

## Chapter Three

### Buddhism and Humanism

In the previous sequel we have explained in great detail the concept of humanism after Ambedkar. It would perhaps not be an exaggeration to claim that Ambedkar's view of humanism directly hinges on Buddhism. Therefore, in this chapter we propose to analyse the concept of humanism after Buddhism. Buddhism is generally considered to be one of the major religions of the world, and many of its adherents also take it to be a religion. The point is that if humanism is supposed to be secular, then it may perhaps be considered to be an opponent of religion. Thus, there is a section of opinion which would expect humanism and Buddhism to be opposed to each other. But we think that there are many facets of humanism and religious humanism is one of the important forms of humanism.

Why is humanism opposed to Buddhism? One possible answer is that humanism is a western concept. Buddhism arose in India in the fifth century before the Common Era and most Buddhists still live in Asia. On the other hand, humanism arose in the West and most humanists live in Europe or the areas like the Americans and Australasia occupied by Europeans. Perhaps this separation in time and place may account for the mutual lack of misunderstanding. Western humanism is predominantly secular in nature and has mostly been used in the democratic political system. Another problem lies in the way religion is interpreted by humanists and Buddhists. The religions which humanists are most

familiar with are those steaming from the Middle East which nurtured the Judeo-Christian-Islamic family of religions. These are based on the notion of an omnipotent God, an authoritative text, and people claiming to be the prophets of God. This notion is absent in Asian religion. Thus, even if we claim that Western form of humanism is not fully detached from religion, but the religion that we witness in Western tradition is somewhat different from the religion from the Eastern tradition. The religion of Buddhism and Jainism completely reject the notion of God while others like Taoism, Confucianism, Shinto, etc. generally ignore the concept of God. This clearly suggests that the conventional notion of religion in the West which humanists are most familiar with, will not easily accommodate belief systems regarded as 'religions' in most Asian traditions. Accordingly, if humanism is to be understood in the Western manner, then of course, there lies a controversy of considering Buddhism as a religion of humanism. However, we do not think so. Humanism, we believe, is not a compartmental concept that can be used and understood in a precise and specific manner. Rather there are multifarious ways or webs of interpretation of approaching humanism. We have already explained the radical interpretation of humanism after M. N. Roy in the first chapter and also examined Ambedkar's view of humanism in the second chapter. Roy's radical humanism ensures economic justice and Ambedkar's humanism ensures liberty, equality and fraternity of the downtrodden people. Roy's humanism is secular in nature; whereas Ambedkar's humanism is a mix bag of both social and political justice.

Thus, unlike Roy, Ambedkar gives importance on both secular and religious aspects of human life.

Buddhism as a religion is not a dogma as it does not match with the usual dictionary definitions of religion. Usual dictionary definitions of religion either require an explicit belief in God or a supernatural or require belief in a 'spiritual' principle or entity. In this sense, Hinduism is a religion. However, a definition including God will not include Buddhism and the definition in terms of some 'spiritual' principle or entity often becomes a circular one because 'spiritual' is defined to mean religions and therefore, cannot be used to define what a religion is. A religion is a belief system which contains a set of absolute beliefs which at the very last could be a set of absolute ethical principles and it must postulate some kind of post-mortem existence 'life after death'. If this definition of religion holds good then Buddhism in the true sense of the term cannot be regarded as a religion. Buddhism does not believe in God; Buddhism does not believe in absolute ethical principles; Buddhism does not believe in 'life after death'. According to Buddhism, everything is relative, momentary, 'sunya'. Nothing is permanent. Therefore, there cannot be anything absolute. Thus, Buddhism as a religion holds a unique position which as a religion brings the secularism of humanism.

