosophy states that Moksha can also be attained by developing the higher faculties of the mind which means a state when the mind is free from all kinds of negative emotions. This is very close to the Buddha's philosophy of *Avidya* (ignorance) as the root cause of all suffering. Unless human mind gets rid of all gross elements- the *panchanivarana* (desire, aversion, doubt, laziness, moha), it is not possible to achieve a state of eternal bliss, Nirvana.

*Vedanta*, one of the world's ancient texts based on *Veda*, affirms the oneness of God and existence and the divinity of Soul. God is Absolute Existence, Knowledge and Bliss—*Satchidananda*. It is the only Reality that is all pervading and, therefore, infinite and unbound. It teaches the real or essential nature of God, the universe and the individual being and its oneness with God. The quintessence of the teachings of *Vedanta* is that *Brahman* is only absolute reality and the world is an illusory (Maya) appearance like a mirage seen in a desert. *Vedanta asserts* that the goal of human life is to realize and manifest our divinity. Our real nature is divine. Plato's theory of pure idea and soul is very close to *Vedanta*. This Oneness of self (jiva) with Absolute Consciousness (Brahman of God) is the goal of *Vedanta*.

### **Existence of God in Buddhism**

Buddhism emerged from Hinduism. There are obvious signs of the influence of the Vedas and the Upanishads on Buddhism. Yet Buddhism denies the authority of the Vedas. It succeeds in presenting itself as a pure ethical and spiritual religion against the extreme polytheism and ritualism of the Vedic tradition. Nevertheless, Buddhism is indisputably a separate religion and philosophy. It has exerted immense influence over the religious and philosophical thinking of the world.

Buddhism, like Islam and Christianity, has a definite origin in a definite founder. The founder of Buddhism was Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha, who was born in Kapilavastu, Nepal. He was also called Sakyamuni (the Saint of the Sakya clan). It is also generally believed by Buddhists that Sakyamuni had taken 550 incarnations to acquire

perfection and to attain enlightenment by a gradual process. The Buddha himself took 500 births before he became *Bodhisattva* i.e., Buddha-elect.

Sakyamuni Siddhartha was very much concerned about the unabated suffering of man through-out his life-time. Birth, various diseases, old age and death—all are signs of suffering and Gautama wanted to find out a permanent cure to all these sufferings of man.

He was over pressed by such concern. One night he left the palace and left his parents, his wife and his recently born son. He himself left his house for ever and went out in search of real knowledge—*Bodhi* or *Prajna*—with the help of which he could save people. After leaving the palace, Siddhartha became a disciple of several teachers but could not get the right remedy for the misery of life. It is said that he got such intuitive light or *Bodhi* while he was in a *Samadhi* beneath a tree (now called Bodhi-Tree) in Bodhi-Gaya, India. After the 49th day of his starting meditation, Sakyamuni attained enlightenment. Thenceforward, he was called the *Buddha*, the Enlightened one. He got three-fold knowledge:

- (1) Knowledge of his previous births
- (2) Knowledge of the births and deaths of all other beings and
- (3) The Knowledge of his release from the whole process of births and deaths.

The first sermon of Buddha became immortalized in the symbolic gesture of *Dharmachakara mudra* i.e., turning the wheel of the law. Since then Buddha preached common people that birth was at the root of all suffering and therefore it was to be avoided. As a matter of fact, man was bound in a constant cycle of birth and death. This cycle was to be stopped and ended. Otherwise, there could be 'no permanent end to human suffering. The way how people generally lived and worked in the world was a sign of their ignorance regarding the real nature of the world. The attachment to the world was the real cause behind man's suffering and this in turn was the result of ignorance (*Ajnana*). If this ignorance could be removed, man could attain a state which was called the state of *Nirvana*. This state was negatively a state of the permanent cessation of all suffering and positively a state of perfect peace and equanimity.

For the attainment of this state and removal of ignorance, Buddha preached them an eight-fold path (*Astangika marga*). K. N. Tiwari comments that this eight-fold path was neither one of complete indulgence nor one of complete asceticism. It was a middle path

(*Majjhima nikaya*). This path consisted eight disciplines—Right understanding (*Samyaka drsti*), Right thought (*Samyaka sankalpa*), Right speech (*Samyaka vaka*), Right action (*Samyaka karmanta*), Right livelihood (*Samyaka ajiva*), Right effort (*Samyaka Vyayama*), Right mindfulness (*Samyaka smrti*) and Right concentration (*Samyaka samadhi*).<sup>22</sup> In this way, Buddhism is a practical religion of pure ethical discipline. Some of the basic features of Buddhism are mentioned here:

- (1) Buddhism is a doctrine or philosophy of life.
- (2) Buddhism is primarily a religion without God.
- (3) Early Buddhism is a purely ethical religion free from all sorts of ritualism.
- (4) Later Buddhism, at least in the form of the Mahayana, gives vent to ritualism, monasticism etc.
- (4) Belief in the four noble truths (*Chatvari Arya Satyani*) and the pursuit of the eightfold discipline (*Astangika Marga*) are the essence of Buddhism.
- (5) The basic creed of Buddhism is—*Buddham saranam gachhami, Dhammam saranam gachhami, Sangham saranam gachhami.*

Buddha never spoke of any God. His only concern was the suffering man. He was simply silent over such issue as whether there was a God or not. In early Buddhism there is no mention of God. Early Buddhism is purely man-centred, humanistic religion. It is entirely ethical in its character.

Later Buddhism accepts Buddha himself as God and believes in his various earlier incarnations. In the modern time, images of Buddha are in temples. These images are worshipped and adored more or less in the fashion of the Hindu God. Furthermore, the Mahayana Buddhists also worship many Bodhisattvas other than the Buddha. They also abound in various sorts of ritualistic practices. This side of Buddhism seems much closer to Hindu polytheism.

Buddhists for the most part worship and adore Buddha as an embodiment of holiness and compassion and as a great spiritual leader and saviour of mankind. By worshipping him, they expect his kind helping hand for removing their suffering.

For Buddhist teachings, God is irrelevant for gaining enlightenment and spiritual development. No amount of devotion or praying to a god will bring enlightenment. In Buddhism, gods too have the nature of impermanence and come under karmic influence. Though god might have an extremely long life compared to a human, it is determined by karma and will eventually come to an end with the rebirth of the god into another life form. Gods have attained the supreme existence because of their good karmas which, after being exhausted, have to fall to earth. They themselves need to be enlightened. The gods like every other being must strive to achieve enlightenment. This understanding differs from Hindu views where the gods are always gods. In Hinduism, all Gods are manifestation of the eternal *Brahman*. They are enlightened, free from any defilement. In Buddhism, the gods are part of the worlds of form and desire and therefore essentially finite. While they are in the position of Gods, they can benefit human life. Consequently, Buddhists believe that a god is not the highest level of spirituality. Entry into bliss and freedom of Nirvana and emancipation from the world of suffering and rebirth is gained only through undergoing Buddhist discipline. Thus, the term god itself becomes irrelevant in Hinduism as the divine nature of God lies within. An individual has to make an effort, by Yoga or Bhakti, to realize this divinity within to deliver himself from the miseries of existence. Buddhists would call this divine God within Nirvana, emancipation from the suffering of life.

Buddhism has sometimes been called an atheistic teaching, in a derogatory sense of non-believer in any kind of gods. Those who use the word "atheism" often associate it with a materialistic doctrine that knows nothing higher than this world of the senses and the slight happiness it can bestow. This is far from the truth. In *Dhammachakra Sutra*, after the propagation of his *Dhamma* to his five followers, the Buddha describes various forms of God who are exalted in listening to his first sermon in Sarnath, India. Only in one way, Buddhism can be described as atheistic, namely, in so far as it denies the existence of an eternal, omnipotent God or godhood who is the creator and ordainer of the world. From a study of the discourses of the Buddha preserved in the Pali canon, it will be seen that the idea of a personal deity, a creator god conceived to be eternal and omnipotent, is incompatible with the Buddha's teachings. On the other hand, conceptions of an impersonal godhead of any description, such as world-soul, etc., are excluded by the Buddha's teachings on Anatta, non-self or insubstantiality. Buddhism affirms many forms of spirituality and belief in gods which means to elevate and improve worldly life. Buddhism

is not, therefore, atheistic in the modern understanding which developed in the West as a reaction to theistic Christianity.

Atheism is often associated with a materialistic doctrine. Buddhism is nothing of that sort. In this respect, it agrees with the teachings of other religions, that true lasting happiness cannot be found in this world; nor, the Buddha adds, can it be found on any higher plane of existence, conceived as heavenly or divine world, since all planes of existence are impermanent and thus incapable of giving lasting bliss. The spiritual values advocated by Buddhism are directed, not towards a new life in some higher world, but towards a state utterly transcending the world, namely, *Nibbana*.

Buddhism is not about either believing or not believing in God or gods. Rather, the historical Buddha taught that believing in gods was not useful for those seeking to realize enlightenment. The Buddha also plainly said that he was not a god, but "awakened". In other words, god is unnecessary in Buddhism. For this reason, Buddhism is more accurately called non-theistic than atheistic.

Buddhists do not make use of the term God, which characteristically belongs to Christian terminology. An equivalent most commonly used is *Dharmakaya*. When the *Dharmakaya* is most concretely conceived, it becomes the Buddha, or Tathagata, or Vairochana, or Amitabha. Buddha means "the enlightened," and this may be understood to correspond to "God is wisdom." Vairochana is "coming from the sun," and Amitabha, "infinite light," which reminds us of the Christian notion, "God is light." As to the correct meaning of Tathagata, Buddhists do not give any definite and satisfactory explanation, and it is usually considered to be the combination of *tatha* = "thus" and *gata* = "gone," but it is difficult to find out how "Thus Gone" came to be an appellation of the supreme being.

Buddhism is not atheistic as the term is ordinarily understood. However, the followers of Buddhism usually avoid the term God, for it savors so much of Christianity, whose spirit is not always exactly in accord with the Buddhist interpretation of religious experience. Again, Buddhism is not pantheistic in the sense that it identifies the universe with God. On the other hand, the Buddhist God is absolute and transcendent; this world, being merely its manifestation, is necessarily fragmental and imperfect. To define more exactly the Buddhist notion of the highest being, it may be convenient to borrow the term very happily coined by a modern German scholar (19th-century German Sanskritist

Theodore Goldstücker ), "pantheism," according to which God is "all and one" and more than the totality of existence.

Buddhism neither believes in the existence of God nor of soul. It is basically a religion of the mind, which advocates present moment awareness, inner purity, ethical conduct, freedom from the problem of change, impermanence and suffering and reliance upon one's own experience as the sole teacher, rather than an external authority, on the Eightfold Path. Unlike other major religions of the world, Buddhism is not centered around the concept of God or an universal supreme being, who is responsible for the end dissolution of the world and the existence of sentient beings. Buddhism does not even support the existence of an external and unchanging soul.

One of the most fundamental beliefs of Buddhism is that all the multitudinous and multifarious phenomena in the universe start from, and have their being in, one reality which itself has "no fixed abode," being above spatial and temporal limitations. However different and separate and irreducible things may appear to the senses, the most profound law of the human mind declares that they are all one in their hidden nature. In this world of relativity, or *nanatva* as Buddhists call it, subject and object, thought and nature, are separate and distinct, and as far as our sense-experience goes, there is an impassable chasm between the two which no amount of philosophizing can bridge. But the very constitution of the mind demands a unifying principle which is an indispensable hypothesis for our conception of phenomenality.

Buddhism recognizes the coexistence and identity of the two principles, sameness and difference. Things are many and yet one; they are one and yet many. I am not thou, and thou art not I; and yet we are all one in essence.

Intellectually, the coexistence of the two mutually excluding thoughts is impossible, for the proposition, "Mine are not thine," cannot be made at the same time the proposition, "Mine are thine." But here Buddhism is speaking of our inmost religious experience, which deals directly with facts and not with their more or less distorted intellectual reflections. It is, therefore, really ideal to say that Buddhism is neither pantheistic nor atheistic nor nihilistic. Buddhism is not a philosophical system, though it is the most rational and intellectual religion in the world. What it proposes is to make clear facts of the deepest spiritual life and to formulate a doctrine which leads its followers to the path of inward experience.

Though God plays an important role in Hindu philosophy, it's very important to note that God alone will never deliver them from his sins. The message of *Yajurveda* is very much compatible with Buddhism—

*Verily the man engulfed in the darkness of ignorance and those who dissolving the dictates of conscience are sinners given to carnal pleasures. They, in this life and after death attain to those sexual enjoyments enwrap in affliction and ignorance.*<sup>23</sup>

Thus, according to the proclamation of an enlightened mind, God or the principle of sameness is not transcendent, but immanent in the universe, and the sentient beings are manifesting the divine glory just as much as the lilies of the field. A God who, keeping aloof from his creations, sends down his words of command through specially favored personages, is rejected by Buddhists as against the constitution of human reason. God must be in us, who are made in his likeness. We cannot presume the duality of God and the world. Religion is not to go to God by forsaking the world, but to find him in it. Our faith is to believe in our essential oneness with him, and not in our sensual separateness. "God in us and we in him," must be made the most fundamental faith of all religions.

Unlike other religions like Buddhism, Christianity or Islam, Hinduism does not talk about a God who stays outside the universe and creates/destroys this universe. Instead here Universe itself is the God! Universe is a self aware *Paramaatma* (the universal soul) and everything else in the universe is a part of this God! We are all *Aatma* (souls) whose goal is to realize and unite with this *Paramaatma* (Universal Soul).

The *Vedas* compare creation to a spider's web, that the spider creates and then lies within. God is both the container of the universe and what is contained in it, which is why the sacred Vedic texts of Hinduism say *Aham Brahmasmi* which means I am God. This is because we are all a part of this Universal God. This is also the reason why we find thirty three crore Gods in Hinduism. Since Universe itself is the God, everything else and everybody else in the Universe is also a form of God. That's the reason why Hindus worship water, rain, thunder, earth, moon, sun, stars, sky, humans, trees, plants, animals, air, father, mother, elders, light, wealth, knowledge, anything and everything that you find in this universe as God.

Vedic rishis/saints were attracted by the bright and beautiful aspects of nature and so they worshiped the various forces of nature as manifestations of supreme *GOD*. Thus, they worshipped a number of Nature Gods.

The word ‘Deva’ or ‘Devta’ is normally translated by western scholars and their followers in India, as deity or god. But this is an incorrect interpretation due to the fact that they have not tried to find out the root from which this word has been derived. As per Nirukta “Dev” is derived from the words *da, dut, dip and divu*—

देवो दानाद् वा दीपानाद् ध्योतनाद् वा ध्युस्थानो भक्तातिं वा ।<sup>24</sup>

According to it, knowledge, light, peace, delight and all those objects that give peace or pleasure are called “devtas”. This fact is borne by veda mantra itself—

अग्निदेवतो, वातो देवता, सूर्यो देवता, चन्द्रमा देवता सववो देवता

रुद्र देवतादित्या देवता मरुतो देवता विश्वे देवा ब्रुसस्पतिर्देवतेन्द्रो देवता वरुतो देवता ।<sup>25</sup>

Fire, Air, Sun, Vasus (space or abode), Aditya (time), learned persons of contemplative mood, all useful and good objects, God the creator and protector of the Universe, *Vedas*, well earned riches and water are all devtas, i.e., highly useful things.

### **Critical Comparison regarding the Existence of *God* in Hinduism and Buddhism**

Hinduism and Buddhism both have numerous gods and both follow the same paths to ultimately achieve Nirvana. The concept of a god or gods in Buddhism is almost void and therefore in the eyes of some it is not even a religion. Hindus have many gods governing different aspects of Hindu life. The three main gods in Hinduism are Vishnu who is the sustainer; *Brahma* is the creator and *Shiva* the destroyer. They are referred as Trinity/*Trimurti*. Most Hindu gods are associated with animals and therefore Hindus feel that being a vegetarian is vital. Cows are sacred in Hinduism and are worshipped as the divine mother, making eating beef a taboo. Buddhism involves meditation and prayer. In Buddhism, one must understand the four noble truths which are the truth of suffering, the truth of the origin of suffering, the truth of cessation, and the truth of the path. As mentioned earlier, these all follow the Eightfold path, which describes the ways in which one must live. Hindu scriptures advocate the pursuit of many goals in one’s life including righteous living, wealth, prosperity, love and happiness. The ultimate goal is to achieve *Nirvana*.

The Buddha attained enlightenment through meditation and meditation was what he primarily taught. The Hindu doctrine mentions meditation as one of the ways to attain God. This is the path of *Raja* Yoga. However, the Hindu scriptures also mention *Karma Yoga* (the path of action), *Bhakti* Yoga (the path of prayer or devotion) and *Jnana Yoga* (the path of knowledge). These are different paths, which lead to the same goal - *Moksha*, *Nirvana* or Union with God.

The reason why the Buddha did not believe in a god is that the belief is not necessary. Some claim that the belief in a god is necessary in order to explain the origin of the universe. But this is not so. Science has very convincingly explained how the universe came into being without having to introduce the god-idea. Some claim that belief in god is necessary to have a happy, meaningful life. Again we can see that this is not so. There are millions of atheists and free-thinkers, not to mention many Buddhists, who live useful, happy and meaningful lives without having belief in a god. Some claim that belief in god's power is necessary because humans, being weak, do not have the strength to help themselves. Once again, the evidence indicates the opposite. One often hears of people who have overcome great disabilities and handicaps, enormous odds and difficulties through their own inner resources, through their own efforts and without belief in a god. Some claim that god is necessary in order to give man salvation. But this argument only holds good if one accepts the theological concept of salvation and Buddhists do not accept such a concept. Based on his own experience, the Buddha saw that each human being had the capacity to purify the mind, develop infinite love and compassion and perfect understanding. He shifted attention from the heavens to the heart and encouraged us to find solutions to our problems through self-understanding.

Hinduism, which has thousands of gods and goddesses, is actually a monotheistic religion. Each god is seen as one manifestation of the one Supreme God. Most Hindus practise devotion (*bhakti*) to either a form of Lord Vishnu or Lord Shiva or Lord Brahman. They see this as one essential part of religious practice.

The Buddha, on the other hand, taught that we should not concern ourselves with worship or devotion to a particular God. The Buddha did not deny the existence of a Supreme God: he just said that we are responsible for our own enlightenment, and not to believe that a supreme being could help us.

The realization of God in Hinduism is very similar to the path of Enlightenment in Buddhism. In Hinduism, *Brahma* nature is realized by philosophically understanding the eternal and unchanging nature of one's self. The mystic yogis, who initially perform the yogic practices, often meditate on renunciation of desires. The practice of *Bhakti* is aimed at worship of the Lord as a divine person, *Ishvara*, or as the Supreme Person situated in his spiritual abode. It is very important to note that *Bhakti* is never done with a mind of lust or gaining anything but with total submission of one's worldly desires. This is true with the Buddhist meditation to achieve *Nirvana*.

When we observe profoundly, we will find that there are numerous similarities between Hinduism and Buddhism. It can be seen that all religions teach human beings how to attain the highest morality level. The moral level through interpretation of reality though relatively different, holds single purpose which is to know and recognize the Ultimate Reality, the Creator of this universe.

Religious unity and tolerance that possess for the most part of similar ultimate reality even though through a very different interpretation is to show that all the created differences are of the manifestation of reality of God's existence and His legitimacy of the universe creation. All these differences should be understood by all human beings because such differences are supposed to be a symbol of the universal harmony. Hence, all these differences should not be the source for disputation, but to be deliberated and taking the necessary lessons of the truth of His existence and the reason why human beings are created diversely in religion, color, language and so on – to knowing God through His diversity of creation.

According to the Buddha, being is an aggregate of the five Skandhas (*Panchaskandhas*). But none of the five aggregates alone is the self or soul (*atta*); and apart from these there remains nothing to be called the soul or God. Thus, Buddha goes a step further than the Upanishads, beyond all modes of positivity, cognition, perception and so on, so that he is able to make us implicitly conscious of the karmic fetters from which one must free oneself in order that one may elevate oneself to a level of awareness which is equivalent to *Nirvana*.

While the Absolute is pure consciousness and pure freedom and infinite possibility, it appears to be God from the point of view of the one specific possibility which has become actualized. While God is organically bound up with the universe, the

Absolute is not. The world of pure being is not exhausted by the cosmic process which is only one of the ways in which the Absolute reality which transcends the series reveals itself.

God is the Absolute from the human end. When we limit down the Absolute to its relation with the actual possibility, the Absolute appears as supreme Wisdom, Love and Goodness. The eternal becomes the first and the last.

The religious devotee envisages the supreme reality in the form of a personal God who is the source, guide and destiny of the world. The difference between the Supreme as absolute Spirit and the Supreme as personal God is one of standpoint and not of essence. It is a difference between God as he is and God as he seems to us. Personality is a symbol, and if we ignore its symbolic character it shuts us out from the truth.

Every belief in Ultimate Reality as God is restrictive in character. It fixes limits, boundaries. The assumption of a personal God as the ground of being and creator of the universe is the first stage of the obscuring and restriction of the vision which immediately perceives the great illumination of Reality. It permits the knowledge of the truth that ever transcends God, does not annihilate God but comprises it.

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# Concept of Atman/Soul in Hinduism and Buddhism

## Section - 2

### Concept of *Atman* in Hinduism

The word *Atman* technically means 'the Divinity'. So, in the *Upanishads*, except for a few places, the word *Atman* has been generally used for God, absolute Divinity. *Brihadaranyak Upanishad* says, "The supreme Divinity should be desired by a soul to be visualized." *Aitreya Upanishad* says, "The supreme Divinity (God) existed before the creation of this universe." The word 'brahm' means the absolute Divinity who is absolutely great and makes a soul great like himself after God realization. In Hinduism, *Atman* is considered the essential 'self' of a person. The pre-Buddhist *Upanishads* link the Self to the feeling "I am."

*Atman* refers to the non-material self, which never changes. It is distinct from both the mind and the external body. This real self is beyond the temporary designations we normally ascribe to ourselves, in terms of race, gender, species and nationality.

In the *Upanishads*, the term '*brahma*' mostly refers to the personal form of God and occasionally to the impersonal (*nirakar*) aspect of God, which is mentioned in the verse seven in the *Mandukyounishad*. The reason is that the *nirakar* aspect of God or *nirakar brahma* is formless and actionless and so it is only the '*Purusha*,' the personal form of God, who does all the things. The *Upanishads* describe the kindness of God awarding liberation and His abode to the souls, and the creation of the universe. This is the work of the personal god only. That's why, there is very little description of the *nirakar brahma* in them.<sup>1</sup>

*Brahma* is derived from the root 'brh', which means 'to grow or expand' and refers to 'the power which of itself burst into utterance as prayer.' Philosophically speaking, therefore, *Brahman* is "the power or primary principle which spontaneously manifests itself as the universe".<sup>2</sup>

The second *Upanishadic* term *atman* for the ultimate reality is applied to whatever constitutes the essential part of anything, more particularly. The Vedic philosophers and later, the *Upanishadic* sages, tried to discover not merely a cosmic principle or the source of the universe as a whole, but the psychic principle or the inner essence of man.

In the hymns of *Rigveda*, *Atman* refers both to the ultimate essence of the universe and the vital breath in man. In the *Upanishads*, the word *Brahman* is used in the former sense, while the word *Atman* denotes the inmost essence in man. The basic doctrine of the *Upanishads* involves the identification of *Brahman* with *Atman*. The Supreme God manifests itself in supreme truth in every Soul.

The most important thing is that nirakar brahma, being an existence of absolutely dormant virtues (*avyakt shakti*), can never even manifest its blissfulness. It is like the subtle dormant state of the beauty of a flower that dormant exists in its seed that has not even taken the shape of a plant. So, wherever the *Upanishads* talk about the Divine knowledge of Bliss (*chidanand*) of *brahma*, they only refer to the personal form of God and not the nirakar brahm.

The *Upanishads* offer two facts. The first one is that the soul does not belong to maya or the mayic world because it itself is an eternal, infinitesimal and Divine entity. The second one is that the soul has a natural and eternal relationship with God. The *Upanishads* describe this fact with their aphorism like *tattavamasi*. It means Soul (in its pure form) is substantially the same as God, like a drop of the ocean and the ocean itself. Soul Belongs to God as it is eternally related to Him. Souls are unlimited in number. But the truth is that the souls in the mayic realm are eternally blemished with the association of maya which is an eternally existing delusive power of God that appears and multiplies itself in the form of this world.<sup>3</sup>

There are many interesting perspectives on the 'self' in Hinduism, ranging from the self as eternal servant of God to the self as being identified with God. The understanding of the 'self' as eternal supports the idea of reincarnation. In the incarnation, the same eternal being can inhabit temporary bodies.

Some versions of *Yoga* argue that, through their spiritual practices, one can come into direct contact with one's real self or *atman*. Meanwhile, other Hindu philosophical and religious theories suggest that the *atman* possessed by each individual is a reflection of the *Brahman* or absolute in the universe. The real immortal self of human beings is identical with brahman. Spiritual liberation or 'moksha' takes place when the *atman* and the *Brahman* join and become united. This was probably the *anathema* to Buddhist philosophy. This based itself rather on the absence of a real self, *anatman*. It is on this basis that Buddhism denies the existence of the *atman*. The notion of the self is closely

linked with that of the personality and also with the construction of the parts of the individual. Many arguments arose and still arise within Buddhism about its nature, or better, lack of essential nature.

For the self to achieve liberation, it has to know reality, both kinds of reality: its own and that of the ultimate cause of the world. Question arises- Does the individuality of the self survive after liberation? According to *Sankara*, it does not, but *Ramanuja* argues that it does. *Sankara* suggests that the self is what lies behind consciousness. This itself is similar to light. Consciousness and what lies behind it are both the same sort of thing. The self is the basis to the activity of consciousness. Consciousness is the way in which the self expresses itself. It represents the manner in which it acts. But it is important to make a clear distinction here between them, he claims, by contrast with the *Advaitin* who mixes them up.

