

## 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 (prativu). 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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