There is no question of doubt that humanism based on the usual definition of religions normally postulates some absolute beliefs. These involve some ethical rules not completely relativistic and belief in the rational inquiry. It thus could be considered as satisfying the first criterion. However, it has no theory of existence

after physical death and therefore does not satisfy the second, and is thus not a religion on this definition. But what is Buddhism? Buddhism is the Western name for the doctrine propounded by Siddhartha (Goutama) in the fifth century BCE in India. The term 'Buddha' means 'awakened' or 'enlightened'. There is different form of Buddhism and not all forms are explicitly relevant to humanism. Many of their beliefs and practices are quite the contrary to what the Buddha proclaimed. Therefore, if a meaningful comparison of Buddhism and humanism has to be made, it has to be made with the authentic teaching of the Buddha which can be gleaned from the Pali Canon. Buddha argued that all phenomena, animate or inanimate, have three characteristics. They are unsatisfactory as they do not constitute some kind of ideal; they are impermanent in that they will change with time, and that they lack an abiding essence. When these characteristics are applied to the human plane, the first characteristic of unsatisfactoriness is usually seen as suffering (*dukkha*), the second in the human process of ageing, decay and death (*jarmarana*), and the third is the absence of a soul (*atman*). With reference to the human conditions, the Buddha proclaimed the Four Noble Truths of Buddhism. These are:

- (i) Suffering: The first noble truth is a tyranny of pain. According to Buddha, life is full of suffering. Birth is painful, decay is painful, disease is painful, death is painful, union with the unpleasant is painful; painful is the separation from the pleasant, and any craving that is unsatisfactory, that too is painful. This affirms that the human condition is characterised in the final analysis by suffering and

unsatisfactoriness. If nothing else, this is implicit in the very process of ageing, decay and death. By conceiving life as full of miseries, Buddha does not preach the mere worthlessness of life, nor does he preach resignation to the inevitable doom; rather he asks us to revolt against evil and attain a life of a finer quality humanity is talking about.

- (ii) **The Cause of Suffering:** Buddha explains the origin of life's sufferings in the light of his special theory of natural causation known as *pratitya-samudpada*, according to which nothing is unconditional. Hence, the life's sufferings must also be due to some conditions. The Buddha traced this to the basic human tendencies of craving and grasping. These, in turn, cause greed, hatred (aversion) and delusion (i.e. ignorance of the true nature of existence).
- (iii) **The Release from Suffering:** The third noble truth is the extinction of suffering. This truth is a logical deduction from the second truth. Extinction of suffering can be effected by removing and destroying the causes that are responsible for suffering. By a complete destruction of thirst, craving or will to be born, one can put a stop to suffering. This total extinction of suffering is known as *nirvana*. *Nirvana* is the total extinction of desire. It is the total extinction of suffering, decay and death. Thus, *nirvana* means extinction of miseries and consequent state of perfect equanimity and peace. Thus, Buddha affirms that a state that is free of suffering is possible. This is

not necessarily realised in a post-death situation like a heaven or the Kingdom of God, but in this very life itself. A person who has secured release from suffering and has died is said to have reached the state of *nibbana* (nirvana) the precise nature of which is not described in the Buddhist texts.

- (iv) Way to cessation of suffering: The fourth noble truth is the path leading to the extinction of suffering. This is Noble Eightfold Path consisting of Right view, Right thought, Right action, Right speech, Right livelihood, Right effort, Right mindfulness and Right concentration. It is important to note here that the usual religious requirements of prayer, blind faith, sacrifice, etc. do not figure in the Buddha's path.

### **Humanism and Secularism**

It is interesting to note that even though Buddhism is a religion, but there is secularism in Buddhism. Secular humanism asserts that only relevant spheres of actions for humans are humanity in a collective sense. That means there is no external divine agency between human beings and the physical environment. The Buddha affirmed the same for him humans have to rely on themselves for their release from sufferings. There is no external authority or saviour to rely on. As a secular humanism, Buddhism affirms the ultimate responsibility of human beings. Buddhism as a secular humanism reveals that nature in the sense of physical world is the given datum which humans have to deal with. Not only that Buddhism as a religion gives utmost importance