Another form of inquiry follows - What scope is there to distinguish between the self and consciousness in this way? We have experience of a self that is different from its acts of consciousness, because the acts of consciousness are always changing while the self seems to be relatively permanent. He further argues that, not only is the self the basis of consciousness, it is also the object of consciousness. This is the case because, in every act of knowledge, the self is aware through consciousness of something else. It is also aware that it is aware. In other words, it is also aware of itself. This is not a separate act of consciousness, but rather is part and parcel of the activity of consciousness itself. The significance of this doctrine emerges when it is contrasted with *Sankara's* concept of dreamless sleep (*susupti*). According to *Sankara*, in such sleep the individual self disappears. All that remains is consciousness. This is to be identified with the absolute self. From this, it follows that the individual self is really an illusion. There is an eternal self which is presupposed by individual experiences. The nature of the self is something that we intuit, and it is known through our experience. *Sankara* disapproves of the *Nyaya* argument that we can know the self through inference. This argument starts with a series of experiences, and then appeals to the notion of a self to which they belong.

*Sankara* suggests that we have no reason to think that those experiences are part of 'my self' as opposed to 'someone else' unless we already accept the existence of such a self, which is circular. Such a self can be accepted as existing right from the start of experience, although its real status has to be qualified. *Ramanuja* agrees that consciousness

persists in dreamless sleep, but does not accept *Sankara's* conclusion, since the former argues that a type of self-awareness continues in the experience of dreamless sleep. After all, when we wake up, we attribute the experience to an individual self, and so have no reason not to think that such a self persisted during the sleep. In such sleep, the self is aware of itself only as a subject, but he discounts the significance of the dreamless sleep. This does indeed provide an example of bliss, the same sort of bliss that arises on liberation, but this is only a pale reflection of the fully fledged bliss of liberation. Dreamless sleep merely provides a temporary relief from samsara, while when the self is in contact with *Brahman*, complete relief is affected. By contrast, *Ramanuja* argues that our experience is essentially dualist, since we distinguish between the knower and the object of knowledge. *Madhva* also suggests that the individual differences between people must be based on their different selves, and goes further than *Ramanuja* in arguing that souls cannot be alike.

*Atman* has two rather contrasting meanings. In this sense, it can mean the ultimate reality of a person. It also means the superficial aspects of the personality with which we tend to identify ourselves. The more we get to know ourselves as we really are, the further we can see behind the superficial to the essential aspects of ourselves. But these superficial aspects can be important as well. According to *Advaita Vedanta*, only the universal *brahman* is ultimately real. The ordinary personality and its notion of identity are illusory. Yet there is also an elaborate theory of the personality and how it survives during change, in particular transmigration. Although the self may not be ultimately real, it is still real enough as a part of our experience to be analysable in terms of a self that can undergo change and yet remain to a degree the same. *Advaitins* are particularly interested in the nature of *brahman*, while at the same time they are keenly aware of the conceptual difficulties in describing the nature of something that is absolutely one and without differentiation.

### **Concept of *Atman* in Buddhism**

In the Buddhist philosophy, they argue that, if there had been a real self, it would have possessed certain characteristics. These include permanence, immutability, absence of suffering and being unaffected by prior events. A real self would have been happy since it would have been aware of itself. It would not have been changed and it would not have been dependent on anything else. But the self, in so far as we experience it, is very

different in such a description. This suggests that the real self and the human self are entirely distinct. The notion of a persistent self is an illusion from which we ought to free ourselves. Such mental liberation is a stage on the route to liberation.

The idea of *Atman* entails the idea of the self as a spiritual rather than material being. Thus, there is a strong dimension of Hinduism which emphasises detachment from the material world and promotes practices such as asceticism. Thus it could be said that, in this world, a spiritual being, the *Atman*, has a human experience rather than a human being having a spiritual experience.

Thus, a person has to recognize this truth that he is under the bondage of *maya*. So he has to renounce his ignorance by properly understanding the fact that he does not belong to this mayic world. He only belongs to his Divine beloved God with whom he has all kinds of sweet relationships. After knowing that, he has to love Him wholeheartedly and selflessly. Upon god realization, the worshipper of the *nirakar brahma* enters the absolutely dormant state of the Divinity called *kaivalya moksha* and stays there forever in a kind of totally passed out state, because the *nirakar brahma* itself is an actionless dormant Divinity.

The only Hindu school of thought that flatly denies the existence of *Atman* is the *Charvaka* School. The *Charvaka* regards consciousness as a mere product of matter. Consciousness is inseparable from life. It is always found associated with the body and is destroyed with the body's disintegration. As *Madhavacharya* writes in *Sarva-darshana-samgraha*:

*From the four original principles or elements alone, when transformed into the body, consciousness is produced, just as the power is developed from the mixing of certain ingredients; and then these are destroyed, consciousness at once perishes also... Therefore, the soul is only the body distinguished by the attribute of intelligence, since there is no evidence for any self distinct from the body.*<sup>4</sup>

*Samkara*, the *advaita* philosopher, refutes *Charvaka*'s theory of soullessness. His argument mainly involves the *Charvaka* claim that life-movements, consciousness, memory and the related intellectual function belong to the body for the simple reason that they are experienced only in the body and not without it. According to *Sankara*, life movements and the like do not sometimes exist even when the body exists (as at death), and hence they cannot be products of the body.

### ***Buddhist Concept of Soul and Anatma***

The Buddhist term *Anatman* (Sanskrit), or *Anatta* (Pali) is an adjective in the *Digha Nikaya Sutra*. It refers to the nature of phenomena as being devoid of the Soul. That is the un compounded subjective Self (*Atman*) which is the “light (*dipam*), and only refuge”. Of the 662 occurrences of the term *Anatta* in the *Digha Nikayas*, its usage is restricted to referring to twenty two nouns (forms, feelings, perception, experiences, consciousness, the eye, eye-consciousness, desires, mental formations, ear, nose, tongue, body, lusts, things unreal, etc.), all phenomenal, as they are Selfless (*anatta*). Contrary to countless many popular (=profane, or =consensus, from which the truth can ‘never be gathered’) books written outside the scope of Buddhist doctrine, there is no “Doctrine of *anatta/anatman*” mentioned anywhere in the sutras. Rather *anatta* is used only to refer to impermanent things/phenomena as other than the Soul, to be *anatta*, or Self-less (*anatta*).

Specifically in sutra, *anatta* is used to describe the temporal and unreal nature of any and all composite, phenomenal, and temporal things, from macrocosmic to microcosmic, be it matter as pertains the physical body, the cosmos at large, including any and all mental machinations which are of the nature of arising and passing. *Anatta* in sutra is synonymous and interchangeable with the terms *dukkha* (suffering) and *anicca* (impermanent). All three terms are often used in triplet in making a blanket statement as regards any and all phenomena; such as: All these aggregates are *anicca, dukkha, and anatta*.

*Anatta* refers specifically and only to the absence of the permanent soul as pertains any or all of the psycho-physical (*nama-rupa*) attributes, or *khandhas* (*skandhas*, aggregates). The five-aggregates constitute a being—aggregates of material and mental forces which are changing all the time—and are the prime causes of suffering. Buddha sums up the nature of the fives *khandhas* in *Majjima Nikaya*: All corporeal phenomena whether part, present or future, one's own or external, gross or subtle, lofty or low, far or near, all belong to the group of corporeality; all feelings belong to the group of feelings all perceptions belong to the group of perception; all mental formations belong to the group of formations; all consciousness belongs to the group of consciousness.

According to the Buddha, none of the five aggregates alone is the self or soul (*atta*). Apart from these there remains nothing to be called the soul.

The Pali compound term and noun for “no soul” is *natthatta*, not the term *anatta*. This is mentioned at *Samyutta Nikaya* 4.400. In this part, Gautama Buddha was asked if there “was no-soul (*natthatta*)”. To this, Gautama equated this position to be a Nihilistic heresy (*ucchedavada*). Common throughout Buddhist sutra (and Vedanta as well) is the denial of psycho-physical attributes of the mere empirical self to be the Soul, or confused with same. The Buddhist paradigm as regards phenomena is “Na me so atta” (this/these are not my soul). This is most common utterance of Gautama the Buddha in the *Nikayas*, where “na me so atta” = *Anatta/Anatman*. In *sutra*, to hold the view that there was “no-Soul” (*natthatta*) is = *natthika* (nihilist).

One way that *karma* is used in Buddhism is to explain transmigration of souls and reincarnation. Buddha did not believe that a soul passes from one body to another, or also called *anatta*. Instead, he said there is a series of causes that connects each life to the next life. The way that our previous lives were led brings us to the way our current life is lived. This then may seem that we have no power over how our life will be lived which is untrue. Even though our life right now was produced from what acts were done in the past, our will is only influenced but still free. That is to say, we still have the freedom to form our own destinies. This process only says that the results from actions (ideas, impressions, feelings, streams of consciousness) will carry over the next life.

There is no soul that passes on. Buddha used an analogy about flames on a candle to describe this transmigration. Lighting a candle from the flame of another candle does not mean the original flame is on the latter candle. It only means the flame of the first candle caused the flame of the latter candle just as the actions of a previous life is the ignition to the next life. As the candle does not actually pass its flame on to the next candle, the previous life does not pass anything (a soul) on to its next life. Likewise, what an individual desires or feels is not caused because something was transported in the body, which had those desires and feelings.

Buddhism differs from the atheism (Skt. *Nastika*, Pali *natthika*) in affirming a spiritual nature. That is not in any noticeable form, but immeasurable, infinite, and inaccessible to observation. Of which, therefore, empirical science can neither affirm nor deny the reality thereof of him who has ‘Gone to That [Brahman]’ (*tathatta*). It is to the *Atman* as distinguished from oneself (*nama-rupa/khandhas*, mere self as =*anatta*) i.e., whatever is phenomenal and formal (Skt. and Pali *nama-rupa*, and *savinnana-kaya*) “name

and appearance”, and the “body with its consciousness”.<sup>5</sup> ‘Nonbeing (asat, natthiti ‘the all is ultimately not’) both of these positions are existential antinomies, and heresies of annihilationism]’.

In contrast to the above, it has been incorrectly asserted that affirmation of the *Atman* is = *sassatavada* (conventionally deemed ‘eternalism’). However, the Pali term *sasastavada* is never associated with the *Atman*, but that the *Atman* was an agent (karmin) in and of samsara which is subject to the whims of becoming (*bhava*), or which is meant *kammavada*; such as *sassatavada* in *sutta* = *atta ca so loka ca* (the *Atman* and the world are one), or: ‘Being (sat, atthiti [views of either sabbamatthi ‘the all is entirety’, and *sabbamekattan* ‘the all is one’s Soul’<sup>6</sup> both are heresies of perpetualism]). *Sasastavada* is the wrong conception that one is perpetually (*sassata*) bound within samsara and that merit is the highest attainment for either this life or for the next. The heretical antinomy to nihilism (*vibhava*, or = *ucchedavada*) is not, nor in *sutta*, the *Atman*, but bhava (becoming, agencyship). Forever, or eternal becoming is nowhere in *sutta* identified with the *Atman*. The *Atman* is “never an agent (karmin)”, and “has never become anything” (=bhava). These antinomies of bhava (*sassatavada*) and vibhava (*ucchedavada*) both entail illogical positions untenable to the Vedantic or Buddhist *Atman*. However, the concept of “eternalism” as =*Atman* has been the fallacious secondary crutch for supporting the no-*Atman* commentarialists position on *anatta* implying = there is no *Atman*.

According to the philosophical premise of Gautama the Buddha, the initiate to Buddhism, who is to be “shown the way to Immortality (*amata*)”<sup>7</sup>, wherein liberation of the spirit/mind [Greek = nous] (*cittavimutta*; Greek = epistrophe) is effectuated through the expansion of wisdom and the meditative practices of sati and *samadhi* (assimilation, or synthesis, complete disobjectification with all objective [unreal] ‘reality’), must first be educated away from his former ignorance-based (*avijja*) materialistic proclivities in that he (the common fool) “saw any of these forms, feelings, this body in whole or part, to be my *Self/Atman*, to be that which I am by nature”.

Teaching through negative methodology of *anatta* in *sutta* pertains solely to things phenomenal. These things were: “subject to perpetual change; therefore unfit to declare of such things ‘these are mine, these are what I am, that these are my Soul’”<sup>8</sup>. The one scriptural passage in which Gautama is asked by a layperson what the meaning of *anatta* is as follows: At one time in Savatthi, the venerable Radha seated herself and asked

of the Blessed Lord Buddha: “*Anatta, anatta* I hear said venerable. What pray tell does *Anatta* mean?” “Just this Radha, form is not the Soul (*anatta*), sensations are not the Soul (*anatta*), perceptions are not the Soul (*anatta*), assemblages are not the Soul (*anatta*), consciousness is not the Soul (*anatta*). Seeing thusly, this is the end of birth, the *Brahman* life has been fulfilled, what must be done has been done.”<sup>9</sup>

*Anatta*, which has been taught in the *Nikayas*, has only relative value as it is directly conducive to subjective awakening, or illumination. It is not an absolute one. It does not say or imply simply that the Soul (*atta, Atman*) has no reality, but that certain things (five aggregates), with which the unlearned man (fool = *puthujjana*, as is always implied in spiritual texts, a materialist) identifies himself, are not the Soul (*anatta*). That is why, one should grow disgusted with them, become detached from them and be liberated. This principle of the extremely abused and misunderstood term *anatta* does not negate the Soul as such, but denies Selfhood to those things that constitute the non-self (*anatta*), showing them thereby to be empty of any ultimate value and to be repudiated.

Instead of nullifying the *Atman* (Soul) doctrine, it in fact compliments and affirms it in the most logical method by which Subjective is initially gained, that by and through objective negation. It has been said that: ‘No Indian school of thought has ever regarded the human soul (another error, since the soul is not a possession of, nor is of the nature of the persona, or 'human') or the carrier of human personal identity as a permanent substance (literally meaning, absurdly permanent impermanence. This is certainly true when referring to the empirical persona (mere self aggregates=*pancakhandas*, as opposed to the Person, spirit, *Atman*). That the *Atman* is not to be understood as a thinking substance, phenomena, or eternal soul, is certainly the case, and logically cannot be otherwise.

*Anatta* is a key principle in the doctrine of Buddhism and the metaphysics, thereof quantifying *anatta* and being meant all physical and mental consubstantial and temporal objectivity. All are compounded things either in simplex (matter, hyle) or complex (mental). As an-atta is meant not-Subject (=object [phenomena]), those things, as Buddhism declares “the unlearned fool bemuses himself as being (those things)”. "What do you suppose, followers, if people were carrying off into the Jeta grove bunches of sticks, grasses, branches, and leaves and did with them as they wished or burned them up, would it occur to you: These people are carrying us off, are doing as they please with us, and are burning us? No, indeed not Lord. And how so? Because Lord, none of that is our Soul, nor

what our Soul subsists upon! Just so followers, what is not who you are, do away with it, when you have made done with that, it will lead to your bliss and welfare for as long as time lasts. What is that you are not? Form, followers, is not who you are, neither are sensations, perceptions, experiences, consciousness"<sup>10</sup>.

Just as 'disgusting (*anatta*) doctrine' cannot make logical sense, neither does '*anatta* doctrine' bring light to studies of Buddhism what *anatta* is contextually or its philosophical importance as being merely a qualifier of that which is evil, foul, disgusting, phenomenal and repulsive (= *anatta*). *Anatta* is of course a doctrinal tenant within Buddhism. However, as conventionally and irrationally conceived, there is absolutely no such creature in Buddhism as a "no-Soul doctrine".

What has Buddhism to say of the Self? "That's not my Self" (*na me so atta*). This, and the term "non Self-ishness" (*anatta*) predicated of the world and all "things" (*sabbe dhamma anatta*). These are identical with the Brahmanical "of those who are mortal, there is no Self/Soul", (*anatmahi martyah*).<sup>11</sup> "The Soul is the refuge that I have gone unto". For *anatta* is not said of the Self/Soul but what it is not. There is never and nowhere in *sutra*, a 'doctrine of no-Soul', but a doctrine of what the Soul is not (form is *anatta*, feelings are *anatta*, etc.). It is of course true that the Buddha denied the existence of the mere empirical "self" in the very meaning of "my-self" (this person so-and-so, *nama-rupa, anatta*). The Buddha denied the immortal (*amata*), the unborn (*ajata*), Supreme-Self (*mahatta*), uncaused (*samskrta*), undying (*amara*) and eternal (*nicca*) of the *Upanishads*. That is palpably false, for he frequently speaks of this Self, or Spirit (*mahapurisha*), and nowhere more clearly than in the too often repeated formula 'na me so atta', "This/these are not my Soul" (*na me so atta*'= *anatta/anAtman*), excluding body (*rupa*) and the components of empirical consciousness (*vinnana/ nama*), a statement to which the words of Sankhara are peculiarly opposite, "Whenever we deny something unreal, is it in reference to something real", since it was not for the Buddha, but for the nihilist (*natthika*), to deny the Soul. For, "yad *anatta....na me so atta*, "what is *anatta...* (means) that is not my *Atman*"<sup>12</sup>. The extremely descriptive illumination of all things which are Selfless (*anattati*) will be both meaningless and a waste of much time.

*Anatta* is a Pali term used in Buddhist thought and meaning not-self' (*Sanskrit, anatman*). This is one of the three marks of all conditioned existence and is central to Buddhist teaching. It was devised to stand in opposition to the notion of *atman*, the idea of

a constant and eternal self, which is a significant notion in Indian philosophy at the time of the Buddha. The Buddhist theory of selflessness is predominantly a rejection of *Hindu* orthodox philosophy. It has led to a very creative debate between the traditions. Buddhist philosophers regard the Hindu notion of the self as an expression of the reification that binds humanity to a misguided notion of what is real, while Hindu thinkers regard the denial of the self as equivalent to nihilism. The idea of such a self is misleading, according to Buddhism, since it is no more than an idea that we apply to the flow of consciousness, and if we closely examine the contents of consciousness we can find no such self in it. For Buddhism this is a crucial point, since it is the illusion that there is a self which leads to an incorrect view of reality and so to suffering (*dukkha*). Once we rid ourselves of this notion, we are on the route to escape from suffering. It is difficult to overemphasize the significance of this notion in Buddhist philosophy.

An interesting question has often been asked about the doctrine of not-self. That is, why the self is not actually denied, while the not-self is described as a vital notion for us to grasp. The reason seems to be the desire to avoid the appearance of Buddhism being nihilist, and also to vindicate the role of the not-self for our salvation. The not-self doctrine can be regarded as an example of skilful means to employ a device that human beings want to use to transcend the negative consequences of that device. The idea of the self is a leading instance of attachment. It is through such attachment that we become linked to suffering and frustration, because we do not realize that what we are attached to is constantly changing and impermanent. The notion of the real self is a useful notion in that it explains what we find so attractive about the idea of a permanent subject of consciousness, and can be used to encapsulate so much of what is in fact illusory but which seems to be solid. The point of identifying things with not-self is to point out how illusory they are, and how we should let go of them in just the same way that we should let go of the self. What we need to do is appreciate how suffering, change and not-self characterize everything in which we ordinarily have confidence. This exercise sets us on the route to nirvana.

The role of the not-self, then, is to provide us with a reason to let go of the phenomena that imply the existence of a self. There is no need to attack the notion of the self directly, because contemplating the nature of the experiences that presuppose that notion brings out not only how empty they are, but also how empty is the notion that they

presuppose. The point is to embody one's suspicion of the reality of phenomena in one's practice, and not disprove a particular concept which can then remain unconnected to our behaviour. One of the interesting features of Buddhist philosophy is the suspicion of philosophy itself, in the sense of the defense of or attack on different theoretical views. There is even uneasiness about what might be regarded as correct views, because adhering to these is also a form of attachment. They are held by us due to some prior cause which links that attachment to the impermanent. This eventually leads to impermanence and frustration. On the other hand, one can hold the right views in the right way. This involves going beyond the process of holding views entirely because it is identified with a form of direct intuition. From this, it follows that adhering to a doctrine of not-self can be just as destructive as believing in the self. What we need to do is change until we can see things as not-self. The question remains, however, - is this not itself a view that has been defended and to which we might well become attached, although that is through practice instead of in theory?

One of the characteristics of nirvana is that it is the opposite of everything that characterizes the appearance of our world, in the sense that it is permanent and happy. One might expect it also to be the opposite of not-self, but this is not the case. *Nirvana* is the highest form of emptiness. Since it is empty, it cannot include the self. The self is intimately connected to the human personality. As the forms of attachment implicit in the personality are weakened and eventually replaced, the self certainly does not make a comeback. The notion of the permanent self disappears. As a result, *nirvana* is realized. The characteristics of the self, its permanence and immutability, do survive in nirvana, and indeed represent the nature of the ultimate end, but not as parts of a reconstructed real self. The notion of a real self is shown to be illusory in *nirvana* because the latter involves establishing as real and permanent what goes far beyond the narrow and selfish aspects of the ordinary notion of the human self. The latter characteristics cannot survive in *nirvana*, which is precisely its opposite.

In later schools of *Mahayana* and *Vajrayana Buddhism*, such as *Sarvastivada*, *Vajrayana*, *Madhyamika*, and lastly *Zen*, the oldest existing texts (*Nikayas*) of Buddhism predate all these later schools of Buddhism. *Anatta* is never used pejoratively in any sense in the *Nikayas* by Gautama the Buddha. He himself has said: "Both formerly and now, I've never been a nihilist (*vinayika*), never been one who teaches the annihilation of a being,

rather taught only the source of suffering, and its ending (*avijja*).<sup>13</sup> Further by investigation into the reference, one can be directed as to a further understanding of this 'negative' methodology which the term *anatta* illuminates. It should be noted with great importance that the founder of *Advaita Vedanta*, Samkara used the term *anatman* lavishly in the exact same manner as does Buddhism. However, in all of time since his passing, none have accused Samkara of propounding a denial of the *Atman*. Such as: “*Atma-anatma vivekah kartavyo bandha muktaye*”-“The wiseman should discriminate between the *Atman* and the non-*atman* (*anatman*) in order to be liberated.”<sup>14</sup>; “*Anatman cintanam tyaktva kasmalam duhkah karanam, vintayatmanam ananda rupam yan-mukti karanam.*” -“Give up all that is non-*atman* (*anatman*), which is the cause of all misery, think only of the *Atman*, which is blissful and the locus of all liberation.”<sup>15</sup>

Every qualifying characteristic is, as the non-*atman* (*anatman*), comparable to the empty hand. The intellect, its modifications, and objects are the non-*atman* (*anatman*). The gain of the non-*atman* (*anatman*) is no gain at all. Therefore, one should give up the notion that one is the non-*atman* (*anatman*). In none of the Buddhist *suttas* is there support for "there is non-*atman*" theories of *anatta*. The message is simply to cease regarding the very *khandhas* in those terms by which the notion of *Atman* has, itself, been so easily misinterpreted. As has been shown, detaching oneself from the phenomenal desire for the psycho-physical existence was also a central part of *Samkara's* strategy. There is, hence, nothing in the *suttas* that *Samkara*, the chief proponent of *Advaita Vedanta*, would have disagreed with.

“A Doctrine of *Anatta*” exists as a status quo, however, there exists no substantiation for same in *sutta* for Buddhism’s denial of the *Atman*, or in using the term *anatta* in anything but a positive sense in denying Self-Nature, the Soul, to any one of an aggregation of corporeal and empirical phenomena which were by their very transitory nature, “impermanent (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*), and Selfless (*anatta*)”.

In fact, the term “*Anatmavada*” is a concept utterly foreign to Buddhist *sutta*, existing in only non-doctrinal *Theravada*, in some *Mahayana*, and *Madhyamika* commentaries. The perfect contextual usage of *anatta* in *sutta*: “Whatever form, feelings, perceptions, experiences, or consciousness there are (the five aggregates), these he sees to be without permanence, as suffering, as ill, as a plague, a boil, a sting, a pain, an affliction, as foreign, as otherness, as empty (*sunya*), as Selfless (*anattato*). So he turns his mind

(*citta*) away from these and gathers his mind/will within the realm of immortality (*amataya dhatuya*). This is tranquility; this is that which is most excellent!"<sup>16</sup>.

## **Critical Comparison regarding the concepts of *Atman* in Hinduism and Buddhism**

The Upanishadic "Self" shares certain characteristics with *nibbana* of Buddhism. Both are permanent, beyond suffering, and unconditioned. However, the Buddha shunned any attempt to see the spiritual goal in terms of "Self" because in his framework, the craving for a permanent self is the very thing which keeps a person in the round of uncontrollable rebirth, preventing him or her from attaining *nibbana*. Both in the *Upanishads* and in common usage, self/Self is linked to the sense of "I am".

The main philosophical difference between Hinduism and Buddhism is that the concept of *Atman* was rejected by the Buddha. Terms like *anatman* (not-self) and *shunyata* (voidness) are at the core of all Buddhist traditions. The permanent transcendence of the belief in the separate existence of the self is integral to the enlightenment of an *Arhat*.

The Buddha criticized conceiving theories even of a unitary soul or identity immanent in all things as unskillful. In fact, according to the Buddha's statement in *Khandha Samyutta* 47, all thoughts about self are necessarily, whether the thinker is aware of it or not, thoughts about the five aggregates or one of them.

Two ideas are psychologically deep-rooted in man: self-protection and self-preservation. For self-protection man has created God, on whom he depends for his own protection, safety, and security, just as a child depends on its parent. For self-preservation man has conceived the idea of an immortal Soul or *Atman*, which will live eternally. In his ignorance, fear, weakness, and desire, man needs these two things to console himself. Hence, he clings to them deeply and fanatically. The Buddha's teaching does not support this ignorance, fear, weakness, and desire, but aims at making man enlightened by removing them and destroying them, striking at their very root. According to Buddhism, our ideas of God and Soul are false and empty. Though highly developed as theories, they are all the same extremely subtle mental projections, garbed in an intricate metaphysical and philosophical phraseology. These ideas are so deep-rooted in man, and so near and dear to him, that he does not wish to hear, nor does he want to understand, any teaching against them. The Buddha knew this quite well. In fact, he said that his teaching was 'against the current,' against man's selfish desires.

The Buddha denies the existence of self, as conceived in the *Upanishadic* tradition, in the *Alagaddupama Sutta*. Possibly the most famous *Upanishadic* dictum is *tat tvam asi*, "thou art that." Transposed into first person, the Pali version is *eso ham asmi*, "I am this." This is said in several *suttas* to be false. The full statement declared to be incorrect is "This is mine, I am this, this is my self/essence." This is often rejected as a wrong view. The *Alagaduppama Sutta* rejects this and other obvious echoes of surviving *Upanishadic* statements as well (these are not mentioned as such in the commentaries, and seem not to have been noticed until modern times). Moreover, the passage denies that one's self is the same as the world and that one will become the world self at death. The Buddha tells the monks that people worry about something that is non-existent externally (*bahiddhaa asati*) and non-existent internally (*ajjhattam asati*). He is referring respectively to the soul/essence of the world and of the individual. The most basic presupposition of early *Brahminic* cosmology is the identification of man and the cosmos and liberation for the yogin was thought to only occur at death, with the adept's union with *brahman*. The Buddha's rejection of these theories is therefore one instance of the Buddha's attack on the whole enterprise of *Upanishadic* ontology.

The term *anatman* is found not only in Buddhist sutras, but also in the *Upanishads* and lavishly so in the writings of Samkara as mentioned earlier. *Anatman* is a common through negative (*neti neti*, not this, not that) teaching method common to *Vedanta*, Neoplatonism, Buddhism, early Christian mystics, and others, wherein nothing affirmative can be said of what is "beyond speculation, beyond words, and concepts" thereby eliminating all positive characteristics that might be thought to apply to the Soul, or be attributed to it. Self-Nature (*svabhava / Atman*) can never be known objectively, but only through "the denial of all things which it (the Soul) is not". The Subject (Witness/*Atman*) cannot be negated (Subject precedes any object of negation, even and also false attempts at Subject/Witness negation = nihilism). Objective negation culminates in Subjective liberation, not to mention is the most expedient means to *Atman*-realization (*Atmanbodhi, cittavimutta, pannavimutta, etc.*).

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## Concept of *Karma* in Hinduism and Buddhism

### Section - 3

#### Concept of *Karma* in Hinduism

*Karma* literally means action. *Karma* means "deed or act". Karma is the law of action and this law governs man's consciousness. *Karma* is a part of philosophy of the Hindus. The term came into being in Hinduism, based on the *Vedas* and *Upanishads*. One of the first and most dramatic illustrations of *karma* can be found in the great Hindu epic, the *Mahabharata*. The original Hindu concept of *karma* was transformed into the religious practices and later enhanced by several other movements within the religion, most notably *Vedanta*, *Yoga*, and *Tantra*.

To the Hindus, *karma* is the law of the nature or phenomenal cosmos that is part of living within the dimensions of time and space. *Karma* may differ on the basis of the time factor- past, present, and future. Consequence is the part of the action and the consequence always comes only after the action. Thus suffering is not the consequence of a wrong act, but an actual part of the act, although the consequence may be only experienced later. A soldier is sometimes wounded in battle, and in the excitement does not feel any pain. Afterwards, when he is quiet and away from the battle, he feels the pain. In this way, a man sins and feels no suffering, but later the suffering makes itself felt. The suffering is not separated from the wound, any more than the heat from fire, though that is experienced as a result.

All actions are parts of the laws of nature. For example, a boat without oars, sails, or rudder is carried about helplessly by the winds and currents. The sailor finds himself drifting along under the press of forces that he can neither change nor direct. But a clever sailor, with oars, sails and rudder, can send along his boat in any direction he pleases, not because he has changed the winds and the currents, but because he understands their directions, and can use those that are going in the direction he wants, and can lay off, the one against the other, the forces that oppose him. A man must know the laws of nature. If a man knows the laws of nature, he can utilise those whose forces are going his way and neutralize those which oppose. Therefore, knowledge is indispensable; the ignorant are always slaves.

A law of nature is not a command to act in a particular way, but only a statement

of the conditions within which action of any kind can be done. Water boils at 100° C under normal pressure. This is a law of nature. It does not command a man to boil water, but states the conditions under which water boils. The laws state conditions under which certain results follow. According to the results, desired conditions may be arranged, and, given the conditions, the results will invariably follow. Hence, law does not compel any special action, but only renders all actions possible, and knowledge of law is power.

The *Jivatma* is three-fold in his nature. He consists of *Ichchha*, *Jnana* and *Kriya*, i.e. Will, Wisdom and Activity. These, in the lower world of upadhis, of forms, express themselves as Desire, Knowledge and Action, and these three fashion a man's karma, and each works according to a definite law.<sup>1</sup>

Desire stands behind Thought, stimulating and directing it. Thought, energised and determined by Desire, stands behind Action, expressing itself therein in the world of objects. Mans nature is desire-based; as is his desire, so is his thought; as (his) thought is, so he does action; as he does action, so he attains. Therefore, the following three laws make up the Law of karma:

1. Desire carries the man to the place where the objects of desire exist, and thus the desire determines the channels of his future activities.
2. Mind is the creative power, and a man becomes that which he thinks. His mind determines his personality.
3. Circumstances are made by actions.

Devoted to the fruits of acts, whatever kind of acts a person does, covetous of fruits, accomplishes, the fruits, good or bad, that he actually enjoys, partake of their character. Like fishes going against a current of water, the acts of a past life are flung back on the actor. The embodied creature experiences happiness for his good acts, and misery for his evil ones.

These three laws cover the making of karma, because the *Jivatma* consists of Will, Wisdom and Activity. These show themselves in the world by desires, thoughts and actions. When we have divided the factors in a man's destiny into opportunities, character—or capacities—and surrounding circumstances, we have covered them all. Nothing else remains.

One very commonly felt difficulty in connection with karma is this: the quiry

follows like this: "If I am destined by my karma to be bad or good, to do this or not to do it, it must be so; why then make any effort?" This is merely a fallacy. The fallacy of this line of thought should be very clearly understood, if the above has been grasped, because it turns upon a complete misunderstanding of the nature of karma. The effort is part of the karma, as much as the goodness or badness. *Karma* is not a finished thing awaiting us, but a constant becoming, in which the future is not only shaped by the past but is being modified by the present. If a man desires to be good, he is putting forth an energy which presently will make him good, however bad he may be now.

Another mistake sometimes made by people regarding the *karma* is that which leads them to say respecting a sufferer: "He is suffering his karma; if I help him I may be interfering with his *karma*." Those who thus speak forget that each man is an agent of the karma of others, as well as an experiencer of his own. If we are able to help a man, it is the proof that the *karma* under which he was suffering is exhausted, and that we are the agent of his *karma* bringing him relief. If we refuse to carry the karmic relief, we make bad *karma* for ourselves, shutting ourselves out from future help, and someone else will have the good *karma* of carrying the relief and so ensuring for himself aid in a future difficulty.

*Karma* is said to be of three kinds: *Prarabdham*, *Sanchitarm*, and *Vartamanam*. *Prarabdha karma* is that which is ripe for reaping and which cannot be avoided. It is only exhausted by being experienced. *Sanchita karma* is the accumulated karma of the past, and is partly seen in the character of the man, in his power, weaknesses and capacities. *Vartamana karma* is that which is now being created.<sup>2</sup>

The *Sanchita karma* is the *karma* which is gathered, collected and heaped together. It is the mass which lies behind a man, and his tendencies come from this. The *Vartamana karma* is the actual, that which is now being made for the future, or the *Agami*, the coming *karma*. The *Prarabdha karma* is that which has begun, is actually bearing fruit. In Vedantic literature, it is sometimes compared to an arrow already shot.

*Prarabdha karma* is unchangeable within the scope of one life, since it is the 'setup' for the life in question. It is the karma of one's past life. After death, the atma leaves the body, as the casting off of old vestments, and carries with it the *samskaras* (impressions) of the past life of thoughts, actions and events. These *samskaras* manifest themselves in the unchangeable situation into which one is born and also in certain key events in one's life. These include one's birth, one's time of death, one's economic status,

family (or lack of family), etc.

The *samskaras* that one inherits from the past life create one's personality, inclinations, talents, the things that make up one's persona. One's likings, abilities, attitudes and inclinations are based on the thoughts and actions of past life. One's *Samchita karma* is somewhat alterable with much practice and by doing a lot of efforts. This might be seen through the Hindu system of *Yoga* and the dynamic of the *gunas*. An example can be taken as someone who, through meditation, has slowly evolved into a more stable personality.

*Vartamana or Agami karma* is the karma of the present life over which the soul has complete control. Through it, one creates one's karma in the present for the future of the current life and in times to come.

Hindus have belief on *karma*. They believe that human fate is determined by the *karma*. They talk about different kinds of karma but many of them are not conscious about the kinds. They cannot say, sometimes, if an event in life has been caused by *Prarabadha* or *Agami karma*. The idea of "bad things happening to good people" is as a result of *Prarabadha karma*. This is more simply understood as karma from a past life. It is said that karma works within a cyclical framework that sees the phenomenal universe being created and eventually dissolving back into itself, back into realization that it was nothing other than *Maya* imposed on the truth of *Brahman*. Therefore, people believe that *karma* will eventually be worked out. What the *karma* has been done by them is important because the fruit will be received accordingly. They say, through exceeding devotion and love of God, one can be helped to speed through *karma phal* (*karmic fruit*). By developing '*vairagya*' or 'detachment' from the fruits of one's *karma*, as Lord Krishna most famously summarized, one can transcend *karma* and be liberated. One is aided by love of God. All the *Yogas* of Hinduism seek to transcend *karma* through different means of realization.

The *Bhagavad-Gita* categorises *karma*, listing three kinds of human actions: (1) *karma*: those which elevate, (2) *Vikarma*: those which degrade, and (3) *Akarma*: those which create neither good nor bad reactions and thus lead to liberation.

In Hinduism, if one does pious activities, he can accrue good karmic credits and attain a higher birth. Thus, he can enjoy his life with heavenly blessing without any difficulties. However, if the pious credits are exhausted, he will fall again to earth.

*Samkhya Yoga* classifies actions into four kinds, according to their capability to produce pleasure and pain: 1) *Sukla* (white) refers to those actions which produce pleasure as well as the actions of those who are engaged in scholarly activities; 2) *Krisna* (black) refers to vicious or veda-prohibited actions that produce pain; 3) *Sukla-krisna* (white/black) refers to actions which produce both pleasure and pain and involve most of our day-to-day activities; 4) *Asukla-akrisna* (neither white nor black) refers to actions which neither produce pleasure nor produce pain, and thus refers to activities like introspection and self-disciplining—activities that are conducive to yogic aspiration.<sup>3</sup>

It is believed that, if one transgresses universal and God-given laws, his soul is degraded to the status of lower species. Only by gradual purification (and that's by suffering), he can rise again to the human status. When he is in the status of the lower species, his soul cannot exercise free will. Rather he is more or less condemned to a "sentence."

*Karma* and fate are often interchangeable terms in Hinduism. *Karma* is misunderstood as fate. Fate is an unchangeable destiny decreed long ago by some forces external to human beings such as the planets and stars, or most probably the Gods. Some argue that *karma* is neither fate nor predetermination. Each soul has absolute free will. Its only boundary is *karma*. They say that God and Gods do not dictate the events of human lives, nor do they test human beings. They also say that there is no cosmic force that molds human life. Indeed, when beseeched through deep prayer and worship, the Supreme Being and His great Gods may intercede within our *karma*, lightening its impact or shifting its location in time to a period when we are better prepared to resolve it.

In Hindu astrology, or *Jyotisha*, they show a strong relation between human beings and the geography of the solar system and some star clusters, but we must know that it is not a cause-effect relation. Planets and stars don't cause or dictate *karma*. They have orbital relationships which establish proper conditions for *karmas*. These conditions activate and inspire a particular type of personality nature to develop. *Jyotisha* describes a revelation from the orbital relationships. It reveals *prarabdha Karmic* patterns for a given birth and how we will generally react to them (*Kriyamana karma*). With astrological knowledge, we are aware of our life's *Karmic* pattern and can thereby anticipate it wisely.

We have thousands of earth lives. We experience different forms or a remarkable variety of life patterns. We exist as male and female, often switching back and forth from

life to life as the nature becomes more harmonized into a person exhibiting both feminine nurturing and masculine intrepidity. We come to earth with different roles in different forms as princesses and presidents, as paupers and pirates, as tribals and scientists, as murderers and healers, as atheists and, ultimately, God-realized sages. We take bodies of every race and live the many religions, faiths and philosophies as the soul gains more knowledge and evolutionary experience.<sup>4</sup>

Therefore, a Hindu knows that the belief in a single form of life on earth is not possible. A single form of life in the earth followed by eternal joy or pain is utterly wrong. Such belief merely causes great anxiety, confusion and fear. Hindus believe that all souls reincarnate. They take one body form and then another, evolving through experiences over long periods of time. *Karma* operates not only in this lifetime but across lifetimes. The results of an action might be experienced in a new life after the present life.

Hindus believe that human beings do their actions with good or bad consequences. They might reap the rewards of their action in this present life, or in a future life with human rebirth, or they might reap the rewards of their action in a heaven or hell in which the self is reborn for a period of time.

This process of reincarnation, birth after birth, is called *samsara*, or a continuous cycle, in which the soul is reborn over and over again according to the law of action and reaction. Many Hindus believe that, at death and after death, the soul is carried by a subtle body into a new physical body. This can be a human or non-human form (an animal or divine being). The goal of liberation (*moksha*) is to make us free from this cycle of action and reaction, and from birth and rebirth. One is not liberated until he has done all his *karmas*. Upanishad clearly speaks,

*The object to which the mind is attached, the subtle self goes together with the deed, being attached to it alone. Exhausting the results of whatever works he did in the world he comes; again from that world to this world for (fresh) work. This is for him who desires. But he who does not desire...his breaths do not depart. Being Brahman he goes to Brahman.*<sup>5</sup>

This is very much similar to the Buddhist theory of *Nirvana*. The belief in karma and reincarnation brings to every Hindu inner peace and self-assurance. That maintains discipline of their actions. They believe that the maturing of the soul takes many lives. If the soul is immature in the present birth, there is still hope, because there will be many

opportunities for him for learning and growing in future lives. These beliefs and the attitudes eliminate their anxiety, developing a strong perception that everything is all right as it is. And, there is also a keen insight into the human condition and appreciation for people in all stages of spiritual unfoldment. The *Bhagvad-Gita* speaks, regarding the exhaustion of *karma* and attaining the Brahma state—

*He who is free from attachment, who is liberated, whose mind is established in knowledge, whose actions are but actions of sacrifice only, his actions are completely dissolved.*<sup>6</sup>

The lines say that his offering is *Brahman*, his oblation is *Brahman*; his sacrificial fire is *Brahman*, the sacrificer is *Brahman*. He certainly attains *Brahman* who finds *Brahman* situated in all activities. These are similar lines to the Buddhist concept of *karma*.

### **Concept of *Karma* in Buddhism**

Karma (in Pali called *Kamma*) means in Buddhism "action" or "doing". Whatever one does, says, or thinks is a *karma*. Buddhism teaches that there are other forces beside karma that shape our lives. These include natural forces like the changing seasons and gravity. When a natural disaster like an earthquake strikes a community, this is not some kind of collective karmic punishment. It's an unfortunate event that requires a compassionate response, not judgment. In the (*Anguttara Nikaya Nibbedhika Sutta*), the Buddha said the following words: Intention (*cetana*), monks, is karma, I say. Having willed, one acts through body, speech and mind.

Every time a person acts or does something there is some quality of intention at the base of the mind. It is that quality rather than the outward appearance of the action that determines the effect. If a person professes piety and virtue but nonetheless acts or does something with greed, anger or hatred (veiled behind an outward display of well-meaning intent), the fruit of those actions will bear testimony to the fundamental intention that lay behind them and will be a cause for future unhappiness. The Buddha spoke of wholesome actions (*kusala-kamma*)—that result in happiness, and unwholesome actions (*akusala-kamma*)—that result in unhappiness.

For *Buddhists*, *karma* has implications beyond this present life. Bad actions in a previous life can follow a person into their next life and cause bad effects. Good actions can cause good effects. Even an Enlightened One is not exempt from the effects of past karma. One story tells that the Buddha's cousin tried to kill him by dropping a boulder on

him. Although the attempt failed, the Buddha's foot was injured. He explained that this was karmic retribution for trying to kill his step-brother in a previous life.

In *Buddhism*, *karma* is fundamentally related to suffering and by implication, to the idea of nirvana or the cessation of suffering through individual liberation. In *Majjima Nikaya*, the Lord Buddha says-

*Whatever kind of feeling (vedana) one experiences—pleasant, unpleasant or indifferent—one approves of and cherishes the feeling and clings to it. While doing so, lust originates; but lust of feelings means clinging to existence (upadana); and on clinging to existence depends the karma-process (kamma-bhava); on the karma-process rebirth depends; and depending on rebirth are decay and death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair. Thus arises the whole mass of suffering.*<sup>7</sup>

*Karma*, therefore, has to offer a comprehensive account of universal organization of worldly existence. In this sense, *karma* is primordially objective and does not distinguish between the rich and the poor, the beautiful and the ugly, or the healthy and the sick.

The theory of *karma* should not be confused with so-called 'moral justice' or 'reward and punishment'. The idea of moral justice, or reward and punishment, arises out of the conception of a supreme being, a God. God sits in judgment. He is a law-giver and he decides what is right and wrong. The term 'justice' is ambiguous and dangerous, and in its name more harm than good is done to humanity. The theory of *karma* is the theory of cause and effect, of action and reaction. It is a natural law, which has nothing to do with the idea of justice or reward and punishment.

Accompanying *karma*, there comes usually a separate tenet called *Vipaka*. It means result or effect. The reaction or effect can itself also influence an action. In this way, the chain of causation (*karma*-effect) continues *ad infinitum*. When Buddhists talk about *karma*, they are normally referring to *karma* that is 'tainted' with ignorance - *karma* that continues to ensure that the being remains in the everlasting cycle of *samsara*.

To make this more intelligible, one has to account for (un)wholesome actions and (un)wholesome states and their respective meaning in Buddhism. The former is outlined in the *Noble Eightfold Path*. Action springs from volition, which springs from intention,

which springs from thought, and so forth. The quality of actions can be described in ethical terms, simply as either good or bad, or both good and bad, or indifferent.

The Buddha has defined three types of *karma* that a human being can do: (i) The *karma* of words (*vachi kamma*), (ii) The *karma* of *sarir* (bodily karma), and (iii) The *karma* done by mind (*mano karma*). Among the three *karmas*, the *karma* of mind or the intention is the most important of all mental events because it gives direction to the mind, determining whether we engage with virtuous, non-virtuous, or neutral objects.

An intention is a mental action. It may be expressed through either physical or verbal actions. Thus, action, or *karma*, is of two types: the action of intention and the intended action. The action of intention is the thought or impulse to engage in a physical or verbal act. The intended action is the physical or verbal expression of our intention. *Karma* actually refers to the action of intention but in general usage it includes the intended action and the seeds that are left in the mind as a result.

There are various grades of ethical qualities. Most people have an intuitive understanding that enables them to discern between good and bad, although the discerning ability depends on the person's state of mental development. A wise person at a high level of mental development can clearly discern mental activities and actions in an ethical dimension, while a deluded person has difficulties or is even unable to do so.

In Buddhism, *karma* is not pre-determinism, fatalism or accidentalism, as all these ideas lead to inaction and destroy motivation and human effort. These ideas undermine the important concept that a human being can change for the better no matter what his or her past was, and they are designated as "wrong views" in Buddhism.

- (i) *Purbbekatahetuvada*: The belief that all happiness and suffering, including all future happiness and suffering, arise from previous karma, and human beings can exercise no volition to affect future results (past-action determinism).
- (ii) *Issaranimmanahetuvada*: The belief that all happiness and suffering are caused by the directives of a Supreme Being (theistic determinism).
- (iii) *Ahetu-appaccaya-vaada*: The belief that all happiness and suffering are random, having no cause.

*Karma* is continually ripening, but it is also continually being generated by present actions. Therefore, it is possible to exercise free will to shape future *karma*. The

Buddha asserts effort and motivation as the crucial factors in deciding the ethical value of these various teachings on karma.

Buddhists try to cultivate good *karma* and avoid bad. However, the aim of Buddhism is to escape the cycle of rebirth altogether, not simply to acquire good *karma* and so to be born into a more pleasant state. These states, while preferable to human life, are impermanent: even gods eventually die.

*Karma* is not an external force. It is not a system of punishment or reward dealt out by a god. The concept is more accurately understood as a natural law which is similar to gravity. Buddhists believe that we are in control of our ultimate fates. The problem is that most of us are ignorant of this, which causes suffering. Buddhists suggest us to take conscious control of our behaviours.

*Karma* implies that a person is inherently accountable for everything that is happening to him. This implies that whether he experiences happiness or misery all depends on his actions. *Karma* encompasses all actions, and not just those perceived by the public. Even thinking badly about another person has its consequences.

In *Buddhism*, although the past has some influence on the present, the present also is shaped by the actions of the present. A famous *Theravada Bhikkhu* Thanissaro explains the theory of *karma* in Buddhism in this way—

*...instead of promoting resigned powerlessness, the early Buddhist notion of karma focused on the liberating potential of what the mind is doing with every moment. Who you are — what you come from — is not anywhere near as important as the mind's motives for what it is doing right now. Even though the past may account for many of the inequalities we see in life, our measure as human beings is not the hand we've been dealt, for that hand can change at any moment. We take our own measure by how well we play the hand we've got.*<sup>8</sup>

The function of *karma* and causation is explained by the principle of Dependent Origination (*pratityasamuppada*) in Buddhism. It is considered as one of the scientific and excellent theories of explanation of the Buddha which makes his teaching more scientific than any other religions. Dependent Origination consists of twelve links or chains. They are—

<i>avijja</i>	ignorance
<i>sanskara</i>	mental formations

<i>vigyana</i>	consciousness
<i>nama-rupa</i>	mind and matter
<i>sadayatana</i>	six sense organs
<i>sparsa</i>	contact
<i>vedana</i>	sensation
<i>trsna</i>	desire
<i>upadana</i>	grasping
<i>bhava</i>	becoming
<i>jati, jara, byadhi,</i>	birth, old age, disease, death <i>maranam</i>

The first two links, ignorance (*avijja*) and mental formations (*samskara*), relate how the past actions in a person's previous lives affect this present situation. Ignorance concerns the defilements that a person had in the past. Mental formations represent the *karma* resulting from the good and bad actions of a person in the past that determine many aspects of his present life. The think link, consciousness (*vigyana*), represents the consciousness that enters a mother's womb at the beginning of a person's present life. The other aggregates are also present in very subtle forms at this moment, but since consciousness is the dominant aggregate, it is used to represent this stage in a person's life. The fourth link, name and form (*namarupa*), corresponds to the fetus growing in the mother's womb and the development of its body and mind. The completion of the fetus's sense organs corresponds to the fifth link, the six sense organs (*sadayatana*). The child from birth until one or two years of age is equated with the sixth link, contact (*sparsa*) between sense organ and object. The sense organs, objects, and consciousness are all present, but the infant still cannot properly discriminate between suffering and pleasure. The stage at which a child is able to differentiate between suffering and pleasure but does not yet have any sexual desires corresponds to the seventh link, sensation (*vedana*). The emergence of sexual lust corresponds to the eighth link, desire (*trsna*). Striving for fame and fortune is represented by the ninth link, grasping (*upadana*). A person thus accumulates *karma* that will bear fruit in the future. This state corresponds to the tenth link, becoming (*bhava*).

The links of desire and grasping in the present are similar to the link of ignorance of the past, since all result in the formation of *karma*. In a similar way the link of becoming in the present is similar to the link of mental formations in the past, since both can be

equated with *karma*. The third through the tenth links are all explained as referring to a person's life. The five links from consciousness to sensation are called the five fruits of the present, which were caused by actions of the past. The three links of desire, grasping, and becoming are called the three present causes, which will bear fruit in the future.

A person's future birth is determined by the three present causes. Future births are represented by the eleventh link, birth (*jati*). Thus, *jati* is similar to consciousness at the moment of conception in the present life, in other words to the third link, consciousness. The result of future birth is old age and death (*jaramarana*), the twelfth link. It corresponds to the links of name and form through sensation in the present life.

When the twelve links are distributed among three lifetimes, two links concern past causes, five links present effects, three links present causes, and two links future effects. The cycle of cause and effect is repeated twice. Consequently this explanation is referred to as 'the two cycles of cause and effect over the three time periods.'<sup>9</sup>

Ignorance, desire, and clinging are all defilements (*klesa*). The *karma* arising from these defilements is represented by the links of mental formations and becoming. The phenomena arising from *karma* are represented by the remaining links, from consciousness to sensation and birth, old age, and death. Thus phenomena arise from *karma*. Later, those same phenomena serve as the basis for additional *karma*. The twelve links of Dependent Origination thus illustrate how existence can be characterized as endless cycles of defilement, *karma*, and phenomena. Moreover, since phenomena are characterized by suffering, these cycles may also be characterized as defilement, *karma*, and suffering. In this manner, twelve links may be explained as an illustration of *karmic* cause and effect.

In Buddhism, *karma* is supposed to be a seed. They say that an action (*karma*) results in the form of 'ripening' (*Vipaka*), and fruit ('*Phal*') which are attributes of a seed. The movement of beings, between birth and rebirth, is not a haphazard process. Rather it is governed and ordained by the law of nature. All kinds of beings are born in accordance with the nature and quality of their (past) *karmas*, and they are offshoots of their actions. Violent and hateful acts tend to lead to rebirth in a hell, acts of confusion and delusion will lead to a rebirth as an animal, and acts of greed tend a person to be reborn as a ghost. A person's actions (*karma*) mould their consciousness, making them into a kind of person so that, when they die, their outer form tends to match the type of a nature that has been developed.

Actions and results have correlations. If a person's bad actions are not so serious as to lead him to a lower birth, they affect, invariably, the nature of a human rebirth. For instance, stinginess leads to poverty, injuring other beings leads to repeated ailments, and anger leads to being ugly--the later aspect being extension of the process by which an angry person gradually develops ugly features during the course of his present life. It is solely due to the actions of their past lives that some people are ugly, ill or poor. Therefore, they must not think and blame for their present fate. They should think and act positively and in good ways for the good results in future.

Generous, kind, benevolent acts and moral restraints tend us to get birth again as human beings. If we attain meditative calmness of *Gyan* ('*Jhana*' in Pali), we will have a rebirth in heaven. All intentional actions, whether good or bad, matter a lot, because they leave a trace on the mind (of a person), which ultimately relates to future results.