on compassionate action towards other human beings which we think is one of the important aspect of humanism. In secular humanism there is no role of God or any divine agency. Humans themselves determine their fate by practicing four noble truths which are practical and based on science and common sense. Thus Buddhism as a secular humanism holds that humans have no obligation towards God or to obey such any supernatural agent. Perhaps Buddhism is the only universal religion which unambiguously rejects the idea of God. Buddha showed that belief in the existence of a supreme creator God is a fundamental delusion which the enlightened person has to get rid of. Therefore, according to Buddhism, it would be futile or ineffectual to believe in God, to prayer and sacrifice to God. To believe in God is to disbelieve oneself. In this way we can say that Buddhism goes even beyond humanism in talking in atheistic, indeed, antithesistic position.

In secular humanism, everything must be founded on reason and human experience. We sense the same in Buddhism. That is why Ambedkar was influenced by Buddhism. There is a cardinal principle of humanism which is too common in Buddhism. The methodology which the Buddha recommended that his disciples follow is given in the famous *Kama Sutra*. Buddhism as a secular religion states: *“Do not believe in anything (simply) because you have heard it. Do not believe in traditions because they have been handed down for many generations. Do not believe in anything because it is spoken and rumoured by many. Do not believe anything simply because it is written in your religious books. Do not believe in anything merely on the*

*authority of your teachers and elders. But after observation and analysis when you find that anything agrees with reason and is conducive to the good and benefit of one and all then accept it and live up to it.*” Here we have a clear statement of the scientific method advocated by humanists, rationalists and scientists. Buddhism is opposite of the blind faith unlike theistic religion like Hinduism.

Buddhism as a secular religion ensures human rights, i.e. equal human rights backed up by liberty, equality and fraternity. Buddhism as a secular religion proclaims just society. Even though there is no specific codification of human rights in a single place in the Buddhist’s discourse, however, careful study would reflect that in various *suttas* the Buddha gives instructions on how individuals should conduct themselves. We think that the Buddha was one of the first to condemn slavery as a right livelihood, and thereby ensures the most basic of human rights. No other leader of a major religion has done it. The Old Testament endorses slavery and this has to be ascribed to Christianity as well. Even According to Ambedkar, there is slavery in Hinduism in the form of caste-system. Islam too completely endorses slavery and Mohammed himself was a slave owner. When religion is dictated by God and any other supernatural entity, there remained slavery in one form or other as we noticed in many religions as stated above. However, Buddhism is free from any sort of religious slavery.

It is important to note here that even though humanists affirm human rights, but there is no universally accepted code of human rights. Human rights are

must for every human but such rights are relative, transferant and can be varied from person to person in the context of social and cultural situation. Even though Universal Declaration of Human Rights has been set up to give a uniform human rights, but there are many specific rights mentioned there with which some humanists will not agree. In Buddhism the starting point of a new life is conception. This even marks the conjunction of three things, the sperm, the ovum and the *sankhara* or residual karma of a deceased being. The last mane should not be confused with the sub-soul of some religion because the rejection of the notion of a soul is a cardinal principle of Buddhism.

Buddhism as a secular humanism not only confines to humans, even it goes beyond it. It not only ensures social justice, but gives prime importance on environmental justice as well. Thus, the humanism of Buddhism is comprehensive in nature. Buddhism as a secular humanism incorporates both biotic as well as abiotic community. Buddhism states that humans do not have the right of domination over animals and the environment. It reveals that humans along with many other species of animals do change their environment by preserving and maintaining their very existence. To encompass everything within the purview of humanism is a cardinal principle of Buddhism. According to Buddhism to dominate over animals and even over nature is not a human right at all. To the Buddha all forms of life were entitled to exist, and human should respect this right of existence. Humanism states that any species, human or animal, has to make certain modifications in

the natural environment to accommodate its basic living requirements. What the Buddhist principle asserts that wanton and deliberate destruction of animal life and ecosystems is not an automatic right of humans. In this respect, Buddhism goes much further than humanism does in the area that is now described as ecological conservation and responsibility.