People should not dwell mentally on a bad *karma*. Whether deliberately or accidentally it is done, it is a bad act. To contain and suppress it and not energise it is a noble/good *karma*. If a person resolves neither to conceive nor translate a bad karma into action, it will dilute the bad karmic results. A skilful action is '*Punya*' (auspicious) or fortunate, because it purifies the mind and, then, leads it to good fortune in the future. An unskilful action is '*Apunya*' or '*Papa*' (evil), ill-fortune, or inauspicious. Since beneficial results do not outflow from it, hence it is infertile.<sup>10</sup>

*Punya* is a good merit. It also implies 'deserving'. Any act of giving, even with expectation of something in return, or expecting the *Karmic* results, is a purer motive. It is of no use to say whether a gift is big or small, but if it gives joy, and supports a holy way of life, it is worth merit for where there is a joyful heart, no gift is small. Merit-sharing is simply a way of spreading the *Karmic* benefits of good deeds to others, as a gesture of goodwill.

There is no known beginning to the cycle of rebirths and the world, as there is no conceivable beginning of this world (*Samsara*). The cycle of rebirth involves countless lives over vast stretches of time. Buddhists believe that every birth or rebirth is occasioned by a prior cause and no being is an exception to it.

Human life is precious. It is a marvelous opportunity for spiritual growth. Therefore, they suggest, it should be used wisely. Life must not be frittered away, because it may be cut short, at any time, by death. The law of *karma* is believed to be dynamic,

fluid and flexible, because it is neither rigid nor mechanical.

A moral life is not necessarily followed immediately by a good rebirth, if a strong evil action of past life has not yet brought its results, or a dying person regrets having done good. Similarly an immoral life is not followed necessarily by a bad rebirth, as the appropriate results will come in time, so it says.<sup>11</sup>

Thus, in short, *karma* has relationship with cause and effect combination. Birth and rebirth are affected from *karma* of past and present.

### **Critical Comparison regarding the concepts of *Karma* in Hinduism and Buddhism**

Hinduism involves role of God. Buddhism does not involve the role of God. *Karma* in Hinduism differs from Buddhism on the basis of the same. Notably, unlike Buddhists and Jains who believe that *Karma*, as natural law, on its own, joins the soul when it reincarnates and comes to fruition, Hindus believe in the role of God for linking *karma* to the person. But this difference is only superficial. The very first verse of *Dhammapada* and the gathas of *Upanishads* and *Vedas* clearly indicate that the essence of these two religions regarding *karma* is the same. *Upanishad* speaks—

*Accordingly as one behaves so does he become. The doer of good becomes good, the doer of evil becomes evil. One becomes virtuous by virtuous actions. Others become bad by bad actions.*<sup>12</sup>

The next passage in the same verse identifies desire as the root cause of all human activity –

*Others however say that a person consists of desires. As is his desire, so is his will. As is his will so is the deed he does. Whatever deed he does that he attains.*<sup>13</sup>

*Dhammapada* also speaks the same lines on the nature of *karma*—

*Experiences are preceded by mind, led by mind, produced by mind. If one speaks or acts with an impure mind, suffering follows even as the cart-wheel follows the hoof of the ox (drawing the cart).*

*Experiences are preceded by mind, led by mind, and produced by mind. If one speaks or acts with a pure mind, happiness follows like a shadow that never departs.*<sup>14</sup>

Thus, certain philosophical viewpoints may term "destiny" or "fate" but that is in actuality, according to the laws of *karma*, the simple and neutral working out of *karma*. Many people compare *karma* to a moral banking system, which are very similar to a credit and debit of good and bad. However, this view falls short of the idea that any sort of

*karma*, whether we term it 'good' or 'bad', binds us in recurring cause and effect. In order to attain supreme consciousness, to escape the cycle of life, death, and rebirth and the knot of *karma*, one must altogether transcend *karma*. This method of transcendence is variously dealt with in many streams of not only Hinduism and Buddhism, but also in other faiths and philosophical systems.

*Karma* is needed as long as single trace of impurity exists within a soul or *Atman*, right from first manifestation to last. The effort of every soul or *Atman* remains reducing dross impurities within. It is only through complex process of *karma* that every soul or *Atman* gains more purity as one proceeds ahead in cosmic cycle of life. This philosophy of *Karma* is vividly expressed in *Gita* as well—

*He whose all undertakings are devoid of desires, whose actions are burnt in the fire of knowledge, he is declared as a scholar by the wise.*

*Renouncing all attachment to the fruits of his actions, ever satisfied, without seeking shelter or protection, depending upon nothing, he certainly does nothing though he is engaged in actions.*<sup>15</sup>

Lord Buddha also believed that *Trshna* is the main cause of one's *karma*. If one does not renounce *trshna*, one cannot be liberated.

Shri K. Thirugna Sambantha, in the section of *Karma* in his outline of *Saivism*, explains the concept of *Karma* in Hinduism by distinguishing its concept from that of the Buddhist and Jain religions which do not require an external Being like God as being necessary for it. In their beliefs, he notes that *Karma*, as a natural law, and like a calf, among a large number of cows, goes and finds its mother for obtaining the milk, also finds the related person and comes to fruition. However, he further argues that Hindus, on the other hand, would find flaw with this theory and would criticize it by noting that *Karma*, unlike the calf, is an unintelligent entity. Hence, *Karma* cannot go and find out the related person by itself. Shri Sambantha then concludes by noting that an intelligent Supreme Being with perfect wisdom and power, (e.g. *Shiva*, in *Shaivism*, for example.) is necessary to make *Karma* to join the related person. In such sense, God is the Divine Accountant.

Swami Sivananda, in his commentary synthesizing Vedanta views on the *Brahma Sutras*, also reiterates the same views. In his commentary,<sup>16</sup> of *Brahma Sutras*, Sivananda notes that *Karma* is insentient and short-lived, and ceases to exist as soon as it is done. Hence, he points out that *Karma* cannot therefore bestow the fruits of actions at a future date according to one's merit. Furthermore, Sivananda notes that one cannot argue that

*Karma* generates *apurva*, or *punya*, which gives fruit. Since *apurva* is non-sentient, it cannot act unless moved by an intelligent Being, i.e., God. Hence, it cannot independently bestow rewards and punishments.

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# Concept of *Moksha* in Hinduism and Buddhism

## Section - 4

### Concept of *Moksha* in Hinduism

In every religion, the concept of moksha, nirvana or liberation is very importantly mentioned. All religions have a basic concept of liberation. But the notion of liberation is different in different religions. In Hinduism, the present life is considered to be the result of many lifetimes of past desires, *karmas* and the results of those *karmas*. The results of these previous karmas are unfolding at every moment. Some *karma* is mature and bearing fruit at the present moment, other *karmas* are laying as "seed" waiting to mature at a future time. All that we have done in the past creates who we are in the present and all that we do in the present is creating who we will be in the future. In this way, there is great cycle of desire, action (*karma*) and reaction that drives the wheel of life. As a result, all beings are forced to remain within this world in order to experience the fruit of their desires and actions (*karmas*).

Desire and actions (*karmas*) are said to be the source of reincarnation. Beings continue to "rotate" through endless lifetimes in this physical world. Sometimes in heaven (nice places), sometimes in the middle regions (medium places) and sometimes in hellish realms. This rotation through endless lifetimes is the process of reincarnation called *samsara* in Sanskrit. The ultimate goal of life in Hinduism is to break this cycle of reincarnation, to escape *samsara*. Breaking this cycle is done through the process of yoga, and freedom or liberation from the cycle of rebirth is called moksha.

From spiritual point of view, real achievement of life is not money, nor material luxury. Neither is it sexual nor eating pleasure. It is neither intellectual, business nor political power, nor any other of the instinctive, nor intellectual needs. These are natural pursuits in human life, to be sure, but our divine aim on this earth must be to personally realize our identity in and with God. Identifying ourselves with God is called enlightenment, *Self-Realization*, *God-Realization* and *Nirvikalpa Samadhi*. After many lifetimes of wisely controlling the creation of *karma* and resolving past *karmas*, the soul is fully matured in the knowledge of these divine laws and then there is the highest use of them. Through the practice of *yoga*, the Hindu bursts into God's superconscious Mind, the experience of bliss, all-knowingness, perfect silence. His intellect is transmuted, and he

soars into the Absolute Reality of God. He is a *jnani*, a knower of the Known. When the *jnani* is stable in repeating his realization of the Absolute, there is no longer a need for physical birth, because all lessons have been learned, all *karmas* fulfilled and Godness is his natural mind state.

That individual soul is then naturally liberated, freed from the cycle of birth, death and rebirth in the earth. After *moksha*, our soul continues its evolution in the inner worlds, eventually to merge back into its origin and that origin is God, the Primal Soul. In Hinduism, the terms *moksha*, *nirvana* and *mukti* (liberation) are used synonymously to describe release or freedom from the cycles of birth and death (*samsara*). *Moksha* is a process and not a state of being. In the Hindu definition, *moksha* is not something to be experienced or realized, but rather attained upon God-realization. The liberated soul or *atman* finally enters the abode of God, the kingdom of God. The ultimate goal of every life, for all human beings, is to reach the stage of *moksha* (salvation).

Every Hindu hopes to attain *moksha*. But he or she knows well that it will not necessarily come in this present life. Hindus know this and do not delude themselves that this life is the last. Seeking and attaining profound spiritual realizations, they nevertheless know that there is much to be accomplished on earth and that only mature, God-Realized, souls attain *moksha*.

God may seem distant and remote as the experience of our self-created *karmas* cloud our mind. Yet, in reality, the Supreme Being is always closer to us than the beat of our heart. His mind pervades the totality of our karmic experience in lifetimes. As karma is God's cosmic law of cause and effect, *dharma* is God's law of Being, including the pattern of Hindu religiousness. Through following *dharma* and controlling thought, word and deed, *karma* is harnessed and wisely created. We become the master, the knowing creator, not a helpless victim. Through being consistent in our religiousness, following the *yamas* and *niyamas* (Hindu restraints and observances), performing the *pancha nitya karmas* (five constant duties), seeing God everywhere and in everyone, our past *karma* will soften. We may experience the *karma* indirectly through seeing someone else going through a situation that we intuitively know was a *karma* we also were to face. But because of devout religiousness, we may experience it vicariously or in lesser intensity. For example, a physical *karma* may manifest as a mental experience or a realistic dream. An emotional *karmic* storm may just barely touch our mind before dying out.

According to the scriptures, the discipline of unattached action (*Nishkama Karma*) can lead to salvation of the soul. So they recommend that one should remain detached while carrying out his duties in life. As Lord Krishna said in the *Bhagavad-Gita*: "To the man thinking about the objects (of the senses) arises attachment towards them; from attachment, arises longing; and from longing arises anger. From anger comes delusion; and from delusion loss of memory; from loss of memory, the ruin of discrimination; and on the ruin of discrimination, he perishes".

Hindus believe that the soul passes through a cycle of successive lives (*samsara*) and its next incarnation is always dependent on how the previous life was lived (*karma*). In a lifetime people build up karma, both good and bad, based on their actions within that lifetime. This *karma* affects their future lives and existences. People must take responsibility for their actions either within this life time or the next. Death is a key part of this cycle and is treated with specific importance. Death is the last *samsara* (cycle of life) referred to as the 'last sacrifice'.

*Moksha* is the end of the death and rebirth cycle. It is classed as the fourth and ultimate artha (goal) of life. It is the transcendence of all *arthas*. It is achieved by overcoming ignorance and desires. It is a paradox in the sense that overcoming desires also includes overcoming the desire for *moksha* itself. It can be achieved both in this life and after death. In simple words, *moksha* or *Nirvana* is deliverance in Hinduism from the cycle of birth and death with the intervening periods of stay in heaven and hell according to a person's good and bad deeds. This happens when the person has no bad deeds in his/her account. Hindus believe that all people are governed by this rule, Hindus as well as those who are not. Acting according to 'dharma' adds to the good deeds and cancels bad deeds. 'Dharma' is fulfillment of one's duties and responsibilities and engaging in righteous action.

Hinduism discusses various states and types of *moksha* attained by various means like bhakti, yoga etc. Especially eight stages or types of *moksha* are defined in various texts.

#### 1. *Salokya Mukti*

In *salokya-mukti*, the departed soul goes to ishta-loka (the abode of the Personal God, such as the abode of *Vishnu*), and stays there blissfully enjoying His presence. A person who has gone through rigorous ethical and moral disciplines followed by right

knowledge, right action, non-attachment, and devotional meditation on the Personal God (*Vishnu*), becomes fit for release or moksha through Ishwara's loving grace.

## 2. *Samipya or Sannidhya Mukti*

In *samipya* or *sannidhya-mukti* the departed soul enjoys the bliss of extreme proximity to the Personal God. A person who has gone through rigorous ethical and moral disciplines followed by right knowledge, right action, non-attachment, and devotional meditation on the Personal God (*Vishnu*), becomes fit for release or moksha through Ishwara's loving grace.

## 3. *Sarupya Mukti*

In *sarupya-mukti* the departed soul acquires the form of the Personal God and enjoys intense bliss.

## 4. *Sayujya Mukti*

In *sayujya-mukti*, the departed soul becomes blissfully absorbed in the Personal God. A person who has gone through rigorous ethical and moral disciplines followed by right knowledge, right action, non-attachment, and devotional meditation on the Personal God (*Vishnu*), becomes fit for release or moksha through Ishwara's loving grace. *Sayujya Mukti* is of two kinds as described in *Shri Chaitanya Charitamrita*:

- (i) *Brahma Sayujya* – One is to merge in the *Brahman* or *Brahmajyoti* which is the spiritual effulgence from the body of the Lord. Here the soul exists simply as a spiritual spark experiencing *brahmananda* that is freedom from the material cycle of birth and death.
- (ii) *Ishvara Sayujya* – One is to merge into the body of the Lord directly like *Shishupala's* soul and is considered even more ghastly by the devotees. Because when we merge in the impersonal effulgence of the Lord, some great devotees can come there and save us and make us qualified to go to the *Vaikuntha* planets to directly serve the Lord. But when the soul merges in the body of the Lord, the soul is doomed to never achieve direct devotional service to the Lord.

#### 5. *Krama mukti or Avantara Mukti*

*Krama mukti* or *avantara mukti* means liberation through stages. A person who has intensely meditated on *Saguna Brahman* using the sacred sound symbol *Aum* or other prescribed methods of meditation goes to *Brahma-loka* after death. There he attains the knowledge of *Nirguna Brahman*. When the entire universe is dissolved at the end of the kalpa, he becomes one with *Brahman* and is not born again. This is called *krama-mukti* or *avantara-mukti*.

#### 6. *Vishishtadvaita Moksha*

Those who believe in this school believe that moksha means living blissfully in *vaikuntha*, which is the realm of the Personal God after the death of the devotee. A person who has attained *moksha* lives blissfully in *vaikuntha* in a spiritual body in the presence of God. He/she acquires many divine powers such as omniscience, etc., but unlike God he/she cannot create, sustain or dissolve the world. In spite of the exalted state, the devotee has to remain subservient to God. They also believe that *Karma Yoga* and *Jnana Yoga* are only aids to *Bhakti Yoga*. One can be liberated from the bondage of *samsara* only through God's grace. They suggest that *Bhakti Yoga* practices are the only means of obtaining divine grace.

#### 7. *Purva- Mimamsa Mukti*

Devotees achieve moksha through the right performance of rituals as prescribed by the Vedas. Some suggest that the liberated soul goes to heaven (after death) and enjoys heavenly bliss forever. Others suggest that *moksha* is a state devoid of the possibility of rebirth. You are free from pain and suffering. They do not consider *moksha* as a state of heavenly bliss.

#### 8. *Apavarga Mukti*

*Liberation* or *Apavarga* is a separation from all qualities. Liberation is a state beyond pleasure, happiness, pain, or any experience whatsoever. It is achieved by cultivating ethical virtues and acquiring the right knowledge of reality. After liberation, there is no rebirth.

*Moksha* is described in the following ways in various schools of Hinduism:

### 1. *Jivan Mukti/ Videha Mukti in Advaita School*

Some Hindus, especially those who follow the *Advaita* School of Philosophy, believe that one can have liberation from samsara even when alive. According to them, a spiritual aspirant has to first go through various moral and ethical practices, worship (upasana) of the Personal God, etc. These observances gradually purify his mind and make it ready for intense meditation on the Impersonal Divine Reality (*Nirguna Brahman*).

The intense meditation enables the devotees to attain a condition known as *atmajnana* or the knowledge of inner Divine Self. *Atmajnana* destroys the ignorance (*avidya*) that covers the knowledge of the reality. As soon as his ignorance is annihilated, the person will be released and becomes a *jivanmukta* (one who has had *jivanmukti*).

After attaining *jivanmukti* a person can no longer think of himself or herself as an embodied being. The body and the rest of the world appears illusory to a *jivanmukta*. The illusory body will continue to exist as long as the *prarabdha karma* lasts. When the *prarabdha* is exhausted and the illusory body dies, the *jivanmukta* attains his disembodied release called *videha-mukti*.

### 2. *Sadyomukti*

*Sadyomukti* means "immediate release." *Sadyomukti* is another way of getting *moksha* for those who believe in *jivanmukti*. According to this view, a *jivanmukta* may totally lose interest in his illusory body immediately after attaining *jivanmukti*. As a result, his body drops off in a matter of days causing his *sadyomukti*.

It is also possible that after attaining *atmajnana*, these liberated souls can no longer identify with their bodies, which along with the rest of the world have become illusory and unreal. So for them, their bodies are not really there and thus they attain *sadyomukti*.

### 3. *Kaivalya Moksha in Sankhya School*

This form of *moksha* is suggested by the Sankhya School of Philosophy of Hinduism. They suggest that the soul or the spirit is *purusha* (pure consciousness), and the body-mind complex is an evolved form of unconscious primordial matter known as *prakriti*. *Prakriti* functions by borrowing consciousness from *purusha*.

*Purusha* gets tied down or bonded by *aviveka* - *purusha*'s false identification with *prakriti* and its evolved products like mind, body, etc. Such false identification is caused by *purusha*'s ignorance. While in bondage, *purusha* suffers mental and physical pain because of its false identification with the mind-body complex.

In order to get rid of the false identification and consequent pain and suffering, *purusha* must acquire the knowledge known as *viveka-jnana*. When *purusha* learns *viveka-jnana*, it realizes that as spirit it is completely different and distinct from *prakriti* and the associated mind-body system. When this happens, the devotees will experience the complete cessation of suffering and pain. Thus *viveka-jnana* causes *purusha*'s *moksha* by disentangling *purusha* from *prakriti*.

There are five kinds of *mukti* or liberation described in the *Shrimad Bhagavatam*:

*salokya-sarshiti-samipyas-arupyaikatvam apy uta  
diyamanam na grihnanti vina mat-sevanam janah<sup>1</sup>*

*Srimad-Bhagavatam*

Sri Kapiladeva said, *O My dear Mother! Despite being offered the five types of liberation known as salokya, samipyas, sarupya, sarshiti, and ekatva, My pure devotees don't accept them. They only accept My transcendental loving service.*<sup>2</sup>

*Advaita* school of *Vedanta* literally means 'not two' or 'not dual', and whose major thinker was *Shankara*. The group of texts discussed in most detail is the *Upanishads*, and the varied ways in which that text deals with the links between *brahman* and the individual soul, and the former's links with the universe. The term 'non-dual' is based on the idea that reality is one and not to be differentiated. This reality is *brahman*, divine power, knowledge of which leads to *moksha* or liberation. The crucial notion here is of a hierarchy of levels of viewing reality. *Brahman* is available to a degree at each level of reality, but really it exists without any attributes at all. The common idea that we are separated from reality is due to human ignorance, *maya* or *avidya*, the illusions that persist as a result of our apparent individuality. One of the ways of cementing us in this ignorance is by trying to escape from it, since such effort means action, and action implies the acquisition of karmic traces (*karma*) and merely deepens bondage.

One view offered by *Advaita* was that *brahman* is both identical and different from the individual soul and the world. In itself it is entirely one, but within that unity resides the ability to comprehend an infinite variety. This is plausible if one sees creation

as not the production of entirely new things, but rather the instantiation of aspects that already exist within the *brahman*. One of the interesting implications of this view is that it suggests a dual strategy to liberation, which is going to be neither entirely through following one's moral and religious obligations, nor through acquiring knowledge, but in some combination of the two. The former strategy helps to bring about detachment from the influences of the world, while the latter encourages acknowledgement of the oneness of reality, and so leads to the ending of ignorance.

The progress of this attempted solution was brought to an end by Shankara, who argued that all it does is to restate the original problem without contributing to its solution. How can one thing encompass both similarity and dissimilarity? These are contradictory concepts and claiming that they both characterize the same subject is to involve oneself in self-contradiction. Shankara agrees that whatever the Upanishads say must be true, but that the references made to the diversity of reality are not an account of what is deeper reality. All diversity is in itself an illusion. On the other hand, it does not follow that the world itself is unreal, since it constitutes a stream of appearances which do depend on a principle of reality.

We need to distinguish between two sorts of unreality, one where an object is mistaken for something that it is not, and this is different from the case where we take ordinary experience to be ultimate reality, which it is not when compared with the one principle of reality, *Brahman*, itself. The individual self is not illusory in the first sense, since it is *Brahman* appearing to us in a particular way, in the only way that would make sense to us given our physical and mental constitution. Seeing *Brahman* in this way leads to errors about its real nature, but none the less it gives us a glimpse of that real nature. What we need to do is to work from where we are to gain a deeper idea of where the self genuinely originates. We have to make a distinction between the status of the self and the world, for while the latter may be illusory, the former is not similarly illusory, since if it were, there would be no prospect of the liberation of the self.<sup>3</sup>

The doctrine then is that *Brahman* is the one reality which manifests itself in two ways, one as the world and another as the individual self. The former manifestation is an illusory aspect of *Brahman*, while the latter is *brahman* itself, although under the distorting aspect of the illusory universe. We should not see this link between *Brahman* and the world as causal, since causal relations only obtain between empirical phenomena. Physical

change means that one thing becomes part of something else, but is not entirely destroyed, nor is the new thing entirely new, since it came about through the causal efficacy of something else, which remains part of the new thing. Although the universe is *maya* and so unreal, it is not incomprehensible. By contrast with the Sankhya-Yoga metaphysics, the principle of the material is not real. It is not unreal either, since it is influenced by reality, and there is no point in looking to matter itself as the ground of the physical universe. On the other hand, it obviously has a part to play in such an explanation, but not an ultimate role. The ultimate ground is of course Brahman. When we deny the reality of the world, all that we are doing is denying its reality apart from its origins in brahma. The latter in itself does not change, but without it there would be no experience of physical change. The position is even more complicated than might immediately appear to be the case in that *Brahman* is really neither simple nor diverse, but is entirely without features.<sup>4</sup>

Sankara identified the consciousness with *Brahman*, reality. What we normally think of as consciousness is merely an effect of it, though, and the 'I' that lies at the basis of experience is in itself beyond apprehension. On the *Advaita* approach, this brahman or *atman* is the basic self of everything, and is the same for everything. As a result of ignorance, we tend to identify the self with objects in the world of matter, and we do not appreciate how distinct the real self is. It is easy for us to think that the empirical self which we can observe through and in our experience is the real self, but this is an error. We can appreciate the nature of the error by considering that the empirical self cannot understand itself, since there is always an aspect of self that remains outside the object of knowledge. This transcendental self is immediate, since if it were to be an object of consciousness itself an infinite regress would be created. Consciousness in itself is there all the time, and is not in the objects of that consciousness. Consciousness is completely independent, and does not need another consciousness to function, nor does its operation require the object of consciousness.

The analogy of consciousness with light was often drawn, since light is not dependent on the objects illuminated by it, as compared with those objects themselves. Objects can only be noticed if they are lit up, as it were, while light itself requires nothing to light it up, since it is itself the basis for illumination. The Advaita and Vishishtadvaita schools both accept that the self manifests itself at the source of our knowledge, but they differ on its precise nature. According to the former, the transcendental self is equivalent to

consciousness, while for the latter the self is an immortal and individual knowing subject. *Vishishtadvaita* argues that the self cannot just be consciousness, since consciousness requires something to be conscious. Consciousness also has to have an object it can be directed at, and this is a lower form of consciousness that exists at the level of karma. Once we achieve liberation, this sort of consciousness disappears into the transcendental consciousness and we are left with a soul that knows itself and is concerned with nothing else.<sup>5</sup>

In the Vedas, idea about *Moksa* is hardly clear. Heaven, a place of eternal pleasure and rejoice, is the highest good of life. It is in the Upanisads that we first get an idea about *Moksa*. Here sometimes *Moksa* is understood as an identity of self with the *Brahman*, the ultimate reality, and sometimes as likeness of the self with God. The *Brhadaranyaka Upanisad* describes the state of *Moksa* thus: "As a man in the embrace of his beloved wife knows nothing without or within, so the person when in the embrace of the Intelligent self knows nothing without or within. That, verily, is his form in which his desire is fulfilled, in which the self is his desire, in which he is without desire, free from any sorrow." Gaudapada in his *Karika on Mandukya Upanisad* gives an account of *Moksa* which is more thoroughly a state of absorption into the universal nature of *Brahman*: "As on the destruction of the jar etc. the ether enclosed in the jar etc. merges with the *akasa*, even so the individual merges into the universal spirit." But the *Mandukya* itself says at another place that by liberation the soul attains likeness with the Divine.<sup>6</sup>

### **Concept of *Moksha* in Buddhism**

Regarding to *Moksa* as the ultimate destiny, Buddhism is generally recognised as having a negative concept of *Moksa*. Buddhism terms liberation as *Nirvana* which literally means 'cooling down' or 'blowing out'. The meaning itself shows that *Nirvana* is basically a negative concept. The blowing out (or cooling down) means here the blowing out (or cooling down) of the fire of passions. It is well-known that according to Buddhism it is the passions which are the root cause of bondage or suffering. So when the passions are blown out, liberation is attained. With the cooling down of passions, actions cease bearing fruits and consequently the cycle of birth and death stops. And that is really the complete cessation of suffering, which is the true nature of *Nirvana*. But according to some, *Nirvana* is not merely a negative state. They point out that when the fire of passions cools down, it is quite natural that a state of perfect peace and equanimity will be achieved and this is a

positive achievement. Not only that, some quite unambiguously believe that *Nirvana* brings positive bliss. *Nibbanam paramam sukham*, says the *Dhammapada*. This state of happiness is unique, which cannot be described in words.<sup>7</sup>

*Nirvana* is a compound of the prefix ni[r]- (ni, nis, nih) which means "out, away from, without", and the root va[na] (in Pali vati) which can be translated as "blowing" as in "blowing of the wind".<sup>8</sup> *Nirvana* is the state of being free from suffering. It is blowing out the fires of greed, hatred, and delusion. The Lord Buddha says that ignorance (*avijja*) is the main cause of suffering. It is by cutting *avijja* by the sword of wisdom a person truly attains *Nibbana*. The Buddha said—

*When you have learned this, to be freed from the bond of existence you must cut down ignorance with all your efforts, for it is the root of pain. Then, set free from the bonds of the prison-house of existence, you will possess as Arhats natures perfectly pure. You shall attain Nirvana.*<sup>9</sup>

*Nirvana* is perhaps the most mysterious concept in Buddhism. The Lord Buddha himself has denied the positive definition of *Nirvana* as it is impossible to put in the words. No senses can feel or comprehend it. The only way to understand *Nirvana* is insight meditation. Ven. Dhammapiya correctly says, "No single expression in any language can fully cover the true meaning of *Nibbanic* experience without practice. The mere interpretations sometimes mislead readers to absorb different meanings." Trying to explain nirvana is somewhat like trying to explain the taste of sugar to one who has never tasted it, or trying to explain a color to one who is and was born blind. It is difficult, if not impossible. *Nirvana* is beyond words, logic and reasoning. It is easier and safer to speak of what *Nirvana* is not. It isn't nothingness or annihilation of self, because the dharma teaches there is no self to be annihilated.

What is that motivates a person for *moksha*? The final reason why worldly success cannot satisfy us completely is that its achievements are ephemeral. Wealth, fame, and power do not survive bodily death—"You can't take it with you," as we routinely say. And since we cannot, this keeps these things from satisfying us wholly, for we are creatures who can envision eternity and must instinctively rue by contrast the brief purchase on time that worldly success commands. Life holds other possibilities. To see what these are we must return to the question of what people want. Thus far, Hinduism and Buddhism both would say, we have been answering this question too superficially.

Pleasure, success, and duty are never humanity's ultimate goals. At best they are means that we assume will take us in the direction of what we really want. What we really want are things that lie at a deeper level. Only the ultimate salvation could be the answer.

In our attempt to explain it, we use words which have limited meanings. It isn't heaven; it isn't purgatory, and it isn't the end. Nirvana is the Absolute Reality, which is realized through the highest mental training and wisdom. It is beyond the reach of the spoken or written word.

Immediately after the realization of Nirvana and Buddhahood, the Buddha explains to his five disciples in these words—

*It occurred to me, monks that this dhamma I have realized is deep, hard to see, hard to understand, peaceful and sublime, beyond mere reasoning, subtle and intelligible to the wise. . . Hard, too, is it to see this calming of all conditioned things, the giving up of all substance of becoming, the extinction of craving, dispassion, cessation, Nibbana. And if I were to teach the dhamma and others were not to understand me that would be weariness, a vexation for me."*

The Buddha described *Nirvana* as the perfect peace of the state of mind that is free from craving, anger and other afflictive states (*kilesas*). The subject is at peace with the world, has compassion for all and gives up obsessions and fixations. This peace is achieved when the existing volitional formations (*samskaras*) are pacified, and the conditions for the production of new ones are eradicated. In *Nibbana* the root causes of craving and aversion has been extinguished such that one is no longer subject to human suffering (*dukkha*) or further states of rebirths in *samsara*. In simple words, *Nirvana* in Buddhism means "state beyond sorrows," or a "state of freedom from cyclic existence."

Nirvana in Buddhism is a state of living in which mind is free from any wrong thoughts as anger, lust or worldly desires. Thus, *Nirvana* is a mode of living in which mind and soul are found in complete peace and solitude. In Buddhism, *Nirvana* is described as 'deathless'. *Nirvana* is not a state of physical or worldly happiness; rather it is spiritual happiness which is consistent and immortal.

By the means of meditation, the Buddha realized the wisdom that accompanies enlightenment. Traditionally, he is said to have realized enlightenment through the cultivation of the Four Trances and the Threefold Studies Enlightenment, however, is not equivalent to the Four Trances or Stages of Meditation. The definition of Buddhist

enlightenment as “seeing things as they actually are” suggests the dynamic nature of Buddhist meditation. The mind was considered to have an innate wisdom. Because its basic nature involved thought, when the mind was quieted and focused and concentration strengthened, then superior form of wisdom would naturally be manifested. Both Buddhist meditation and yoga were means of producing wisdom, but since they employed different methods of concentration, the resultant wisdom probably differed. The wisdom produced from Enlightenment which was realized through Buddhist meditation was described as ‘seeing the *Dharma*.’

The Buddha had his progress through more profound meditative states as he passed through the Four Trances. These were probably the natural results of his many years of training. This temperament seems to have been suited to meditation from the time he was young, and the training he received from his early teachers *Arada* and *Udraka*. The term *dhyana* has been used since the early *Upanisads* with the meaning of meditation<sup>10</sup>, but the Four Trances should probably be regarded as a new meditation system developed by the Buddhists. The four trances were as a whole a dynamic way of concentrating the mind. The wisdom received through the trances was not a mystical form of intuition. Rather, it allowed a person to see things as they actually were (are) in a rational and free manner. With that wisdom, the practitioner could know truth and firmly adhere to that truth. When he could not be shaken or moved from that truth, be bear, pain, or passions, he would realize enlightenment. Because the mind was free from the fetters of defilements and passions, this state was called ‘emancipation’ or ‘salvation’ (*vimoksha*, *vimukti*). Some scholars have described salvation as freedom of the mind from afflictions and nirvana as peace.

The teaching of the four stages of enlightenment is a central factor in the early Buddhist schools, and also in the surviving *Theravada* school of Buddhism. An ordinary person, or *puthujjana* (both *Pali* and *Sanskrit*: *prithujana*), is trapped in the endless changes of samsara. Doing good or evil as influenced by his desires and aversions, an ordinary person is born in higher or lower states of being (heavens or hells) according to their karmas (actions). One who follows the Buddhist path and experiences the truth to the extent of cutting of a number of the ten mental fetters (*Pali*: *samyojana*), becomes an *ariya puggala*, a "noble person" who will surely become an *Arahant* in the near future (within seven lives).

The four stages of enlightenment in Buddhism are the four degrees of approaching to full enlightenment as an *Arahant* which a person can attain in this life. The four stages are:

i. *Sotapanna*

The first stage is that of *Sotapanna* (Pali and Sanskrit: *Srotapanna*). Literally it means "one who enters (*apadyate*) the stream (*sotas*)." The stream is the Noble Eightfold Path regarded as the highest *Dharma*. The stream-enterer is also said to have "opened the eye of the Dharma" (*dhammacakkhu*, Sanskrit: *dharmacaksus*). A stream-enterer is guaranteed enlightenment after no more than seven successive rebirths, and possibly in fewer. The stream-enterer can also be sure that he will not be reborn in any of the unhappy states or rebirths (an animal, a *preta*, or in hell). He will only be reborn as a human being, or in a heaven. The stream-enterer must have an intuitive grasp of Buddhist doctrine (*sammaditthi*, "right view"), has complete confidence or *Saddha* in the Three Jewels of Buddha, Dhamma, and *Sangha*, and has good moral behaviour (*Sila*).

ii. *Sakadagami*

The second stage is that of the *Sakadaagami*. Literally it means "one who once comes (*agacchati*)". The once-returner will return to the human world only one more time. He will get nirvana in that life.

iii. *Anagami*

The third stage is that of the *Anagami*. Literally it means "one who does not (an-) come (*agacchati*)". The non-returner does not come back into human existence, or any lower world, after death. Instead, he is reborn in one of the worlds of the *Rupadhatu* called the *Shuddhavasa* worlds, or "Pure Abodes". Here he will attain *Nirvana* (Pali: *Nibbana*). Some of them are reborn a second time in a higher world of the Pure Abodes, but in no case are born into a lower state. An *Anagami* abandons the five lower fetters that bind the mind to the cycle of rebirth. An *Anagami* is thus partially enlightened. He is on the way to perfect and complete Enlightenment.

iv. *Arahant*

The fourth stage is that of *Arahant*. The person is a fully enlightened human being who has abandoned all fetters. The person, upon decease (Sanskrit: *Parinirvana*,

*Pali: Parinibbana*), will not be reborn in any world because he has wholly abandoned *samsara*.

The *Pali* Canon of Buddhism contains many perspectives on *nirvana*. For one, it is linked to seeing the empty nature of phenomena. It is also presented as a radical reordering of consciousness and unleashing of awareness. Scholar Herbert Guenther states that with *nirvana* "the ideal personality, the true human being" becomes reality.<sup>11</sup>

Various *Mahayana* schools differ much in the interpretation of *Nirvana* from *Theravada*. *Mahayanists* believed that the '*parinibbana*' of the Buddha did not result in the total extinction of his '*samsara*'. Rather he entered the '*apratisthita-nirvana*' in which he continued to work for the salvation of all beings who were suffering in '*samsara*'. This means the Buddha would have retained one or more of the '*skandas*' after '*parinibbana*'. The assumption that the Buddha could continue to exist after '*parinibbana*' in an existence that consists of the '*skandas*' is contradicted from the traditional teachings of the Buddha who said that suffering resides in '*skandas*'. There cannot be any suffering after getting *Nirvana*. This envisages the total extinction of '*samsaric skandas*'.

That's why *Theravada* Buddhists do not accept the *Mahayana* theory of *Nirvana*. This *Mahayana* theory of *Nirvana* is linked to their '*Sunyata*' (emptiness) theory which is not acceptable to *Theravada* Buddhists. The word '*sunya*' is used in *Theravada* Buddhism with a different meaning to that of *Mahayana*, particularly the viewpoint of the *Madyamikas*. The *Chula-sunyata Sutra* of the *Majjima Nikaya* deals with the significance of the term '*sunya*' and its connection with the notion of '*Nirvana*'. In this *sutra*, the Buddha teaches that the cessation of suffering depends on the cessation of being and becoming. There is a passage in this *sutra* which describes emptiness ('*sunyata*') with an analogy of the forest. It is clear that the world is empty of self or what belongs to a self. For the *Theravada* Buddhists, this did not mean that the world itself was unreal or literally void, but that there is no self or soul in a person or sentient being. This is the '*sunyata*' theory in *Theravada* and this is totally different from that of '*Mahayana*'.

The *Mahayanists* rejected this interpretation of emptiness ('*sunya*') or to be precise that it did not go far enough. According to their thoughts, even the constituent elements known as '*Dhammas*' are unreal and void. As mentioned above, this idea could be traced back to the very early *Mahayana* texts like '*Asta-sahasrika-prajna-paramita*' which states that all *Dhammas* are unoriginated and non-existent. Although the notion of

emptiness is significant in most versions of Buddhism, it is crucial to Mahayana Buddhism. The argument goes that everything is without a nature, and so is empty. *Nirvana* or enlightenment is also empty, since it is realized through the acquisition of an empty consciousness. If everything is empty, both the material world and the perfect world, then we are also empty from an essential point of view, and we each share in this quality of being *sunya* or empty.

The Mahayana uses this as an argument that the Buddha nature is in everyone, because everyone shares emptiness. If the Buddha nature is empty, it is the same sort of emptiness in everyone. How can we attain an understanding of emptiness, especially when we are to engage in a process that in itself is far from empty, but involves a great deal of theory and argument which is designed to help us to appreciate the emptiness of everything? The answer is that the words of the teaching are distinct from the teaching itself, and the words can lead us close to the point where we have to rely on ourselves and our experiences alone, to blend with the emptiness of the essence of the world which is the source of our own emptiness.

The *Madhyamaka* school emphasized the emptiness of the key ideas of philosophy, such as the self, causality, motion, time, *karma*, and even *nirvana* and the Buddha. It seems likely that the stress on emptiness was designed to oppose the views of the *Abhidharma* school which often implies that there is some reality in the basic categories of the universe, and of course it might be used to counter all the 'orthodox' Hindu notions of what essentially exists. *Nagarjuna* and his followers thought that compromising on the notion of reality was going against the principles of Buddhism. After all, they argue that to appreciate the emptiness of everything is the same as absolute knowledge, and the objective of religion itself. As one might expect, the doctrine of emptiness came in for a lot of criticism, which *Nagarjuna* tries to rebut in his works. For example, it was argued that if everything is empty, then the thesis that everything is empty is itself empty, and so has no force. On the other hand, if the thesis is not empty, then it is not the case that everything is empty. If everything can be negated, then so can the thesis presented by *Nagarjuna*. Many similar objections are directed against him, some linked to the problems of self-referentiality and others questioning the accuracy with which the thesis fits in with Buddhist principles. His general reply is that it is important to distinguish

between relative and absolute reality. Everything, he argues, is absolutely empty, but relatively real, since we have evidence for the latter from our experience.

*Nagarjuna* accepts that in absolute terms all arguments are empty, but on the relative level it is acceptable to use them to show that one cannot stay at that level if one is going to make progress. There is a nice medical analogy which points out that if medicine is used to cure an illness, the medicine itself must also leave the system after having carried out its restorative function. The doctrine of emptiness-- should be used to cure ourselves of belief in the absolute reality of what we experience, and then it also should be expunged from our conceptual system, in just the same way that the Buddha after enlightenment was reluctant to speak and teach any more. The paradoxical strategy of claiming that everything is empty is none the less impossible to state, since it is self-refuting. But its supporters have a point in arguing that, although the argument cannot be proposed, it could still be valid, although not once stated. In any case, one could always hold the emptiness doctrine as applying to the nature of reality, but not as describing our experience of the material world.

According to the *Mahayana* tradition, we should distinguish between the form of *nirvana* achieved by someone like a monk, and the form of enlightenment available to everyone as shown by the Buddha and the *bodhisattvas*. There is a general *Mahayana* confidence that enlightenment is widely available, and can be achieved within one person's lifetime. This is often accompanied by a theory that all beings have the Buddha nature, or even are *Buddhas*. This approach was taken to its logical conclusion in China by Chan (Zen), who argued that we are all Buddhas and all can achieve enlightenment suddenly. That is, we all have the Buddha nature, and we can use it to adopt the correct attitude to the nature of reality, and once we do this we can break with samsara and immediately become enlightened.

According to *Yogachara* Buddhism, enlightenment can be achieved if we transfer unenlightened mental impulses away from ourselves through the following of religious practices. There are various approaches to how enlightenment may be realized; some arguing that what is required is gradual progress through many lives, while Zen thinkers are in favour of sudden enlightenment, since only the present really exists. But their theory was more complex than this, and they also emphasized the importance for enlightenment of appropriate deeds. The point that Zen masters made was that everyone had the Buddha

nature in the sense that everyone had it potentially. Everyone may at one time be the slave of illusion, but since they all innately possess the Buddha nature, they can in principle and in practice throw off this ignorance and acquire enlightenment.

The *Madhyamaka* school interprets enlightenment slightly differently, in that it tries to wean us away from our attachment to concepts, which it sees as a form of craving or desire. Of course, the route to doing away with concepts is through the use of concepts, and so this form of Buddhism is fond of self-subversive riddles and stories. Concepts only work at one level, and at a higher level of truth we have to transcend concepts if we are to achieve enlightenment. This form of enlightenment can never be expressed in language, which means that language can only take one part of the way to enlightenment. The final step has to be something that one does after receiving hints, in the form of paradoxical slogans and possibly even jokes.

The key advantage *Vajrayana* Buddhism claims to provide is an accelerated path to enlightenment. *Nirvana* is sometimes described as complete and perfect sanity. In *Vajrayana* this is achieved through use of tantra techniques, which are practical aids to spiritual development, and esoteric transmission. Earlier schools might provide insight meditation as ways to achieve *nirvana*. For the *Vajrayaists*, the technique of meditation is slow and only helpful in achieving to the stage of *Arahatship* and not to become the Buddha. So they call it the lower wheel (*Hinayana*). *Vajrayana* techniques make full enlightenment or Buddhahood possible in a much shorter timeframe, perhaps in a single lifetime. *Vajrayana* Buddhists do not claim that *Theravada* or *Mahayana* practices are in any way invalid, only that they represent slower paths. It should also be noted that the goal of the *Mahayana* and *Vajrayana* is the attainment of Buddhahood, whereas the goal for *Theravada* practice is liberation from the cycle of rebirth in *Nirvana*. *Vajrayana* relies on various tantric techniques for the realization of *Nirvana* which is different from the *Theravadins* spiritual insight practice of *Vipassana*.

## **Critical Comparison regarding the concepts of *Moksha* in Hinduism and Buddhism**

### **Notion of Death in Hinduism and Buddhism**

While discussing the concept of *moksha* in Hinduism and Buddhism, obviously, it is very important to understand the notion of death in these two religions. In Hindu

philosophy, death is described in a number of different ways. According to *the Bhagavad-Gita*, those selves that have managed to free themselves join *Krishna*, yet remain distinct from him. Selves that are not freed are reborn repeatedly, until liberation is finally achieved, although there is a self that is not touched by this involvement in *samsara*, the cycle of birth and rebirth. There are two ways of looking at the self, *atman* or the self that is in contact with *brahman*, absolute reality, and *jiva*, or the temporal aspect of this unchangeable self. Death is really of little consequence, it is going to take place many times within the cycle of change, and the more that the person can disregard it the more likely he or she is to transcend the cycle eventually and attain moksha or escape. Of course, the materialists such as the *Lokayata* have few problems in discussing death, which is merely a rearrangement of the material parts of the human being, leading to the dissolution of the person.<sup>12</sup>

There are many differences; one of the main differences between the role of death in Buddhist philosophy and that in Hinduism is that in the former there is no eternal self that continues through many changes of the material aspect of the person. On the other hand, Buddhist thinkers certainly do not want to argue that nothing remains after death. What lasts is *karma*, the consequences of our actions and the actions of others, and what we should do to try to escape from this process is to abandon our trust in the reality of the world and the existence of a real single self. We seem to remember aspects of our past lives, but these are not really aspects of our past lives, but combinations of moments that took place to something linked loosely with whom we are now. Death is not very significant in that it is going to lead to the dissolution of the particular combinations of impulses and motives and replace these with another combination within a new form. If enlightenment is achieved, then death is a significant event, since it stops the whole process of rebirth. Death is always a significant event in the round of rebirth, since it is the point of transition from one body to another, but it has no importance in itself. The Buddha compares the body and the mind to a clay pot and the oil in it. When it is thrown into a pool of water, the pot breaks up and disintegrates, but the oil rises to the surface. The body is only the container of the chitta or mind, and the fact that we die is merely a reflection of the truth that everything that is created will come to an end.

Buddha says that, in every moment of our life, we are dying. The I of that moment dies, never to be reborn. Yet despite the fact that in this sense my life consists of nothing

but funerals, I do not conceive of myself as dying each moment, for I do not equate myself with my individual moments. I endure through them—experiencing them, without being identical with any of them in its singularity. Hinduism carries this notion a step further. It posits an extensive self that lives successive lives in the way a single life lives successive moments.

A story from the life of *Sankara* is very much illustrative in explaining the *advaita* philosophy of *Sankara*. According to tradition, *Sankara* met his guru *Govinda* at the ‘tender age’ of eight and under the following circumstances. As the child knocked at the door of the great master [the reply from inside was], ‘Who art thou?’ Little Shankar replied, ‘Thou!’ The teacher recognized the disciple and opened the door.

This traditional story is illustrative of the main thrust of *Sankara’s advaita*: non-difference (*avaitavada*), or stated in the positive, identity. To the question ‘Who are you?’ *Sankara’s* answer is the simple but devastating, ‘I am you’. Here, the aspirant’s question once again must be ‘How can that be?’ The non-dual statement of identity proclaimed by the young *Sankara* is consistent with the *Upanisadic* insistence on the unity of reality (*brahman*) and the identity of self (*atman*) with reality. In the mature *Sankara* teaching this powerful identification becomes absolute and serves to form the cornerstone of his non-dualist *Vedanta*.<sup>13</sup>

Reality (*brahman*) is by nature non-originated and undifferentiated, ‘One without a second’. *Atman*, by its very nature, is, according to *Advaita* teachings, identical with *brahman*: ‘This *brahman* is the self’. This identity is not produced by any change in the nature of *brahman* or *atman*, for a thing cannot change its nature; hence, to be identical, the nature of reality (*brahman*) and the nature of *atman* must always be the same. (Perhaps it is better to say that there is only one nature to things, that of *brahman*.)<sup>14</sup>

### **Rejection of Moksha in Charvaka School**

The *charvakas*, also called *Lokayata*, or the materialists in Hindu philosophy, rejected any notion of valid knowledge, so that philosophy, which “according to the common Indian view ought to be a discipline of life, ceases here to be even a discipline of the mind”.<sup>15</sup> The *charvaka* doctrine is summed by *Krishna Mishra* in his allegory *Prabodha-chandrodaya*—“*Lokayata* is always the only *sastra*; in it only perceptual evidence is authority; the elements are earth, water, fire, and air; wealth and enjoyment are

the objects of human existence. Matter can think. There is no other world. Death is the end of all.”<sup>16</sup>

The charvakas outrightly rejects any concept of enlightenment or moksha. Since, there remains nothing of a being after death, it is futile to talk of *mukti*. It is not only useless, but totally a wrong way of living the only life a being enjoys. For them there is no sufficient proof for the existence of any valid knowledge and hence enlightenment thereof. Nor is internal perception the means, since you cannot establish that the mind has any power to act independently towards an external object since all allow that it is dependent on the external senses...Nor can inference be the means of the knowledge of the universal proposition, since in the case of this inference we should also require another reference to establish it, and so on, and hence would arise the fallacy of an ad infinitum retrogression.<sup>17</sup>

The only contradiction in *Charvaka* is the rejection of all sorts of knowledge. Moksha is the rejection itself that requires a ground or some sort of inference without which one cannot deny or reject. So, *Charvaka* doctrine is paradoxical because it cannot provide any kind of proof for its rejection. The philosophy of non-duality of *Advaita Vedanta* has occupied the dominant position in Indian philosophy from the time of *Sankara* (c. 7th–8th centuries) to the present day. The *Upanisads* represent the culmination of a great shift in Vedic thought from the external, ritualistic worship of *brahman* to an internal, subjective quest for and subsequent inner identification with *brahman*. According to *Upanisadic* definitions, *brahman* admits of no distinctions or divisions (‘One without a second’); is both being (One) and knowing (intelligence) and is identical with the self, in both the objective sense (‘This *brahman* is the self’) and the subjective sense (‘I am *brahman*’). Hence, we can know *brahman* by the realization that That, i.e., *brahman*, is what we are.

Although the two religions talk differently regarding the ultimate liberation, but the essence is the same. This is made clear in *Gita* by *Krishna*—

*Then his soul is a lamp whose light is steady, for it burns in a shelter where no winds come.*

*When the mind is resting in the stillness of the prayer of Yoga, and by the grace of the spirit sees the spirit and therein finds fulfillment.*

*Then the seeker knows the joys of eternity: a vision seen by reason far beyond what senses can see. He abides therein and moves not from truth.*<sup>18</sup>

Because his mind does not become restless with desires and also because he does work without an eye on the result, all his *karmas*/actions are like offerings to *Krishna* who is infinite (i.e. with no end). The soul of such a man is like a steady flame sheltered in the grace of *Krishna*. This verse is highly poetic and expresses excellence of devotion. The Lord Buddha also defined *Nirvana* as extinguishing of the energy, burning away of all the *samskaras*.

The two traditions of *Advaita Vedanta* of Hindu sage *Sankara* and Zen Buddhist philosophy have many similar aspects. According to *Advaita* and *Zen* philosophies, reality is fundamentally unconditioned and non-dual in nature, and that realization of this ‘true nature’ of things is the aim and goal of human life. As a corollary to this, both traditions claim that our ordinary dualistic way of experiencing the world does not give us true or direct knowledge of ‘the nature of things’, as our experience of reality is somehow distorted or filtered by conditions and structures that we falsely identify with reality itself.<sup>19</sup>

Both *Advaita* and *Zen* claim that spiritual awakening does not involve ‘adding anything new’ to the practitioner’s experience. Both philosophies claim that there is nothing to be gained from spiritual practice. Nevertheless, both traditions claim that there is a fundamental non-dual realization as to the ‘nature of things’, *dhamma*. In this context, the *Advaita* and *Zen* experiential spiritual quests can be said to be similarly framed. In the non-dual practice traditions of *Advaita Vedanta* and *Zen Buddhism*, engagement with a spiritual practice represents an ongoing process of applying oneself to a form of inquiry. In this form of inquiry, fundamental dimensions of what it is to be a human being are claimed to be revealed. Deconstructive spiritual inquiry in both traditions targets the primary dualisms of subject and object, cause and effect, and linear conceptions of space and time.

The *Advaitin* believe that ‘nothing ever happens’. For them, *brahman* cannot be experienced by merging with one polarization of a dichotomous relationship. As the beginningless and endless non-dual emanation that is the substratum ‘between thought’, *brahman* admits of no shadings or aspects of differentiated oppositions. That is, *atman-brahman*-identity is not a realization of identity as opposed to difference, nor is it a merging with reality as opposed to appearance. For *Advaita*, *atman-brahman*-identity is ever present and ‘just is’.<sup>20</sup>

*Brahman* is all-being with no relationship to the dichotomy of being and non-being. *Sunyata* of *Mahayana* Buddhism is empty non-being that is not dependent on the dichotomy of non-being and being. Both ‘ultimates’ are pointed out to students in the practice situation as being neither this nor that and both this and that. That is, *Brahman* and *sunyata* are not to be dualistically objectified as attainable. Zen practitioners report the ‘emptiness’ of things and *Advaita* practitioners report the ‘fullness’ of things; however, the experiential point that these insights reveal is that reality has no substantial existence. That is, reality cannot be reduced to any form of ontological objectification. The paradoxical ‘empty fullness’ of *brahman* or the ‘full emptiness’ of *sunyata* is experienced without contradiction. Deconstructive spiritual inquiry in both *Zen* and *Advaita* experientially ‘moves’ practitioners into this ‘space’ wherein the boundaries and barriers of conceptual thought and personal dualistic experiencing are felt to be lessened or undone and an already-present non-dual sense of ‘knowing’ is disclosed in the actual experiencing of the practitioner.