Secular humanism states that children should not be subjected to physical and mental abuse, nor to religious or political indoctrination by parents or others. Humanism states that the rights of children should be codified in a charter of children rights. Buddhism as a secular humanism recognises that parents and elders have a responsibility towards their children and vice-versa. The Buddha did not institute a rite like Baptism or the thread ceremony of Hinduism under which children who are not really aware of what is taking place are inculcated into a religion. We note that the Brahmanical customs under which children were initiated into religious life, even though less intrusive than the later Judeo-Christian-Islamic customs, were frowned on by the Buddha. However, it reveals that the Middle Eastern religions introduced the sexual mutilation of children (circumcision) and this is still done by Jews and Muslims. Christians gave up the practice only after considerable debate. Moreover, the Buddha was against despotic rule by tyrants and argued that rulers should be bound by rules of conduct based on *Dharma* or moral law. It has remained the standard for the ideal Buddhist king. When the news of the campaign planned by the Magadhan king against the Vajjians was brought to his notice the Buddha said so long as they adhered to consultative process,

they would not come to any harm. The Buddha organised the *Sangha* on democratic lines. Thus, democratic processes, subject to moral law, would have been the Buddha's preferred way. Thus, like secular humanism, Buddhism as a secular religion states that civil laws should be arrived at by a collective consensual process and should promote the common good, not the tenets of a particular religion or philosophy.

Buddhism as a secular religion also maintains that special privileges should not be given to any group on the basis of religious or philosophical belief. One group should not be discriminated by other group on the grounds like race, ethnicity, beliefs, gender, age, etc. The Buddha thus opposed the suppression of alternative views. Instead the Buddha repeatedly urges that what others have to say should be listened to and errors pointed out. Discriminatory conduct which leads to the detriment of the well-beings of others clearly fall under the category of wrong action. Buddhism as a secular and universal religion concedes all the people and to men and women in an equal manner. Buddha states that there is no conclusive evidence that life exists after death; so humans should exert themselves primarily in terms of their present life. The Buddha argued that post-mortem existence was not only possible but was in fact the rule. It is only in the case of liberated persons that death is the final end.

In this regard, Buddhism prescribes five cardinal principles of secular humanism. These are:

- (i) Abstaining from conduct injurious to life and the physical well-being of persons.
- (ii) Abstaining from the theft of property of others.
- (iii) Abstaining from sexual violence and misconduct.
- (iv) Abstaining from falsehood, fraud and deception.
- (v) Abstaining from drunkenness, narcotics and mind bending drugs.

According to Buddha, these five precepts should govern the conduct of ordinary persons. More humanistic rules were laid down for those wanted to follow a stricter discipline including over 200 rules for monastics. The first of these five rules in the Buddhist code is more extensive than humanistic are likely to agree to and excludes injury to all forms of life, including that of animals. The rule about theft is made difficult by how property could be defined. In Buddhism this rule is usually stated as not taking that which is not given. This avoids the mysteries associated with the definition of property which will be a problem for humanists. The third rule is the Buddhist formulation excludes sexual relationship based on force, lust, etc. Sometimes it is equated to a rule of monogamy. Buddhism does not say anything special about sexual orientation in the case of laypersons. The fourth rule is encompassed in the Buddhist notion of 'right speech'. It is taken as something more than the mere abstention from the thing stated here in the humanist version. The last one is important for Buddhism because of the place it gives to the culture of the mind through meditation which cannot be done if the mind is distorted by substance abuse. In fact, the five precepts of Buddhism extended into the modern context show that the Buddha's

ethical precepts do not become outdated simply by the passage of time. Unlike other religions the Buddha did not require his followers to make events associated with the life-career of persons (birth, marriage, death) into religious rites. Many of these are treated as purely secular matters without involving any monks or religious officials. This is also the case with practice in Buddhist countries. In other religion, if any event is treated with some religious ceremony, it is death. However, in Buddhism the ceremony is for the benefit of the living, not of the dead person. It is important to note that Western humanists too seem to detect a need for celebrations to mark birth, marriage and death. This is perhaps a hang-over from the Christian past. Christians celebrate birth because they think that it is a gift from God, marriage because they think that it is a sacrament, but what do humanists who devise secular equivalence to these in them? We think Buddhists are more logical in this regard and do not see anything in particular need of religious celebration in any of these events.