It is the aim of religion to lift us from our momentary meaningless existence to the significance and status of the eternal, to transform the chaos and confusion of life to that pure and immortal essence which is its ideal possibility. If the human mind so changes itself as to be perpetually in the glory of the divine light, if the human emotions transform themselves into the measure and movement of the divine bliss, if human action partakes of the creativity of the divine life, if the human life shares the purity of the divine essence, if only we can support this higher life, the long labour of the cosmic process will receive its crowning justification and the evolution of centuries unfold its profound significance. The divinizing of the life of man in the individual and the race is the dream of the great religions. It is the *moksha* of the Hindus, the nirvana of the Buddhists, the kingdom of heaven of the Christians.

Moksha is a spiritual realization. The Hindu *Dharma* says, Man does not live by bread alone, nor by his work, capital, ambition or power or relation to external nature. He lives or must live by his life of spirit. Moksha is self-emancipation, the fulfilment of the spirit in us in the heart of the eternal. This is what gives ultimate satisfaction, and all other activities are directed to the realization of this end.

Moksha can be apprehended through the practice of *yoga*. The practice of any one of the four *yogas* or disciplines, namely the *karma yoga*, *jnana yoga*, *raja yoga* and the

*Bhakti yoga*, can help us to realize moksha. Both *Advaita Vedanta* and *Bhakti* traditions emphasize the principle of non-duality (non- separation of individual and reality) and personified worship (god as love) respectively. One can overcome karma by realizing the self through a *nirvikalpa samadhi* and attain *mukti* (freedom) from rebirth. It is also possible to attain moksha through *bhakti* or love of the manifestations of *Shiva*, *Vishnu* or *Brahma*. If a person can attain *moksha* he can liberate himself from worldly sorrow and enjoy a state of high consciousness or supreme bliss. In this state he can transcend earthly phenomena and understand empirical reality such as the concept of time, space, matter, energy or *karma*. He can then see all these concepts as *maya* or illusion. The state of supreme bliss also leads to a state of *nirvana* where it is possible to destroy the ego or *nama-rupa* and reveal one's true identity. *Moksha* is therefore not a soteriological goal and cannot be equated to the concept of salvation as represented in Greek myths or Christian theology, but dissolution of the ego where even the final goal is annihilated. *Moksha* in Buddhism and Hinduism is not just a belief or a concept but a way of life.

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## Chapter Three

# Vajrayana School in Nepal

Vajrayana is special area of study within Buddhism. Vajrayana has special features in Buddhism in Centext of Nepal. There is a caste in Newar community called Bajracharya. This caste is like Brahamins of Hindu. Some of them are called Sakya too. In oher words, Sakya and Bajracharya are the priests of Buddhism community who are called Vikshu. It is interesting to note that boys froms Bajracharya and Sakya community take the oath of celibacy from early stage of their lives. They are trained to be vikshu and registered as members of ‘Vihar’<sup>1</sup> (Vihar: temple or prayer centre of Buddhas). Some of them may come in the worldly life and most of them remain bachelor throughout their lives.

In Nepal, in four places these Vihars are categoried-Kantipur, Lalitpur, Bhaktpur and Madhyapur Within the Kathmandu Valleys, these Vihars have similarities as well as differences. It is interesting to note that their is a democratic system in these Vihars for the selection of the top priest. In Vajrayana, it is called ‘chakreshwar’. It means to say that the leader of Buddhism is seniority. Chakreshwar is also called ‘Sanganayak’. It means to say that it is a leader of whole group. In Newari language, it is called ‘Thayata’<sup>2</sup> (Leader) Apart from this, there are regional Buddhist councils of Nepalese Vajrayana who keep on coordinating among these Vihars. There are eighteen prominent Vihars in Vajrayana in Nepal which have eighteen Chakreshwars, one head chakreshwar is selected on the basis of the some criteria of seniority. The most senior Chakreshawar is called in Newari language – “De Thyapa”. De means nation, thaya means leader.

This Vajrayani community has special contribution in the evolution of Buddhism in Nepal. For example, Vajrayana community has developed the various modes and methods of tantras and Yogas.

Tantric Buddhism is another aspect of Buddhism. Around 300 A.D., so many tantric works have come out from Buddhism. Vajrayana also is one of the tantric methods which describes in very comprehensive way to attain emancipation.

As Vajrayana is branch of Mahayana, it incorporates its basic philosophy *Permista Naya* (Parmita Path) and *Mantra Naya* (Mantra Path). These are two aspects of Mahayana way of Buddhism.

There is no historical proof to determine the exact date when Vajrayana was set up in Kathmandu. Some inscriptional evidences and refuges give hint of Vajrayana associated with Kathmandu valley. For example, the title 'bajracharya' which is of upper priest caste is found in Newar community. This title sounds some association with Vajrayana.

Buddhism is said to have been introduced into Nepal either by Gautam Buddha himself or by Emperor Ashoka and his daughter Charumati.<sup>1</sup> but the Tantric practice was also introduced in Nepal in its early phase as we find the concept of *Mandala*, *Manjushri*, *Malla*, and *Kalpa*. Similarly the erection of Swayombhu Chaitya also possesses the tantric concept. Moreover, also in the inscription of Licchavi period, the word Vajrayana is found.

Next, the arrival of great Buddhist philosopher Acharya Vasubandhu (4<sup>th</sup> century) is another evidence, that we can present, of the presence of tantric Buddhism or at least he can be considered as the propagator of tantric elements in Nepalese Buddhism.

As a fertile soil of faith and creed, Nepal seems to have attained real prominence as a strong supporter and propagator of the Buddhist faith (obviously tantric Buddhism) from the days of King Ansuvarma in the 7<sup>th</sup> century. He arranged his daughter (Bhrikuti's) marriage to the first powerful King of Tibet, Siron-btsam-sgam.<sup>2</sup> She took to Tibet the idol of Akshobhya along with her.<sup>3</sup>

The concept of Akshobhya Buddha is already found in the Guhya Samaja Tantras (2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> century) as a central figure.<sup>4</sup> This indicates that the cult of tantric Buddhism was prominent in the Nepalese Buddhist Society in those centuries. In the age of Sangharakshita (The tantric teacher of 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> century A.D.) strong ties of religious and cultural friendship appeared to have developed between these two (Nepal and Tibet) countries.<sup>5</sup>

India and Nepal have strong relation on behalf of Buddhist religion. There had always been an exchange of students and teachers as scholars between Nepal and the Buddhist universities of Bihar and Bengal. After the fall of the Pala and the Sena dynasty in Bengal and of the Karnataka dynasty of Tirhut to the successive waves of Muslim

invasion between the ninth and fourteenth centuries, tantric teachers of Buddhism other than Sangharakshita, Padmasambhava in eighth century and Atisa in the eleventh century came to Nepal and then went to Tibet.<sup>6</sup> Buddhist teachings flourished in Nepal with their contribution.

Most religious doctrines came from the Indian scholars. From the eleventh to the fourteenth century, Nepal became a testing ground for different systems for a festival of religious thought and practices imported from India. The influence of Brahminical reformist movement, led by Sankaracharya of south India, penetrated into Nepal at about the same time as the esoteric practices of Tantricism based on the earlier Saiva and Sakta cults and on Buddhist Mahayana formalism. Nepal became not only a focal point where these divergent religious practices converged, but also a melting pot of different kinds of religious thoughts and rituals which were transformed into the Nepali version of Vajrayanas.<sup>7</sup>

Thus, as a whole can be said that right from 4<sup>th</sup> century till fourteenth century Buddhism in the form of Vajrayana flourished in the Valley.

Buddhism in Nepal, especially in *Newar* society, is living through tantric Buddhist rituals. The spiritual leaders and the followers are both engaged in religious Buddhist observances. The seeds of rites and rituals sown by Mahasanghika monks were further nourished by tantric Buddhists. When Hiuen-Tsang visited Amaravati in 639 A.D., the place had developed from Mahasanghika community to a flourishing Mahayana centre and ritualistic worship had become part and parcel of monastic life.<sup>8</sup> Fahian's account of chariot festival in Pataliputra and Itsing's reference of Monastic rituals in Nalanda (67-695 A.D.) such as worship of Buddha images are the sufficient evidences of Mahasanghika monastic activities based on rituals.

A series of Buddha and Bodhisattvas were introduced in early Mahayanic period. In this connection in the wave of Vajrayana, five Buddhas and their consorts and more subordinate deities were introduced in Vajrayanic scriptures. In course of time, Yogic practices along with Mantras and Dharm were incorporated by Buddhist monks and followers according to their calibre and resources. Furthermore, the assurance of liberation in even one life through Yogic practice attracted more and more followers. Teachers and disciple tradition of Vajrayana made the practice of the philosophy of Buddhism easier for

laity to grasp and follow it. The laymen could not observe the secret and profound yogic practices. Thus, ritualism of those Yogic processes was introduced which took them gradually towards emancipation. John Locke (the contemporary specialist of Newar Buddhism) presents this idea regarding rituals on the basis of Giuseppe Tucci's. As the theory and practice of the Mandala, though it is possible to perform the Sadhana in a bare cave with little or no rituals, people differ and some are more inclined to ritual as a means of overcoming their ignorance and the Karmic-effects on their sins. For such people, the master developed a special class of Tantras- the Kriya Tantras, which are devoted to a much more complicated liturgy. Even in Kathmandu though the ritual played a subordinate role, it was a tool or psychological instrument which was used to help them for the realisation and enlightenment they were seeking.<sup>9</sup>

In the beginning of the each life cycle rituals and almost all monastic rituals, *Guru Mandala* rite is performed. The minute speculation of '*Guru Mandala*' confirms to some extent that the process of this particular ritual presents the thoughts and essence of Buddhism from very beginning to the latest development of tantric elements. Predominance of Mahayana Buddhism during the ritual can be speculated so far.

The performance of '*Guru*' Mandala rite begins with solemn promises. These promises are based on confession of sins which are followed by purification of body, speech and mind. Here not only Mahayanic thought but the primary ethics of Buddhism which were promulgated by the Buddha himself are revised and presented to make the people understand the primary steps towards perfect transcendental enlightenment. In this connection, the desirer who is trying to proceed in the way of enlightenment. He must try to help first entire being to gain liberation, only then he can attain enlightenment. The attempt of making entire being free from misery is undoubtedly based on early and later Mahayanic Scripture<sup>10</sup> which is full of compassionate feelings, when the Bodhisattva wishes to help all creatures to obtain liberation.

The six perfections of Bodhisattva are defined through ritualistic acts. The simple acts such as purifying and sweeping the place, removing tiny ants, arranging rites, concentrating on rites and drawing clear lines correspond six perfections. Though these are simple acts preformed during rituals but make the performer understand the essence of those perfections gradually.

Similarly repetition of universal compassion shows the seed of Mahayana in the heart of performer. Further introduction of Eight-fold path and observation of *Uposadha* are a way of teaching to the followers.

Five *Dhyani Buddhas* are the manifestations of Lord Buddha. The Lord, having seated in different *Samadhis* and having recited the different mantras, transformed himself in the forms of Tathagatas and placed them as his replicas in the different parts of the Mandala or magic circle.<sup>11</sup> In other Buddhist Tantric Scriptures the five *Dhyani Buddhas* represent the five 'Skandha'. or elements of which the creation is composed. The entire world is composed of five Skandhas according to Buddha's philosophy. So the basic concept to the world is also brought through the performances of the rites. Along with doctrinal aspects of Buddhism, the moral precepts such as importance of '*Uposadha*' and confessions of sins are also reformed during the '*Guru Mandala*' rites.

Mandala represents the worship of deities. The diagram of '*Guru Mandala*' consists the entire world symbolized by 'Mt. Meru' and the continents plus all the wealth and glory of entire beings of Universe. The performance offers the *Mandala* to the deity. The offering of entire world to the deity may be interpreted in two ways. Primarily it presents the notion of non-attachment, which is the basic requirement of acquiring Nirvan and another one is the compassionate attitude, which makes the offer to give up entire belonging including himself for the welfare of worldly beings. *Mandala* is not only the symbolic representation of the world but at the tantric-yogic levels it represents the human body.<sup>12</sup>

During the 'Pancho-Pachara Puja' (Five-fold offering), the lamp is offered to the deity as a form of knowledge which destroys the net of illusions. As it is found in the doctrinal aspects of 'Vijananavada', all Dharmas are made up of the substances of consciousness and the absolute negation of perceiver and the perceived Ultimate reality.

Not only that the voidness of all phenomena is also taught to the Buddhist followers. So it can be perceived that the entire '*Guru Manadala* rite' is a hand book of Buddhist philosophy. It is concerned with peculiarities of rites and slowly it takes the observer onwards to the knowledge of Buddhism.

### ***Charya in the form of state observances***

The practice of Buddhist philosophy in day to day life is charya. The word 'Charya' is derived from the root 'car' which denotes course proceeding behaviour and conduct. The arduous vows and observances which were promulgated by Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are exercised by Buddhist practitioner in the Kathmandu valley (Kathmandu). The definition of charya is presented as with the permission of teacher (Buddhas). To perform arduous vows, Buddhist normal precepts are observed through various observances.<sup>13</sup>

'Charya' has been defined as the performance of some arduous vows with the permission of the teacher, viz. the Buddhas. Here the Buddhist moral precepts are followed through a number of observances. These are detailed below.

***Astramivrata-*** Newar Buddhist observes the eighth day of each lunar fortnight under the name of Astanuvranta. The devotion is offered to Amoghapasa Lokeswara. Amoghapasa Lokeswara is the Multi armed form of Avalokitesvara. This particular form was introduced in the valley in late middle ages. The name of the deity itself reveals the meaning, that is, the Lokeswara with the unerring of unailing noose.

It is further explained in the Japanese literature as a Lokeswara who leads the sentient beings to enlightenment with the help of the unfallible noose.<sup>14</sup>

Though the Buddhist Newar observes these days (obtamivrata) for worldly purpose, i.e. to wade off evil and for release from prison and great distress, the observation of eight precepts is exercised by them. Thus the practice of Buddhist philosophy is exercised by practitioners and upasaka equally.

***Vasudharavrata-*** This observation is performed on the third day of dark fortnight of the month of Aswin. Vasundhara is supposed to be the wealth Goddess in Buddhism.

### **Laksa, Chaitya vrata-Making of Hundred thousand chaityas**

In Newari language it is known as dyahthyegu, making Gods, for the whole month of *Sravana*, the devotees make small clay Chaityas every day. On the final two days they fast and worship them, and finally take the Chaityas to the nearby river and throw them into the river.

### ***Taravrata- Sattvapuja (Saptvidha nottara Puja) is done for Tara***

All the above observations are done for particular world by purposes, by keeping of precepts, observing purity rules and sometimes even keeping fast. It is very near to the meaning of *Charya*. The Buddhist philosophy is exercised through these observances.

One should abandon one's possessions along with ego and merit for the welfare of whole beings, and for that one should protect, purify and enhance those belongings.

The elaborate performances, devotional practices and observances aimed to fulfil the worldly desire at first were seen against the philosophy of Buddhist but the minute observation of those practices reveals the actual essence of Buddhist philosophy. This way the term '*Charya*' followed by the Buddhist Newar has real meaning.

***Yoga*** – The practice of *Yoga* is also prevalent in Newar Buddhist society, but it is very hard to find out who actually are engaged in tantra yoga. *Yoga* the word is derived from the root *Yuj*, which means to unite. Thus, the etymological meaning of the word will be uniting. In *Yoga Dharshana* it is Chittbriti.

### **Cessation of all mental fluctuation-Nirodh**

In Buddhism a *prajana* (Knowledge) and *upaya* (means) are united. In the *yoga Tantra*, *Mandala Circle* (of deities) is taken as means, with ecstasy due to, binding, of female and male deities. This shows *devatayoga* (*Yoga of the deities and produces divine pride free from ordinary pride*) which is the quick path of Buddhahood, that is to say, to acquire the three kinds of formal body *rupakaya*, the *samboga-kaya* and *dharmakaya*.<sup>15</sup>

At the level of *tantric yoga*, the *Mandala* represents the human body, the continents situate the person who is offering himself and the seven Jewels correspond the seven limbs of enlightenment.

According to the information there still exists the practice of *Nariyoga*, *Vayuyoga* and *Chandaliyoga* among the Newar Buddhists.

## ***Anuttara Yoga***

It is a diamond lit meditation (Samadhi) where body speech and mind are united. In Kathmandu, the higher initiations are given in three disciplines to the Vajracharya, Sakya and Udas too.

These disciplines are Chakra Samvara, Vajravarahi, and Achala. According to my the information kalchakra initiation was also in prevalence thirty to fifty years before.

The Buddhist Newars are seen more conscious to their religion. So the Vajradhatu initiation is popular in Newar community. These above mentioned initiations are formal and open to laity also.

Prevalence of higher initiation among Newar communities is the sign of living Vajrayana in Nepal.

This is the changed social atmosphere where conversion is on the high speed in Nepal under the cover of NGO, INGO and different charity missions. Newar community also finds threatened by this wave. Still the root of Vajrayana community is so strong that it has maintained its status quite state in Nepal. One of the reason is that it emphasis on detachment quite contrast to worldly life. It may not be wrong to say that the people in the modern age are crazy, restless and tense. Therefore, the teachings of Buddhism can only make us free from these very threatening problems of life.

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## **Chapter Four**

### **Religious Symbolism and Rituals in Nepal**

Encompassing the Himalayas within its border Nepal nestles between India and Tibet. It is the geographical areas that are mostly responsible in determining Nepal's religious aura. In the northern sections, where Tibetan influence is dominant, Buddhism in its Lamaistic tradition is prevalent. In the densely populated southern lowlands which appears geographically the same with northern India, Hindu saivism dominates. And in the mid-region of Nepal merging of Buddhism and Hinduism can be seen. Nepal was an official Hindu State just some periods back. Now it is a secular state. But the influence of Kingdom is still there. Brahmans have an important influence both on the rulers of Nepal as well as on the masses of the people.

Tantric Hinduism along with the touches of tantric Buddhism has its dominance. The religious rituals, art and festivals of Nepal reflect blends of Buddhism, Hinduism and animism but intellectually, in the ideas and thought patterns of the Nepalese upper social class, Hindu traditions dominate.

Both Hinduism and Buddhism view salvation as a major purpose of religion; both consider concentration on non-worldly a chief means of achieving salvation. A basic tenet of both these religions, is faith in reincarnation-the idea that each person has had previous lives and will have future lives.

Salvation, the main purpose of life, is not in opposition to the pursuit of knowledge. Religion and learning are closely interrelated in Hindu tradition. The Brahmin are very influential in Nepal, directly on religious activities and indirectly on secular instruction. Intuition and mysticism merged with magic as means of dealing with the universe. Even the traditional myths of Nepal are expressed in religious and mystical terms. Religious observances form a major role in the Nepalese calendar.

In order to understand the development of Hinduism and Buddhism in Nepal, it is necessary to view the treasured past that has been interwoven with myths and real facts in the history of Nepal.

Nepal's civilization dates back several thousand years. It is a mixed culture of Indo-Aryans & Mongoloid peoples. There are certain indigenous tribes like Newaris, Thamangs, Magars, Gurungs, Tharus and Limbas. Among them some of them looks like Mongoloid physique, while others are Caucasian in appearance. The name 'Nepal' was found on a pillar at Allahabad from the Gupta dynasty around fourth century A.D. From that time till the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, Nepal was known for Kathmandu valley. There are various types of invasion, beginning with the Licchavi invasion, three or four centuries after the birth of Christ which make its culture richer. There are two major influences which are responsible for Nepal's present cultural tradition. One is religion which owes its origin in the Hindu tradition, with modifications from Mahayana Buddhism, and with political decisions influenced by the priestly caste. The second in militarism, rooted in the Kshatriya caste which in mixed with Tantric religions traditions, with power usually seized and held through armed violence. A Hindu dynasty, known as Mallas, rules Nepal during 13<sup>th</sup> century onwards, during which the Nepalese culture specially the arts entered a golden age.

During the 13<sup>th</sup> & 14<sup>th</sup> centuries, upper caste Hindus took refuge in the mountains of Nepal due to Muslim invasion. Among them the Rajputs who used to settle in central Nepal and by the mid-sixteenth century has overthrown the rule of Gorkha. In 1768 Prithvinarayan Shah conquered the Mallas of Kathmandu valley. Later the Ranas took the charge. Jung Bahadur Rana was the founder of a dynasty of Prime Ministers where the king becomes the religious and ceremonial head. After that there were revolutions by the royalists and the rule of the Ranas came to an end.

In fact without going into detail if we try to measure the pulse of the Nepalese people regarding the power structure, it may be seen that the country is ruled and administered largely by three groups; the Brahman Caste, the Kshatriya caste and the Newar tribe. Coming back to the religious blend of Nepal, if we try to measure then it will be clear that historically Nepal is a perfect blend of different religious flavour Buddhism from India and also from Tibet and animistic fervour have produced in Nepal a unique amalgam. There are Nepalese who are Buddhists and Nepalese Hindus and both religious groups contain strong element of Tantrism, a cult with primitive magical and animistic trends. Both Buddhists and Hindus participate in one another's festivals, even they worship at one another's temples.

Many Buddhist symbols need to be considered within the culture of the people who follow it. Therefore, many of the early symbols relate to ancient India and can be found in Hinduism as well, although possibly with a somewhat different meaning.

The historical Buddha lived around the sixth century BCE, but no Buddhist artifacts are known from before the third century BCE. In the scriptures, it is mentioned that the Buddha did occasionally use image like the 'Wheel of Life' to illustrate the teachings. The first archaeological evidence, mainly of ornamental stone carvings, comes from the time of the Emperor Asoka (273-232 BCE), who converted to Buddhism and made it a popular religion in India and beyond.

In the second century BCE, people started to excavate Buddhist monasteries in rock, creating a large amount of artwork to withstand the ages. Probably the earliest typical Buddhist monument is the stupa, which was often specially decorated. The first actual Buddha images appeared around the first century BCE, so until then the artwork was largely symbolic in nature. But with the advent of Vajrayana in the 6<sup>th</sup> century, the history of Buddhism completely turned as it gave more emphasis upon imagination, visualization, rites and rituals, mandalas and a great collection of symbolic items, as a chief forms of spiritual practices which still thrives today in Nepal.

The rich and symbolic art of South Asia remains vibrantly alive in the form of mandalas, thangkas and sculptures. The alliance between the physical emanation and their inner and hidden spiritual aspects have attracted scores of scholars to examine and interpret these phenomena.<sup>1</sup>

The ritual tools, rites and the performer, the art and the artist become one when their spirit is dissolved into the very act of their performance. That is the true essence of Buddhist meditation. The various tools and symbols, mantras, mandalas are the mediums by which the yogi achieves liberation. As Sthaneshor Timalsina says that according to tantras, the deity and the practitioner are identical in their true nature. Tantric art mediated the ordinary realm of experience in which the artist or practitioner remains bound with the medium and become one.<sup>2</sup>

Both of these religions Buddhism and Hinduism have influence each other regarding culturally and philosophically. In this regard Hugo Kreijger says, "...That both

Hindu and Buddhist painting were executed by artists of a Buddhist persuasion is very likely the reason that both groups of icons are so similar in conception and composition.”<sup>3</sup>

In modern psychology, Freud and Jung have clarified many aspects of the sub-consciousness in terms of symbolism. In Buddhism, the Buddha too discovered the so called Anusaya Kilesa in our unconscious mind. In order to access these more hidden and subtle aspects of our mind, symbols can be very effective in mind transformation.

C.G. Jung defines archetypes as ‘primordial images’, or archetypal figures that become activated and then clothed with personally derived emotional feelings. This occurs when an emotional [or spiritual] situation develops that corresponds to a particular archetype. For example the ‘Wise Old Man’, the ‘Divine Child’, ‘All-Giving Mother’, ‘Patriarchal Father’, ‘Temptress’ or ‘Trickster’- all are symbolic, recurring figures in dreams, literature and religions. When the archetypal level of the collective unconscious is touched in a situation, there is emotional intensity as well as a tendency for symbolic expression. Even sacred animals have symbolic meanings. T.C. Majpuria says, “...These animal motifs are, thus, lively, varied real and imaginary.”<sup>4</sup>

Nepal has been a very fertile land for religious harmony and tolerance. There has been unique example of Nepal where Hinduism and Buddhism have prospered together. In Kathmandu, there are many temples where we find the status of Buddha being prayed. There are many communities in Nepal who follow both these religions. Simultaneously, in this connection, we can have beautiful examples like Newar communities who follow Hinduism and Buddhism together. In Nepal we find both the roots of Hinduism and Buddhism. The main cause of development of Buddhism in Nepal is that the daughter of this land Bhrikuti was wed-locked with Emperor of China and what Bhrikuti did, was that she spread the Nepalese values along with Buddhist sermons into vast land.

Hinduism and Buddhism are two main and most important religions in Nepal. Both of these religions coexist in Nepal. This coexistence can be seen in many syncretic images like those of Harihara, Lakshmi-Narayana, Budhanila-kantha, Shyambhu, Hanuman, etc. In truth, both these religions have merged into one another in such a way that it is difficult to find differences. Buddhism emphasizes the basic character of older and parental faith, and that is Hinduism. It has become a vision that Buddhism has been born out of Hinduism. Hinduism is commonly called the Brahmanical religion among academic

circles. Both of these have cultural and religious tolerance. The relationship originated and developed out of the innate spirit of tolerance of one another's common religious philosophy and this permeates the life of the Nepalese people.

Buddhists and Hindus live together. They understand each other. They worship each other's gods (Buddha, being worshipped as god). They visit temples as well as stupas. It is, therefore, easy for us to understand the practice of animal sacrifices and the ceremony of *Sraddha* performed by the Buddhists living promiscuously among the Hindus. It is also interesting to realize that the Buddhist texts have Sanskrit language like *Prajnaparanuta* and *Sadhanamala*. Many terms are found in Buddhism from Sanskrit language for easiness. Pali is the main language of this religion. Pali is the language in the earlier Buddhist literature.

The Buddhist society is also divided into several castes like the caste communities of the Hindus. The infusion of Tantricism brought in the practice of animal sacrifices in the Buddhist fold, bringing it still nearer to Hinduism. It also introduced a sense of equality among Hindu followers and brought about some relaxation of restrictions in the field of morals as well as the dismissal of untouchability which was widely prevalent in the Hinduism.