### **Some Problems**

Even though Buddhism as a religion may be regarded as secular and universal religion but from this it does not follow that Buddhism and secular humanism are same. Even though there are some broad agreement of secular humanism with Buddhism but there are two principal differences between them.

### **The Rebirth Hypothesis**

The aim of Buddhism is to end the suffering (dukkha) which it sees the essential feature of the human condition. Humanism has a different goal. It defends basic

human rights, promote a secular ethical system and to free individuals from the control of institutions built on supernatural religion. While humanism considers the normal span of an individual's activity to be the term of his or her natural life, Buddhism has a much wider perspective and considers the life-span of an individual to be a single episode in a much longer story. This aspect of Buddhism has been called the rebirth hypothesis (*sansaric* hypothesis). Buddhism states that an individual consists of five components: one is the physical basis, three are psychological (feelings, perceptions and consciousness) and the fifth is something unique to Buddhism. It is called *sankhara* (volitional formations) and consists of a record of an individual's deliberate actions called his or her *karma*. However, none of the five components are identical as a soul (*atman*), the express denial of which is one of the principal claims of Buddhism. All five are subject to constant change and on physical death all components except volitional formations vanish, the last component surviving just long enough to condition the birth of the new individual. Only in reaching full enlightenment the re-birth process is completely cut off.

The Buddha does not give any more detail about the re-birth process, e.g. relating to the physical mechanisms involved. Neither is an objective proof of the rebirth process given. The Buddha realised that many people may not be able to accept the rebirth hypothesis merely on the basis of his sayings. Thus, the principal claims of Buddhism, e.g. the three characteristics of existence, the four noble truths, the eightfold path, etc. do not depend on whether the rebirth process is true or not. They would apply even if humans have only one lifetime as

materialists, sceptics, humanists, etc. believe. The dispensation which the Buddha gave from strict belief in the rebirth and karma hypothesis is contained in the *Kama sutta* to which reference was made earlier. Here the Buddha distinguishes four levels of confidence in the teaching, the first two of which are of relevance here. The first level involves acceptance of all claims including those for which no proof is given, and the second level allows for some scepticism. In this *Sutta* the Buddha says, “If there is other world and if there is the fruit and result of good and bad deeds, then there is reason that I shall be reborn into the state of bliss, the celestial world, on the dissolution of the body, after death.” This is the first confidence that he attains. However, “ if there is no other world and if there is no fruit and result of good and bad deeds, then I shall myself lead here a happy life, free from enmity, malice and suffering in this very life.” This is the second confidence that he attains.

We think that the second level of confidence of which Buddha speaks is precisely what humanists assert. They do not believe in another world and they do not believe in the law of Karma. Thus what the humanists aspire to is the Buddha’s terminology the second level of confidence which does not require a belief in some kind of existence after death, nor the belief that all actions good or bad have consequences. Moreover, the second level of confidence can be attained by the Buddhist disciple. Thus, a Buddhist can be a humanist without violating the requirements laid down by the Buddha. It should be noted here that some Buddhists do not interpret karma and rebirth as requiring re-birth and post-mortem existence. They give a different interpretation to *sanskara* by

considering the one life we are all familiar with as constituting the entirety of *sanskara* as expounded by the Buddha. According to this, all fruits of karma take place during the single physical life time and any unexpanded karmas being effectively written off. Re-birth is seen as a constant process that takes place during one's lifetime where individuals continuously change in response to physical and psychological events. Each such transformation can be seen as a 'rebirth'. However, this interpretation of karma and rebirth does not have general acceptance amongst traditional Buddhists, even though it is popular amongst many Western Buddhists. It is difficult to cite passages from the Buddhist texts where the Buddha had advocated such a radical interpretation of the doctrine of karma and rebirth.

### **Mental Development**

The second important difference between Buddhism and humanism lies in their views on what constitutes mental development of a person. Humanists have looked upon secular education and the use of the scientific methods as the only way in which the mind of man can be developed. They cite the progress in the sciences and consider that a proper education should inculcate the ability to reason and analysis. The creative aspects of mental activity are not discouraged or denigrated, but 'creativity' should not be an excuse to advance irrational and indefensible ideas. Of course, a major activity of humanists is to cleanse the educational curriculum of irrational elements which tend to promote dogmatism and entrench the religious view. We think that the Buddhists would agree with humanists in promoting a proper education for all, especially for children whose

developing minds should be protected from religious or political indoctrination of all kinds. However, Buddhism argues that true mental development must also involve that kind of training of the mind which is generally referred to as meditation. One should not, however, forget different interpretation of the term meditation. In fact, the Western perspective of meditation is somewhat different from Buddhist texts. Meditation in a theistic context usually involves some adoration of the deity or some form of 'silent prayer'. This is a kind of meditation that some Christian mystics have used. It is also the basis of Sufi meditation in Islam. They are part and parcel of the theistic approach, an alternative way of adoring God undertaken in traditional churches and mosques. This approach has sometimes been referred to as 'mysticism' and humanists have generally opposed it. The Buddha too was opposed to this kind of mysticism which he revealed as *Upanishadic* teachings. Having said this Buddha felt that some kind of alternative reflection was useful in the training of the mind. In this regard, Buddha suggests two components, namely, mindfulness (*sati*) and concentration (*samadhi*). These are not mystical processes. Mindfulness is being completely aware of what we are doing; concentration is the development of insight into the true nature of reality, particularly recognition of the three characteristics of existence both in oneself and in external persons or events.

Buddha put so much emphasis on mental development (*bhavan*) because mental development is a must for overcoming the failure of theistic as well as the secular ethics. These ethical systems often lay down a set of rules but there is no

technique by which persons can actually be trained to do these things. They are looked very much like the laws on the statue book. In the religious arena too some kind of ecclesiastical police did exist in Christianity in the past, and still do in some Islamic countries. This has led to instances of people being burnt, stoned, drowned, tortured, etc. for infringements of religious dogmas or ethical rules based on them. However, the theory of deterrence has been discredited and crimes have been committed in punishments based on this theory.

### **Buddha, Dharma and Sangha - the trio-concepts of Humanism**

The *Buddhist's* essence of humanism actually hinges on the trio-concepts, such as, *Buddha*, *Dharma* and *Sangha*. The Buddha was a man who brought about radical changes in the old order of things and ideas through the means of *Karuna* (Love), *Maitri* (Friendship) and *Samata* (Equality), *Tyaga* (abandonment), etc. He wanted to change the mind of man and the social situation by love and persuasion. He was opposed to any kind of violence and dictatorship, because these methods of change were not permanent. They were rather conceived in human. The Buddha, Dharma and *Sangha* are called as '*Trisaran*', '*Triratna*', or the Triple Gem. These are essentially for the *Upasakas* and the *Bhikkus*, who are regarded as true Buddhists, true humanists. The *trisanan* is an underlying source of unity behind all the Buddhists sects. It is an emotional source for bringing together the entire community of the Buddhists. When pronounced by the *Upasakas* or the *Bhikkus*, their sound pacifies our mind. It creates a feeling of brotherhood, the mutual love and sympathy. Indeed the *Triple Gem* of Buddhism brings all the Buddhist people together and binds them in the world fellowship

and it will expand to all human beings. The role of Buddha is just like a doctor, the Dharma to the medicine and the *Sangha* to nurses. Thus, *Buddha, Dharma* and *Sangha* all together acts as a unified way that we notice in a great humanist. *Trisaran* actually free one from all kinds of fears, provide skilful means to liberate others, always maintaining impartiality towards all living beings. It has the will to help others regardless of what they may have done to oneself.