The cult of Vajrayana marked a synthetic merge between the two sister cults of Saiva and Buddhist deities. The deities have been mentioned in and across the entire range of the royal charters, decrees and other documents issued throughout the wide expanse of history of these two religions. Pratapa Malla and Srinivasa Malla had an agreement and that was written in a copper plate. The agreement announces eternal friendship between them and that invokes different deities comprising Taleju, Guheswori, Pasupatinatha, Karunamaya, Machchhindranatha and Harisiddhi. It encompasses the gods of Buddhists and Hindus alike.

Similarly, there is another agreement and that is between Yogendra Malla and Jitmitra Malla. This agreement invokes Pasupatinath, Guheswori, Karunamaya, Garuda-Narayana of Changu-Narayana, Vajrayogini and Harisiddhi. The coins of Yoga Narendra Malla mention the names of Karunamaya and Lokanatha, both representing Machchhindranath. The coins have Buddhist and Hindu deities. The name of Lokanatha,, a Buddhist deity, occurs on the coins of Yogendra Malla, Vishnu Malla and Tejanarsimha Malla of I.alitpur. Karunamaya is on some coins of the rulers. The coins of Jaya Prakasha

Malla, a historical ruler of Kathmandu, show Pasupatinatha, Guheswori, Taleju and Kamari.

Cultural and religious tolerance can be observed in some other aspects as well. Lokanatha and Vajrayogini, though these gods belong primarily to the Buddhist pantheon, are also worshipped by the Saivites. Though primarily the Buddhists worship in *stupas* and *chatiyas*, they are also visited for the worship and reverence by a large number of Hindus.

Hindus and Buddhists do not have any barriers between regarding their festivals and rituals. Getting across the barriers of social and cultural sects and castes, the Hindus and the Buddhists both have almost a uniform system of rituals and rites. Both perform *yajna* and *kirtan*, being the most important and compulsory part of the rituals, as no worshipping or ceremony is considered complete without it. *Charu*, a mixture of grains of barely, rice, sesame, all soaked in ghee, is put into the fire at the completion of the construction of a *Stupa* or a temple. During the *Pancha-bali*, both Hindus and Buddhists offer ceremonial sacrifices of goats, buffaloes, pigs, and fowls. Some of the festivals, rituals and their tools are briefly described here.

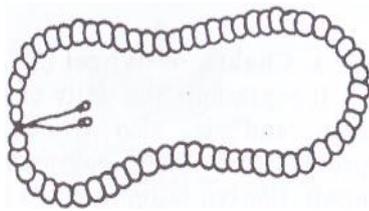
*Agni* is the personification of fire. It is the most sacred and ancient object of Hindu worship. Agni is fire on earth, lightening in mid-air and sun in the sky or heaven. Shiva often carries *agni* in one of his hands, especially in a dancing pose. It is also used as a weapon of war. Adi-Buddha also appeared from a flame. Agni, or God of fire, can also issue it from his body.



Shiva and Agni

Akshamala is a rosary made of beads. It is made of Rudraksha (*Elaeocarpus*) in

the Shaivite cult and of Tulasi (*Ocimum*) in Vaishnava cult. The Hindu creator God Brahma also carries a rosary in one of his hands. Saraswati, a Hindu and Buddhist goddess, also carries a rosary in one of her hands. Some Buddhist deities, like Avalokiteshvara, Prajnaparamita, Bhrikuti, Vasudhara, and other gods and goddesses, also have a rosary in their hands. The rosary has 108 beads, each of a uniform size, and a person always holds in the right hand when the beads are counted. When it is not being used, the *akshamala* is wrapped round the left wrist like a bracelet. A rosary is made of wood, seeds, bone, glass, crystal, turquoise, ivory. *Mantras* (magic formulae) are enchanted in course of computation. Repetition of the mystic formula or prayers contains the essence of a formal prayer, which acts as a powerful spell. The formula is in Sanskrit and is addressed to the deity. Different *mantras* are enchanted for different deities. Generally, Tibetan Lamas and laity chant the prayer of 'Om Mani Padme Hum' i.e. I hail to the jewel in Lotus. It is a prayer of Avalokiteshavara.



Akshamala, or Rosary



Akshamala

Ankusha (Goad) is the attribute of several Tantric deities. It consists of small wooden handle topped by a strong and sharp metal hook. When goad is surmounted by vajra, it is known as *Vajrankush*. Arrow (Tir) is a weapon for subduing the demonic force. It is used with a bow. It is a weapon carried by several deities, especially Kamadeva, God of love and passion whose bow and arrow are made of flowers. In the epic wars of the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, several types of arrows were used. A Buddhist goddess, Kurkulla, holds in her principal pair hand a flowery bow charged with an arrow of flowery lotus. Chakra or Wheel represents the unity of all things and is also symbolic representation of Sakyamuni himself. *Chakra* is represented on various monasteries. Beside the *chakra*, there are shown two deers which were the first disciples of Buddha when he delivered his first sermon in Sarnath (India). This symbol is also called in Tibetan language *ridag choekor* and is depicted over the main entrance of almost every

monastery, especially on Transhilumpo at Shigaste and Jokhang Temple in Lhasa. Vishnu, one of the Hindu trinity, also holds a *chakra* in one of his hands. Krishna, incarnation of Vishnu holds a *chakra* or wheel as a weapon.



Wheel or Chakra

Conch Shell or Shell is called trumpet of victory and symbolises the spoken word. Right-handed conch shell is very sacred. In the epic of Mahabharata, conch shell was blown in the beginning of war was called *Panchajanya*, i.e. born of five. Sound is associated with primeval. It represents cohesive part of oneness and origin of elements. Indra also carries a conch shell called Devadutta. Lotus Flower (*Padma*) symbolises purity as the flower grows out of the mud. Similarly salvation can be attained in this world. It is called *Pema* in Tibetan language. Lotus is ultimate goal or enlightenment. It points out that love is free from earthly matters. Umbrella or Chatra is a symbol of early kingship and world-rule and protection of religion. Several icons are shown having canopy of umbrella. Gold Fish or Matsya symbolises spiritual liberation just as water permits fish to lead its activities freely. So Tibetan belief is that the soul of a human being is set free. Varuna, a Hindu God, rides on a fish. Vishnu had a fish incarnation. Fishes are also sacred for the Hindus. Fish represents truth and transcendental wisdom. Vase or Kalash symbolises purity. It is called in Tibetan language as Bhumpa. It represents a repository of wealth, good health and long life. Hindu Goddess Lakshmi also holds *kalash* in one of her hands.



Krishna blowing conch



Lotus



Umbrella (Chatra)



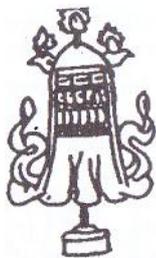
A pair of fish



Holy Vase

Banner symbolises victory and fortune. It is called in Tibetan as Gyaltsen. It also

symbolises good over evil forces, which hinder the success of noble goals. It also proclaims victory of good over evil. Tibetans use it in procession. Knot of Eternity, also called in Tibetan language *Palbhen*. Symbol of Eternity is law without beginning and end. It is also called lucky net or *brahmajala* representing the theories and philosophies of the universe. Aum (Om) is the symbol of the absolute and this sacred word encompasses the whole universe and it includes the past, present and future. *Om* is the essence of all that is sacred in the Hindu thought. It is chanted in the beginning of meditation, prayer, practice of yoga, and in fact all the time. It is past, present and future and goes beyond periphery of time. It is beyond the symbol of *Brahman* or universal soul. Om is the most potent of all *mantras*. It represents the universal knowledge. This eternal world is all: what was, what is and what shall be and what beyond is in eternity. Om is the mystic syllable of AU-M. It is venerated both by the Hindus and Buddhists. Devotees regard it very sacred and chant it only by lips. It is written when all void becomes manifested. Adi-Buddha also proceed from *Om*. In the word *Aum*, Adi-Buddha which is formless and passionless is represented in Triratna, i.e. Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. The letter AUM is the seed mantra of Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, i.e. Tri-ratna. Aum is sublime and eve' thing originated from 'Om'. Most widely known mantra (magic formula) is the prayer 'Om Mani Padme Hum'. This prayer is dedicated to Avalokiteshvara.



Banner Endless links or knots of eternity



Aum

Axe is an important weapon of war. It is carried by Parshuram, the sixth incarnation of Vishnu. He descended to fight against Kshatriyas, the warrior caste at the request of Brahmins. It is also held by ferocious Tantric deities. In Buddhism it symbolizes the severance of worldly attachments. Sometimes Vajras are also fixed to it. Bell (Ghanta) represents female aspect and stands for *prajna* or wisdom. During worship, it is usually held in left hand while vajra or *dorje* in right hand. Bell and Vajra are inseparable ritual objects during worship. Symbolically ringing of tinkling bells during *arti* (waving of lamp) is to keep out other noises so that worshipper can concentrate on prayer. Bhumba (Water

vase) is used for keeping water. Water is required both in Hinduism and Buddhism in various religious ceremonies. Holy vase for keeping sacred water is called *kalash*. It is in the form of a jar with curved pipe for pouring water out of it. Sometimes, it is ornamented with semi-precious and precious stones. Holy vase made of metal is known as *bhumba*. Water is most important for rituals of both Hindus and Buddhists. Water is colourless, transparent, odourless, tasteless liquid. It is compound of oxygen and hydrogen (H<sub>2</sub>O). Water from sacred rivers and ponds is used for rituals.

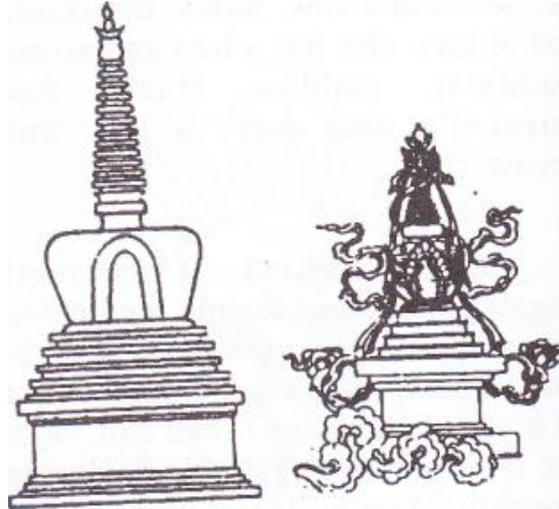
## अमणियमम

On Mani Padme Hum

Bina (Lute) is a stringed musical instrument which is the favourite of Saraswati, Hindu and Buddhist Goddess of Wisdom, Learning and Arts. In Tibet, Mahasaraswati is depicted also with vina. Narad, a Hindu saint, always goes about with a lute. Chaitya represents the Buddhist universe and is a Buddhist sanctuary. It has square or round spires as steps on the capital. Each one represents a heaven. The uppermost is regarded as the highest peak of Mt. Sumeru, a mythical mountain when Bodhichitta loses itself in sunya (nothingness/void). On the four sides are depicted Dhyani Buddhas, i.e. Akshobhya in the east, Ratnasambhava in the south, Amitabha in the west, and Amoghasiddhi in the north. Sometimes, Vairochana is also depicted. Otherwise he is considered as centre of the *mandala*. In Nepal, they are called Pancha *Buddhas* or also called Tathagata's shrine and reliquary. In Tibet, Chaitya is regarded as a receptacle for offerings. It is a solid conical masonry structure intended as relic-holders. It is erected either in the memory of Buddha himself or some Tibetan saints. It is a massive hemisphere or solid dome called *garbha* or womb enclosing the relics. It is surrounded by elaborate plinths and crowned by a square capital called *toran*. The spire is called *chudamani* of 13 step-like segments which represent 13 Buddhist heavens. It is surmounted by a bell shaped symbol called *kalash* or holy vase. Above it is a tapering pinnacle having a lotus flower, crescent moon, globular sun and finally surmounted by a tongue-shaped spike representing sacred light or *jyoti* or Buddha. In the niche, a small image of Buddha is sometimes placed.



**Saraswati with Bina**



**Chaitya or Chorten**

Chakra (Wheel) symbolises rotation of the world and also represents the wheel of *Dharma* (righteousness). Hindu God, Vishnu or Krishna, always carries a *chakra* or wheel. It is also used as a weapon. In Buddhism, it symbolises the wheel of law which turns twelve times or makes three revolutions for each of the four noble truths. It has eight spokes indicating eight-fold paths of salvation. *Chakra* is also depicted on the top of the Tibetan monastery with two deers as disciples. Here *chakra* also represents the Buddha. According to the *Kundalini Tantra*, there are seven *chakras* of the subtle body. The adept meditates on each power centre either in its own right or with the aid of external *mandala yantra*. There are seven chakras. The purpose of the Kundalini yoga is its awakening on which develops super-normal powers. When the coiled serpent *kundalini* makes its upward journey, it becomes connected with different *chakras* and the gradual illumination of each *chakra* brings attainment both on physical and mental planes. The first chakra is called *Muladhara chakra* situated at the root centre above the anus below the root of the penis. Above it is *Svadhithana chakra* which supports life breath. The third chakra is *Manipura* or lotus of the Navel. Next to it is *Anahata chakra*, which is the centre of the unstruck sound. The fifth chakra is called *Visuddha*. It is the centre of great purity situated in the pharyngeal region. The sixth chakra is named *Ajna*. It lies between the eyebrows and is known as the centre of command. The seventh chakra is called *Brahmachakra* or *Sahasara* or lotus of thousand petals. Meditation of these *chakras* helps one to attain various steps of realization. The *Sahasara chakra* is actually the mind, which controls all activities.

Pharsa (Battle Axe) is also called *Pa*. It is held by ferocious deities of Buddhism. Symbolised severance or cutting away of worldly attachments. It is a weapon which was

held by Parshuram, who exterminated Kashtriyas and help Brahmins. Parshuram was 6<sup>th</sup> incarnation of Vishnu. Dharmadhatu has different meanings in different context. It is also called *Dharma* realm or cosmos, universe. It also means mind, realm of truth. According to the *Swayambhu Purana*, Swambhu Dharamdhatu, Sunya rupa, etc. are synonyms. It is depicted in the stupa. *Dharmadhatu Jnana* is wisdom of all pervasive awareness. Dhoopdani or Incense Burner is a pot for burning incense in as an offering to both Hindu and Buddhist deities. It symbolises the fragrance of God's love. Incense is waved before icon. Dipa ia the light fed with *ghee* (melted butter) and offered to Hindu and Buddhist deities. It symbolises dispelling of ignorance and the illumination of mind and knowledge.

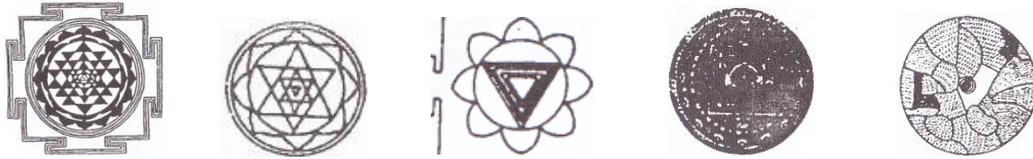
Mandala (Tibatan, Kyilokor) is a circular and spherical diagrams for visualization during religious practices. Mandala is the magic circles or symbolic offsprings. They are timeless and all-embracing.



Mandala

Mandala is one of the great symbols of human experience. It is the passage from state to state from material to spiritual. Its centre is eternity. Its periphery is perfection. There are different kinds of mandalas. *Shiva-Shakti Mandala* is the most important and most universal Hinduist mandala. It is also called Sri Yantra. It is a complex arrangement of triangle and lotus leaves. It expresses the whole motive energy of the universe. It is delicate balance of male and female principles. Downward position of triangle synthesises Shakti, the female principle which is active and creative. Shiva is the male principle and supreme consciousness. It reveals dualism. *Kali Mandala* is concerned with goddess Durga. Durga is greatly worshipped in Tantrism. At the centre of the yantra, Kali, the creative force of world is represented. It symbolises ceaseless cycles of destruction and renewal. In the mandala, Kali is represented as goddess or Triangle pointing downward. *Buddha Mandala* –is a form of mandala that has representation of Buddhism: five elements, five colours, five objects of senses, the five senses. Deities personified are

Vajrasattva as divided into five Buddhas: Vairochana, Akshobhya, Ratansumbhara, Amitabha and Amoghasiddhi. Each one is associated with a particular colour, personality and a passion. *Vishnu Mandala* has Vishnu or one of his incarnations in the centre.



Mandala or Magic circles Shiv-Shakti Mandala Kali Mandala Buddha Mandala Vishnu Mandala

Naga (Tibatan, Lu) is a serpent demigod (mermaids). Gautama's throne was supported by snakes. Buddha was also protected by snakes while meditating. Pustaka is a book of palm leaves oblong in size or a manuscript which is also oblong. Hindu God Brahma carries a sacred manuscript, the *Vedas*, in one of his hands. It is a symbol of wisdom. In Buddhism, the book represents the *Prajnaparamita*, a scripture of transcendental wisdom. This book was supposed to have been given by Buddha to Nagas for safe keeping till mankind becomes wise enough to understand it and it was recovered by Nagarjuna, a Buddhist saint, who founded Mahayana school on the basis of its teachings. In Buddhism, *pustaka* is the symbol of Manjushri, Prajnaparamita (Name of another goddess of the same name as that of scripture), Avalokiteshvara, Vasudhara, Chunda, etc. In some scriptures, a book is shown kept on a lotus flower.

Swastika (Fly-foot cross) is the compound word made of *su+asti* or that which is good. Swasti means auspicious, benevolent, a good deed or good wishes. It is considered auspicious and painted to ward off evil spirit. Its origin goes back to the Vedic times (4500 - 2500 B.C.) or may be earlier. Seals of swastika symbol have been found in Harappan excavation, which dates back about 2000 years. Swastika is a form of Greek cross. Ends of arms are bent at right angles. Right-handed Swastika moves in clockwise direction. Left handed swastika moves in counter clockwise direction. Hindus consider left-handed swastika as evil omen and suggest never to be used. However, in Bon religion of Buddhism, left-handed swastika is represented. In Hinduism, swastika represents Sun or Lord Vishnu. In the *Puranas*, it is mentioned as Sudarshan Chakra or wheel of Lord Vishnu. It symbolises constant changes in universe. Swastika is also associated with Sun as it is regarded that its arms represent rays of Sun. Swastika also represents god of fire and Ganesh. In the *Sidhanta Saar*, the hubs of swastika represent navel of Vishnu and four lines as four faces of Brahma. Swastika is worshipped during religious rites. In Hinduism,

during Diwali or Tihar, Hindu businessmen open their new account books and decorate it with swastika symbol and the words *Subha Labha* i.e. Auspicious profit. Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth, is also worshipped. Swastika is a symbol of good augury.



Swastika

Trishula (Trident) is also called *sula* the favourite weapon of Shiva and represents three functions i.e. creation, protection and destruction. It may also represent three *gunas* (qualities) i.e. *Sattva* (centripetal attraction of existence), *Rajas* (revolving of tendency called activity or multiplicity) and *Tamas* (rhythmic division controlled by time and space). It is also called Agni, A Vedic god. Hindu ascetics of Shaivite faith also carry it with them as it is regarded as destroyer of enemies. In Buddhism, it represents Tri Ratna (Three jewels) i.e. Buddha, Dharma (righteousness) and Sangha (Monastic order) and is carried by Mahakala, Padma Sambhava, Yellow Tara, Jambhala and Simhanad Avalokiteshvara.

Vajra (Tibatan, Dorje) is a small metallic object also called the Thunderbolt, which destroys all kinds of ignorance and enemies. It is indestructible. It is a symbol of Hindu God Indra. In Tantrism, Vajra symbolises male principle when it is held in the right hand. Bell symbolises the female principle when it is held in the left hand. The interaction leads to enlightenment. It is believed that Buddhist God got Vajra from Hindu God Indra and slightly modified by closing the points of darts. Vajra of Hindu gods has three flat darts, the points of which do not touch like those of Tibetan Vajras. The Tibetan variety is round and has four darts and the points are closed. Thus, it appears in the form of a lotus bud. A fifth dart runs through the centre of Vajra. Thus, there are 5 darts. Vajra represents 5 bodies of Dhyani Buddhas. In Vajrayana school of Buddhism, Vajra is the symbol of lingo or male sex organ.

The word Vajra is also used to designate a school of Buddhism called Vajrayana or the path or way of Vajra. This sect was the successor of the Mahayana, the great path. In Tibet all prayers, recitations and invocations are accompanied by several ritual objects,

including vajra or dynamite or master cutter which destroys everything and which is a symbol of boundless power. The double Vajra is the attribute of Bodhisattva Amoghasiddhi and his consort Tara. Vajra stands for skill or *Upaya*. Double thunderbolt is called *Vishva Vajra*. Sometimes, Vajra is placed vertically on a lotus.



Vajra

Wheel of life refers to the Bhavchakra mudra. It is also the wheel of transmigration. This type is very common and explains the Buddhist conception of life, death and birth. The wheel is held by a demon in his clutches. It is symbolic of impermanence. The depiction in the hub is symbolic of lust, anger, ignorance, and cardinal sins. In the segments of the wheel different worlds or rebirths are shown. In the outer rims are shown 2 scenes which represent the various stages through which man passes after birth. The wheel of life is painted, especially at the entrance of monasteries. It is the symbol not only of the mystery of evil and stress in life but of the teachings of Buddha. It is the form of an endless chain which consists of 3 animals, a pig, a red bird and a green snake swallowing each other's tails. These signify the sins of obstinacy, ignorance, evil desire and bad feeling. The wheel of Buddhism is divided into 12 pictorial symbols, each showing a different side of the universal senses.

Yuga is a period in the Hinduism. Hindus do not believe in linear system of time but they believe in cycles. Cycle of time is divided into 4 periods called yugas : Krita yuga (Satyuga), Age of Truth (Treta yuga), Dwapar yuga, Kali yuga (Age of darkness).

Gau is a small metal amulet container or prayer box carried by many Tibetan Buddhists as a portable shrine or altar. The Gau usually contains an image of a personal deity, a blessed written prayer or a sacred yantra diagram and a small offering of rice. Gaus may vary considerably in size and shape, depending on the requirements of the owner. Smaller gaus range in size from 2 cm to 10 cm in diameter are often worn as jewelry and thus may be made of beaten silver or gold and heavily decorated inside and out with

precious stones or carvings. Larger gaus may have a window in front to view the contents and are generally encased in a protective cloth bag and carried slung over the shoulder.



Gau

A prayer wheel is a cylindrical wheel on a spindle, in which a scroll is placed with the mantra Om Mani Padme Hum written hundreds, even thousands of times. The wheel is spun in a clockwise direction (based on the movement of the sun across the sky), allowing with each revolution the accumulation of as much merit as though all of the mantra inscriptions were read aloud. Thus the more prayers a wheel holds, the more powerful it is considered to be. Traditionally, Tibetans and Nepalese use prayer wheels to accumulate merit and good karma; any accumulated merits that an individual may gather during a session of use are freely given to all other sentient beings. A prayer wheel should be held almost upright and spun smoothly and slowly; greater benefit is achieved if the mantra Om Mani Padme Hum is recited as the wheel is turned.



Prayer Wheel

In Hinduism and Buddhism, funeral rituals have some similarities and differences. These rituals are in religious tradition. Hindu priests and Buddhist Lamas provide spiritual

guidance to the dead on its ultimate journey to the eternal world. They provide elaborate rituals needed to propitiate gods and deities so that the soul may be given undisturbed passage by gods to its next destination. In Buddhist funeral ceremony, they convince the soul that it no longer belongs to this mortal world. They convince that it now needs to get prepared to travel to the ethereal world. The main aim behind such complex funeral ceremonies is to ensure that the departed soul doesn't get any difficulties in the netherworld for lack of proper guidance on way to heavenly destiny.

The Hindus, on the other hand, have a strong belief that the soul must hasten the departure of soul. They believe that once the person is dead, the soul prepares to depart immediately on its karmic journey. Therefore, they should cremate the body as soon as practicable. They think that the soul, otherwise, will linger on to this side of the world. According to the Hindu customs, the body is taken to the holy grounds and cremated as soon as possible.

It is customary for the Buddhists to bury their dead, but in some parts of the world, partly because of lack of burial grounds and partly because of Hindu influence, they cremate their dead and share the same burning ghat (river bank) with the Hindus. Hindus consider the bank of a sacred river good and holy for the cremation.

Like the Buddhists, the Hindus follow a large regiment in the disposal of the body. As the Brahmins chant funereal hymns, the living male member of the deceased family sets the first fire to the pyre. Unlike the Buddhists, who prefer immediate dispersal of the ashes over the river, the Hindus collect them in an urn for disposal in a special year-end ceremony. Besides the rituals, there are varieties of gods and goddesses who are common to both Hindus and Buddhist.

There is a figure of *Mahankal* in Kathmandu which is an emanation of Akshobhya. The imposition of his figure in miniature on the forehead indicates that. Other popular deities are Bodhisatwa Lokeshvara under the name of Machchhendranatha and Taleju as a manifestation of Siva-Durga and Buddha Tara.

Hanuman is the great devotee of Rama. He is also included into the fold of Vajrayana. We can see Hanuman ensconced on an elevated seat in both Buddhist *Viharas* and Hindu temples. The Malla rulers adopted the figure of Hanuman for their banner. They had Hanuman's figure installed at the gates to the royal palaces at Kathmandu.

Bhaktapur and Lalitpur. Later the name of Hanuman Dhoka was given as in the case of the old palace at Kathmandu.



Hanuman Bhairava/Hanu Bhairava, consecrated in Patan Museum to protect it from enemies

Bhairava is a form of Siva. He receives homage from Hindus as well as Buddhists. He is called *Matapode* in common parlance. The figure of Bhairava is marked by a *mundamala*, which is a garland of human skulls,. The figure has also a snake which is always with Siva.

*Bhimasena* is a hero in the Mahabharata. He is often defied by the Newar traders, but meanwhile they worship him in the expectation that he could bestow prosperity upon them in their profession of commerce and trade. Bhimasena has attributes of Siva and these attributes have been mentioned in the verses of Pratapa Malla. Pratap Malla calls him *Sivapura*.

Pratapa Malla built a temple for an image of *Vasuki*. Vasuki was presented in the form of Narayana or Vishnu. Vasuki as the snake provides with enormous coils a seat for Vishnu. Snake is worshipped as god on the occasion of *Naga-Panchami* in the month of Sravana (July-August). They worship the snake god during the rains of the month. The worship is done as a propitiatory act, both by Hindus and Buddhists alike.