Thus, it can be said that without accepting the significance of *trisanan* and without practicing it regularly the *Upasaka Samaj* or *Bhikku Sangha* cannot be true and honest follower of Buddha. If anyone fails to derive the spiritual solace emanated from it, he loses one golden chance. Every human being can be benefitted from the inherent virtues, like *Karuna* and *Maitri* of *trisanan*. A refugee of the Triple Gem is a great humanist as he is duty bound to liberate the people, living the lower levels of existence, from suffering. He as a humanist may think of and go to serve them. Anyone who goes in the refuge of Triple Gem, gets relief from tension and turmoil. It becomes a part and parcel of an individual's being, if he truly takes and practices it in his life. It gives him peace of mind and protects him from fear and sorrow. In brief, "The main teaching of the Refuges is to live in accordance with the Law of cause and Effect, i.e. following virtue and abandoning vice. When you practice this every day, it will lead quickly to a change in your life."<sup>59</sup>

What we can say here is that the Triple Gem, such as, Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, are the means through which one can become a humanist. It is therefore

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<sup>59</sup> G.N.Dhargyey, *Tibetan Tradition of Mental Development*, 1978, p.69.

significant to contemplate these three sources of motivation each day before taking refuge. The Buddha, the original source remains present in all three objects of refuge. He is also Guru, the Teacher, of all who take refuges. By taking refuge in the Buddha, refuge is taken in the entire Triple Gem. It is also enter the region, where we could find right knowledge, universal morality and ample contentment. There are many other objects of refuge that people look to, such as, money, a government, caste or community, but these worldly refuges do not have the qualities of a true sanctuary as they create discontentment instead of peace. Even the refuge in gods and goddesses are neither ultimate, nor dependable, and do more harm than good to those who take refuge in them. According to Buddhism, they do not help human beings in mitigating their sufferings; rather they create conditions, which cause individual tension and social disturbance, discrimination and distance between man and man. Thus, only Triple Gem is ultimate and possesses the means to end all sufferings, and the Buddha has compassion for all living beings equally. Thus, following Buddhism one can become a great humanist just by purifying oneself through **Triple Gem.**

Buddha being a great humanist prescribes eight rare and precious characteristics of a true refugee and which are equally useful to all human beings. These are:

- (i) He has attained permanent cessation from all sufferings (The Third Noble Truth) and is, thus, free from birth and death.
- (ii) All his actions come spontaneously and are free of effect.

- (iii) This characteristic can neither be understood nor described in words, for it is *Sunyata* of the Buddha himself. In this way one cannot describe the difference in taste between brown and white sugar, yet a difference is experienced.
- (iv) He has complete wisdom regarding both *Sunyata* and the nature of all phenomena.
- (v) He has perfect compassion for all living beings.
- (vi) He possesses unsurpassable power, and thus, is greatly effective in leading others to Liberation. Some beings cannot be led by the teachings alone, but must be given physical evidence.
- (vii) The Buddha has achieved his own ultimate aim, which consists of these first three qualities.
- (viii) He has attained the perfect means of delivering others, or the later three of these qualities.

Each of the three manifestations of Buddha, including the manifestation of his wisdom (Manjusri), his compassion (Avalokiteswara) and his power (Vajrapani), is the embodiment of the entire Triple Gem. The form of each is the Buddha and Sangha, and their wisdom is the Dharma. Thus, if a person takes asylum or refuge in any of them, it is equivalent to taking refuge in the Triple Gem. The Buddha exercises his power when these manifestations embody themselves on each as *Bodhisattvas*. The Tibetan word ‘Sang-gya’ means ‘Buddha’ having two-fold meaning of ‘awakening from all