Buddha is supposed to be 9<sup>th</sup> incarnation of Vishnu. Buddha came to be regarded as an incarnation of Vishnu as early as the 6th or 7th century, as also Krishna, who was recognized as such in the *Amarakosha*, a work of the 5th century, wherein he was described as the son of Vasudeva. It was the *Bhagavata Purana* highlighting the Krishna cult that first recognized Buddha as an incarnation. This was emphasized by the poet *Jayadeva* in his *Gita Govindam* several centuries later. The belief still holds strongly

among people in both Buddhism and Hinduism.

One of the oldest cults that prevail in the Indian subcontinent is that of the *Mother Goddess*. She is said to be representing various aspects of the mind such as anger, greed, envy, arrogance, eavesdropping, chimera and fault-finding, etc. The cult of the Mother Goddess in the form of *Azima* or grandmother was universally in vogue in Nepal and accepted by all. Female deities in Buddhism reflect and represent the aspects of the *Matrikas* of the Brahmanical religion. The role *Matrikas* in Buddhism is of great importance. King Pratap Malla mentioned and called in verses Vajrayogini Ambika (mother or Parvati), and Ugratara Nila-Sarasvati and Ekajata as representatives of Bhagavati herself. This is also a proof of blending of the two faiths. Without any doubt, this can be held as divergently convergent status of these two religions. This spirit underlies and emphasises the equation of *Tulaja* with the *Bhavani* of the Brahmanical faith and *Ugratara* of the Buddhist conception.

The goddess *Sitala* is shown to be presiding over the ailment of small-pox. She is also called *Azima*. There is a shrine of hers at premises of *the Svayambhu stupa*. She is worshipped by the Buddhists under the name of *Hariti*. This is very similar adoption like that of the Siva *linga* itself as the representative of *the Buddha*, in the mountainous regions. The deliberate adoption as well as adaptation is seen in *the practice of* worshipping the image of *Pasupatinath* as Buddha at *Deo Patan* once a *year*. To retrace our steps, *Sitala* is considered as inauspicious, riding on a donkey and being associated with a broomstick, a winnowing fan and pitchers. The thin veils which may separate the two deities are waved away by the adoptive and tolerant spirit of the adherents of both the sects of Hinduism and Buddhism.

The cult of *Kumari* is celebrated as a festival in Nepal, especially in Kathmandu and Lalitpur. Both Buddhists and Hindus worship *Kumari* as a goddess. The practice of worshipping a living goddess- usually a young girl is very distinct cult of Nepal. A young girl is chosen with much care. She is marked by auspicious signs and of noble upbringing and nature. This vogue is still popular among the Hindus. The Bengalis, on occasions of the Durga Puja, attribute the qualities of Goddess Durga to a young girl and worship her in living form.

In Nepal, the practice of the worship of *Kumari* in living form, includes the annual celebration of a processional festival (*Kumari Jatra*). This festival was introduced by Jaya

Prakasha Malla. It still continues to this day. In this annual autumnal festival, the chariots of *Ganesa and Bhairava* proceed that of Kumari herself. The selection of the living goddess is, however, confined to the families of Buddhist priests. Nevertheless, both Hindus and Buddhists pay homage to her as to any other deity.

The Ganesa's function is primarily celebrated as Ganesh is believed to be a destroyer of evils and obstacles, and bestower of success. Ganesh has been adopted and is worshipped in this role by both the Hindus and the Buddhists, from their Brahmanical brethren. His figure is placed at the entrance of monastries and temples. He is variously depicted with two, four, six, eighteen, or twenty hands, with an increasing number of attributes. He is fully adopted in the *Vajrayana* pantheon. He is worshipped and conveyed by the *Sadhanamala*, and the cult is known to have travelled as far as China. He is worshipped in the intermediate region of Tibet. For example, there is a sixteen-handed figure of *Ganesa* in a shrine to the south-west corner of Ranipokhari, opposite the north-west corner of Ratna Park (Kathmandu), accompanied by his spouse *Siddhi* (success personified) and that is very distinctive. Ganesh is also the guardian of the Bodhisattva Kumari and Mahankal alike in Nepal and Tibet.

Another example of blending is in the case of *Budhanilakantha* (Anantasayana Vishnu). That is in a village to the north-east of Kathmandu. He gets regard as Nilakantha Lokesvara by the Buddhists. The name Nilkantha is an attribute of Siva. It is said that he swallowed poison churned out of the ocean. This deity has, therefore, aspects of Vishnu, Siva and Lokesvara. The deity receives homage and reverence from the worshippers of the both religious sects.

In the same way, Gorakhnatha is linked both with Machchendranatha and with Lokesvara in Lalitpur. Gorakhantha is also involved in the *Bisket Jatra* of Bhadgaon and of *Vajrayogini* in Sankhu. The features of *Lokesvara, Tara, Pancha Buddhas, Prajna Parantita*, and Emanations of Sakyamuni and also the trinity gods are placed in the niche of many monasteries. These all details suggest and confirm the synthetic merge of both religious sects- Hinduism and Buddhism.

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## Chapter Five

### Conclusion

S. Radhakrishnan says that "Buddhism, in its origin at least is an offshoot of Hinduism." Guatama Buddha was himself a Hindu. He was born and brought up as a Hindu. He lived and left this materialistic world as a Hindu. Thus, all these are enough to justify that the concepts of Hinduism predates to that of Buddhism. It was during the later part of the Vedic Era, when Hinduism was on the verge of decline owing to the orthodoxy, superstitions and staunch practices, prevailing in the religion, when Buddhism with lesser complexities and rituals was accepted by the people of the Indian subcontinent. Later it expanded to other parts of the world. We can conclude the thesis with the view that, despite some differences, these two sects have a lot of things in common.

Both Hinduism and Buddhism emphasize the illusory nature of the world. They believe that karma (action) keeps people bound to this world and that has important role in the cycle of births and deaths. The Buddha says that desire is the root cause of suffering and, if we remove desire from our mind and heart, it results in the cessation of suffering. The Hindu texts such as the *Upanishads* and the *Bhagavadgita* mention that doing actions prompted by desire and attachment would lead to bondage and suffering. If people perform actions without desiring the fruit of actions, it would result in liberation. Both religions believe in the concept of karma, transmigration of souls and the cycle of births and deaths.

Both sects give focus on compassion and non-violence towards all living beings. Both sects deal with the existence of hells and heavens and also with higher and lower worlds. Both religious communities present the concepts of the existence of gods or deities but in different ways. Hindus have thousands of gods but Buddhists have only one god. Some Buddhists do not think of existence of god. Both sects persuade people for certain spiritual practices like meditation, concentration, cultivation of certain bhavas or states of mind. Both religious sects convince people for detachment, or renunciation of worldly life as a precondition to enter the spiritual life. The Advaita philosophy of Hinduism is very closer to Buddhism in philosophical thoughts and ritual practices. Both religions have their own versions of Tantra.

Hinduism has not been founded by any particular prophet. Buddhism was founded by the Buddha. Hindus have strong trust on the efficacy and supremacy of the Vedas. The

Buddhists do not have any belief in the Vedas or for that matter any Hindu scripture. Buddhists do not mention in their books about the existence of souls and God. Hindus believe that there is existence of Atman that is the individual soul and Brahman, the Supreme Creator. Later Hindu scriptures mention the Buddha as an incarnation of Mahavishnu, one of the gods of Hindu trinity. The Buddhists do not accept any Hindu god. They do not consider any Hindu god either as equivalent or superior to the Buddha. The original Buddhism as taught by the Buddha is known as Theravada Buddhism or Hinayana Buddhism. Followers of this do not worship images of the Buddha nor believe in the Bodhisattvas.

The Mahayana sect considers the Buddha as the Supreme Soul or the Highest Being. That soul is similar to the Brahman of Hinduism. They worship him in the form of images and icons. The Buddhists consider the world to be full of sorrow. They regard efforts for ending the sorrow as the chief aim of human life. The Hindus consider that there are four chief aims (arthas) in life which every being should pursue. They are *Dharma* (religious duty), *artha* (wealth or material possessions), *kama* (desires and passions) and *moksha* (salvation.). Hindus also believe in the four ashramas or stages in life. This is not followed in Buddhism. People can join the Buddhist order any time depending upon their spiritual preparedness. Buddhists organize themselves into a monastic order (Sangha). The Buddhist monks live in groups. Hinduism is basically a religion of the individual. Buddhism believes in the concept of Bodhisattvas. Hinduism does not believe in it. Buddhism acknowledges the existence of some gods and goddesses of Hindu pantheon, but give them a rather subordinate status. Buddha, the Sangha and Dhamma are the three cardinal requirements on the eightfold path in Buddhism. Hinduism offers many choices to its followers on the path of self-realization. Although both religions believe in karma and rebirth, they differ in the manner in which they operate and impact the existence of individual beings.

Buddhists believe in the process of reincarnation based on deeds or actions (karma) of the present life. Hindus also believe that everyone is a part of an impersonal world. Therefore, they say, a person's soul gets reincarnated into another body of any being, based on the deeds or actions (karma) of the present life. He has to work hard for the salvation by himself. He must not and cannot blame others for the same. The salvation depends on the good deeds or actions (karma) of a person. In Hinduism also, a person

attains salvation as per his own fate and deeds. According to the Hinduism, there are four paths or four yogas to attain salvation: *Karma Yoga*-Way of good works, *Bhakti Yoga* - Way of love and faith, *Jnana Yoga*-Way of knowledge, and *Raja Yoga*-Way of salvation.

Both Buddhism and Hinduism believe that there are many paths to attain enlightenment/knowledge. For that, both suggest that a person can overcome through his feelings and desires and control the six conscious senses. Buddhism has a major sect, 'Tantrayana'. This is mainly based upon the tantric practices. Tantric practices are also prevalent in Hinduism, especially among the worshippers of the Goddess Kali and the god Shiva. Like Hinduism, the Mahayana Buddhism believes that the original teachings of the Buddha are from the Hindu practices, including prayers and the concept of God. They even believe that the Buddha is incarnation of Hindu gods. Mahayana Buddhism also mentions the concepts of heavens and hells.

The original Buddhist philosophy does not mention any godly figures, though the later Buddhist sects write about some Godly figures. The Hindu rituals are more complex. Besides, priests play important role in all Hindu rituals. There are four major sub-sects in Buddhism, but none of them follow the caste system like Hindus. There are a number of castes and sub-castes among Hindus. They follow their caste systems rigidly. Buddhism rejects extreme asceticism that we find in Hinduism. The Buddhists believe in the teachings of the Lord Buddha and the Buddhist scriptures. Hindus believe in the supremacy of four Vedas - *Rigveda*, *Samveda*, *Yajurveda* and *Atharvaveda*. The Buddhists do not believe in the stages of life. People can join any of the stages any time depending upon their spiritual preparedness. The Hindus believe in the four stages of life, also known as the 'ashramas' - *Brahamacharya Ashram* or Student life, *Grihastha Ashram* or family life, *Vanprastha Ashram* or the age at which a person leaves all the worldly desire and home, and *Sanyasa Ashram*- when a person meditates and awaits for the ultimate truth, death.

The Buddhists and the Hindus, both sects, cross each other in religious and social philosophies and practices, with no strife, but in perfect accord. They have a sense of reverence for the deities of each other. They often worship deities in temples and monasteries alike, without any ill-feelings. They have the spirit of oneness and unity prevalent among them is always strengthened by the common participation in the various

rituals and festivals. Generally the Buddhists and the Hindus are not distinguishable from each other.<sup>3</sup> They have strong attachment with each other. Hindus and Buddhists live together in different parts of the world.

The study of religion in the present of the world which is undergoing through the time of war and violence makes it more relevant than ever. As Dr. Radhakrishnan speaks on the value of religion.

*Religion far from being the source of any struggle and strife is a real bond of union among human beings. As a matter of fact, religions are a thing which is of immense value. Any unprejudiced thinker will easily be convinced of the importance of religion.<sup>1</sup>*

Most of the Buddhist feel themselves as political outcasts. There are antagonistic feelings among Buddhist versus Hindus, oppressed Dalits versus privileged classes, male versus female, rich versus poor etc.

The present political scenario threatens the very sovereignty Nepal, in lack of mutual brotherhood feeling. Here Dr. Parameshwar Yadav speaks more clearly in this aspect:

*... that the present world is afflicted by the malady of crisis of values. There are corruption, selfusion, terrorism and many such vices. Besides, there are also chaos and confusion, tension and insecurity in the world. In this background, the cardinal principles of Hinduism and Buddhism can be of great help. Both Hinduism and Buddhism stress the ideals of ahimsa, love, compassion, renunciation, service etc. So, modern man can make life batter and happier if he tries follow ideals which preached by these two great religions of the world.<sup>2</sup>*

Talking about Hinduism and Buddhism in context of Nepal, we find religion acts both as a creative force as well as destroying force in the society. When religion was not properly explained to the mass and practiced with a level of clarity, it brought conflict and classes among various castes and communities in Nepal, causing Maoist movement and violence in various forms of life. Again people did realize that religion particularly; Hinduism and Buddhism are based on compassion and coordination. Society now again makes its march forward on the road of peace and tranquility. It proves the point that Buddhism which has been born in Nepalese soil does have capacity to create order, peace, mutual love and affection. So, if Nepalese understand religions values and tolerance, the

present state of anarchy and uncertainty will be wiped out. It would not be wrong to say that, tolerance, compassion and natural co-existence are the glue that attach and bind the society together which comes from religions like Hinduism and Buddhism.

Religions in Nepal have always been a guiding force in injecting moral and spiritual values. Religions in Nepal have been conceptual and ideological foundation of Nepalese culture. It is due to these reasons that religions like Hinduism and Buddhism have always had influence in Nepalese political life. This nation was unified on the basis of religious values by the King Prithvi Narayan Shah and his successor never interfered into the religious life of people, rather they protected religious institutions. When religious values in Nepal became weaker, at the time anti-social activities like violence and communal misunderstanding has spread. Therefore, in the context of Nepal we need try to create public awareness and opinion within Hinduism and Buddhism.

In this post-modern world, significance of Hinduism is increasing basically more in western world. Hinduism is appreciated for its flexibility and dynamism. In the den of Hinduism, many other religions like Buddhism, Sikhism, Jainism and others have flourished and prospered. It has maintained a great deal of distance from other state management. Comparing it to other religions, we find that there has been tussle between church and government over a long period of time. Similarly, Islamic countries are still being dictated by 'Sariyat' doctrine of Islam. Christianity and Islam still practice conversions. Quite contrast to it, Hinduism never encourages nor does it practice conversion. In this context, Swami Vivekananda, in his historical speech in Chicago has outlined that the concept of conversion itself stands against spirits of Hinduism. He has made his point abundantly clear that he did have capacity to convert others but his 'Guru' Swami Ramkrishna Paramhansa is dead against the practice of conversion. Adaptability is a part of Hinduism. Horizon of Hinduism is very wide. In his famous novel "A passage of India" E.M. Forster has said that Islam is way of life, whereas Christianity pleads for universal brotherhood. But Hinduism encompasses both material and spiritual world. It is focused more on spirituality.

Hinduism says that means and ends both have to be pious. As we notice many religions under the cover of certain philanthropic institutions like NGO and INGO's are launching towards its programmes in converting the people of other religions. It means that means is good but end is not good. In this context, we can quote the view of Nobel

Laureate T.S. Eliot, in his famous drama “Murder in the cathedral” in which here is a line saying, ‘The greatest temptation is the last treason, to do the right deed for the wrong reason. This applies to the point that Hinduism doesn’t do things for wrong reason.

The concept of *Sarva Dharma Sabbhava* and *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* is the basic foundation of Hinduism. On the edifice of it, Hinduism has stood for. It further tries to seek perfection in Human being. On the other hand, Christianity and Islam find human being as full of flaws and weakness. Human beings are destined to suffer in this world. But Hinduism adheres the view that people in this world, through the appropriate system can turn themselves from *Nar* to *Narayan*. In other word, human beings have divinity in their natures and features. In this regard, it is worthy to quote the view of a great Socialist leader Dr. Rammanohar Lohia who says that “We can develop the character of Ram, dynamism of Krinsha and keep mind of Shankar.” Through the appropriate systems and chains of life, Human being can be similar to God. This very divinity character can be only traced in Hinduism.

Comparing it with Buddhism, we find both similarities and differences. In context of Nepal, we can find that bond between Hinduism and Buddhism is very strong. Hindus and Buddhist have regard and respect to each others and both religious groups celebrate their spiritual activities in sprit of togetherness. Buddhists attack on Brahmanism is based on caste system. The purpose of Buddhism is to filter the dirt of Hinduism. This is one of the reasons that Hinduism welcomes Buddhism in their way of life and activities. In “Monastery”, we find Hindu God and Goddesses are prayed whereas in the temples “the idol of Buddha” is prayed to. The very significant difference between two religions is that Hinduism encompasses both attachment and detachment in life whereas Buddhism lays stress on detachment towards life.

Many philosophers comment that Buddhism leads the life towards rustic life far away from pleasures of life. Furthermore, they also say if all the people choose the life of Monk, how can the cycle of civilization run?

In spite of these differences, we notice that both these religions lay emphasis on credibility of character in Human beings.

The present world faces a great deal of crisis because values and norms of human beings are very quickly vanishing in this world. If we understand both these religions properly, we can instill norms and values in valueless society.

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# Academic View

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## Editorial

Since its inception in 2058 B.S., Tribhuvan Universtiy Teachers' Association (TUTA) Tri-Chandra Campus Unit has been actively involved in the enhancement of academic activities through different ways. In this context, TUTA Tri-Chandra Unit realized to continue to publish a journal based on the ongoing research activities at different departments of this campus and other institutions.

The *Academic View* has been published to disseminate the information and knowledge obtained through original researches, review works and experiences to scholars and researchers. The attempt has been made to incorporate all the papers from social sciences to basic/applied natural sciences. This publication covers a wide range of papers in socio-economic, geo-physical, environmental, poltical, cultural, historical, linguistic, chemical, physical, microbiological and other biological sciences to acquire good knowledge and understanding on such issues.

The papers printed in this *Academic View* were produced directly from the soft copies submitted by the authors in their original forms, with minor technical amendments. The views/opinions/statements. Expressed by various authors in these papers donot represent the official views of the publisher and editors. Although all efforts were made to ensure the accuracy and correctness of the papers, the publisher will not be responsible for any unintentional errors made during the publication of this journal.

We hope that this journal will be helpful for the teachers, researchers, students and other readers as well.

We look forward to receiving constructive suggestions and feedback from all of you.

Thank you.

Eak Raj Kadariya  
Chief Editor  
On behalf of the Editorial Borad  
*Academic View*,  
Journal of TUTA Tri-Chandra Campus Unit  
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We would like to express our special thank to Mr. Uttam Shrestha and Mr. Kanchan Prajapati of Creative Link Pvt. Ltd., Bagabazar for their sterling work and kind cooperation in computer design and printing.

We are grateful and always remain indebted to those who encouraged and inspired us to complete this project.

We would also like to say a very special thank you to those who have directly or indirectly helped us to bring this journal in this form.

### *Editors*

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# B R Ambedkar's Neo/Navayana Buddhism – An Overview

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Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, a dalit by birth of Mahar caste wrote the constitution of India. He is considered one of the greatest social reformer and intellectual of his time.

It was on October 14th, 1956 at Deekshabhoomi, Nagpur that Ambedkar announced his conversion to Buddhism by formerly taking Three Refuges of the Buddha, The Dhamma and The Sangha and the Five Precepts, the Panchashilas under a Buddhist monk, Bhadant U Chandramani along with 380,000 of his followers. After this ordination, Ambedkar also gave so called 22 Dhamma Diksha to his followers which has become a great subject of debate. Ambedkar died two months later. Without any doubt, his movement, Neo-Buddhism or Navayana, was pretty much directed against Hinduism and its caste system. He discarded many principles of Hinduism and renounced the worship of its deities. This Ambedkar makes clear in his dikshyas:

- 1 I will not regard Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh as gods nor will I worship them;
- 2 I will not regard Rama and Krishna as gods nor will I worship them;
- 3 I will not accept Hindu deities like Gauri, Ganapati and others, nor will I worship them;
- 4 I do not believe that God has taken birth or incarnation in any form;
- 5 I do not believe that Lord Buddha was the incarnation of Vishnu; I believe this propaganda is mischievous and false.

Although Dr. Ambedkar definitely renounced Hinduism but many Ambedkarites today would display the Hindu deities along with the photo of the Buddha.

It is very important to note that Dr. Ambedkar converted himself and the dalits into Buddhism not because the Buddha was against caste system and that it will bring social justice to the all dalits in India but he considered Buddhism as the most rational and humane religion that truly encompass entire humanity. Dr. Ambedkar also believed that Buddhism had been the original religion of the dalits. So, according to Dr. Ambedkar dalits are not seeking a new religion but they are returning to

their original religion. This movement is analogous to the Arya Samaj's Suddhi movement for reconversion of the Indian Muslims and Christians to their ancestral religion Hindu.

Surely, Dr. Ambedkar wanted to break away from Hinduism by converting himself to Buddhism, but ironically his study of history of Buddhism ultimately traced him back to the early Hindu thinkers, especially the propagator of Samkhya philosophy, Kapila. The similarities between these two philosophies cannot just be co-incidence for Dr. Ambedkar. The two fundamentals principles of Samkhya are:

- 1 Truth must be supported by proof and
- 2 The Three Gunas Satva, Raja and Tama become imbalanced due to suffering.

From the first Principle, the Buddha propagated the theory of Causality, that nothing happens without cause and preached the theory of Dependent Origination. The second principle is obvious. So, Dr. Ambedkar claimed that under the Bodhi Tree the Buddha was deep in meditation of Samkhya philosophy. The only difference is that the Buddha discovered how to emancipate from the miseries of human life and birth cycle.

The Buddha must have learned these principles while he was learning and practicing various forms of meditation under two prominent gurus of his time Arada Kalam and Uddhaka Ram Putra before he followed his own path as they couldn't give him the final answer to liberation.

Dr. Ambedkar gave 25 important tenets of Buddhism in his famous writing "Buddha or Marx" which he very much supported against other religions. Some of these tenets are worthy of mentioning here:

- 1 Religion is necessary for a free society.
- 2 Not every religion is worth having.
- 3 It is wrong to make God the center of Religion.
- 4 It is wrong to make animal sacrifices to be the centre of religion.
- 5 Religion lives in the heart of man and not in the Sastras.
- 6 There is no God in the world ruling upon human beings.

- 7 The function of Religion is to reconstruct the world and to make it happy, not to explain its origin or its end.
- 8 That the unhappiness in the world is due to conflict of interest and the only way to solve it is to follow the Arya Asthanga Marga.
- 9 All human beings are equal.
- 10 Worth and not birth is the measure of man.
- 11 Nothing is infallible. Everything is subject to inquiry and examination.
- 12 Everything subject to the law of causation.
- 13 War is wrong unless it is for truth and justice.

As it is clear from these fundamental laws of Buddhism, Dr. Ambedkar didn't accept Buddhism simply because it preaches Ahimsa and doesn't believe in caste system. Dr. Ambedkar being a political person and a social reformer viewed Buddhism from his own point of view.

He didn't accept Buddhism as it is written in Tripitaka. He rejected many tenets of Buddhism as harmful to humanism based upon the very principle of the Buddha that nothing is permanent and infallible.

First of all, the Neo-Buddhists, or the Navayanas, didn't accept the Chatur Arya Satya; the Four Noble Truths because it takes human life as full of suffering and nothing more, giving a very pessimistic outlook to life that is harmful. Buddha's philosophy is founded upon the ground of Dukkha. Throughout his life, the Lord Buddha taught human beings how to get out from the miseries of life. But Dr. Ambedkar believed that the concept of suffering is very negative and against the nature of man who should always be socially and politically active and not sit down in a quiet place immersing oneself in meditation. Dr. Ambedkar totally misunderstood Buddhism in this case as he never practiced Buddhist meditation.

Dr. Ambedkar believed that the Nikayas of Buddhist canon is not reliable and trustworthy and thought many passages could have been attributed by later monks and scholars. His outright rejection of the renunciation of the Lord Buddha on the ground of seeing old man, corpse is noteworthy here. Dr. Ambedkar did intensive study of the political turmoil during the time of King Sudodhana and he found all sorts of conspiracy going on which was very

natural during those times. But such activities were totally against the temperament of Prince Siddhartha who was always calm and disliked any sort of violence. So, Dr. Ambedkar concluded that the political turmoil and conspiracy inside the palace made young prince Siddhartha sick of life and he renounced the layman's life in search of truth. His frustration was political and not spiritual. He even declared the Bhikkhu of Buddhism as un-ideal and selfish who is in search of his own salvation. Therefore, Dr. Ambedkar took Buddhism as a means for social reform and not as a means to spiritual salvation. This is indeed a complete departure from the fundamental laws of Buddhism in Neo-Buddhism. No doubt that many Buddhist fundamentalist took Neo-Buddhism as somehow anti-Buddhistic in nature and claimed that Dr. Ambedkar's Navayana and his conversion is completely based upon hatred towards Hinduism with just the motive of social and political reforms. But this conflict against Buddhism is not new. The Mahayanas themselves during the 1 century B.C. called themselves "Mahayana" or "Buddhayana" calling the orthodox Buddhists as "Hinayana" because the Hinayanas always sought the personal salvation and did not much cared for others salvation.

But in my opinion this criticism of Dr. Ambedkar and Neo-Buddhism is somewhat unscrupulous and baseless. Recent trends among the Neo-Buddhists and study have proven the fact that they are taking Buddhism not just for social reformation and political conversion but genuine spiritual movement is evolving among them as observed by Leftist commentator Gopal Guru. The problem with Dr. Ambedkar was that he never realized that what the Buddha taught was the system of meditation by which salvation comes. The practice of Vipassana meditation in India had totally vanished but it was still retained in Burma and Sri Lanka. It was Satya Narayan Goenka who brought Vipassana from Burma to India. The practice of Vipassana meditation under the tradition of U Ba Khin, Burma and Satya Narayan Goenka is playing a great role in teaching the Neo-Buddhist the true spiritual value of Buddhism other than social and political reforms. In my opinion, the genesis of true Buddhist is not based upon hatred but upon compassion and love, and which is slowly emerging in India.

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