obscurities' and 'the perversion of all levels of knowledge'. The refuge of the Dhamma is equivalent to the last two Noble Truths, i.e. the cessation of *Dukha* and the *Asthangamarga*. The Dhamma has two aspects: it is both permanent and impermanent. It is permanent for the cessation of suffering and it is impermanent as is the *Asthangamarg*. The Dhamma is known as the 'true refuge' for it is the wisdom by means of which one attains Nirvana. According to Buddhism, taking refuge of the Dhamma also means the taking refuge of the Ten *Parmitas* (Perfections), such as, *Dana*, *Sila*, *Nekkham*, *Panna*, *Virya*, *Khanti*, *Sacha*, *Abhistan*, *Metta* and *Upekkha*. These are the forms of spiritual practices by which one develops the true taking of refuge, and they are also the basis for attaining the cessation of suffering.

**It seems clear to us that within the eternal continuity of becoming, there is something which is permanently alive in the Buddhist way of life and that is the core of its humanism. In fact, the Buddhist humanism continues in the** changing world to influence and activate the people so as to restore to social relationship that harmony and affection without which liberty, equality and even life itself, are but routine things. We think that the passion of Buddhist humanism is rooted in social cohesion of entire mankind and obtains to man his true meaning through concrete human relations. The religion of Lord Buddha is the excellent expression of humanism and humanitarianism. The humanism of Buddhism actually hinges on the ideals of love, harmony and goodwill which in turn enhance the human life without intolerance, injustice and exploitation. The humanism of Buddhism is

directed to “the liberation of man from *dukkha*, suffering.”<sup>60</sup> The Buddhist religion is based on the ethical insight of man, and at the same time, is rooted in individuality –oriented social system which persists and endures on its own principles of compassion and brotherhood, such as, *karuna and maïtre*.<sup>61</sup> The humanism of Buddhism actually tries to explore how to mitigate suffering and thereby makes man’s life happy. The Buddha himself is not a saviour, but a teacher, an exemplar of the good life. In this regard, Kaplan says, “The Buddhist humanism sets man even above the gods, but without a trace of the impiety of worshipping man as God.”<sup>62</sup>

We think that the genesis of humanism of Buddhism is that it is based on love guided by reason and reason inspired by love and reverence. It teaches man to be without prejudice and without fanaticism. Ambedkar was influenced by this aspect of Buddhism which he completely missed in Hinduism. Good men make good social systems, but no economic and material forces on their own have ever made a good society. It is only righteous conduct that makes a man good and not the wealth itself. The Buddhist humanism, thus, is of a higher and qualitative type which consists of genuine human relations and mutual respect between human beings: man is to man a friend, a ‘*mitra*’. Buddhism constantly reminds the people to enter a new society based on spiritual relationship, to participate in a spiritual fraternity, believing that ‘man is not fundamentally a material being driven

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<sup>60</sup> Damodaran, K. *Man and Society in Indian Philosophy*, New Delhi, 1970, p.31.

<sup>61</sup> Jatava, D.R., *The Buddha and Karl Marx*, Phoenix, 1968, p.221.

<sup>62</sup> Kaplan, A., *A New World of Philosophy*, Macmillan, London, 1962, p.265.

by the instincts of production and reproduction. The humanism of Buddhism insists upon the principle that 'the measure of man must be worth, not birth'.<sup>63</sup> The qualitative type of humanism combines respect, love for man and concern for his physical and spiritual welfare with an uncompromising attitude towards the evils of killing, lying, stealing, Adultery, greed and exploitation. Thus, it can be said that the principles of humanist morality of Buddhism which finds in Buddhist paths of purity, righteousness and virtue require definite traits in human character.

The Buddhist humanism embodied in the *Dhammapada* stands for the dynamic progression and universalisation of the spirit of every individual and the illumination and freedom of the entire realm of life. The knowledge is not merely for self-realisation, i.e. for *nirvana*, but also for faith in the unity and inter-connectedness of human beings. It is clear that Buddhist humanism is grounded in human society and marked by an essential perennial theme of '*bahujana hitaya, bahujana sukhaya*'. The four-noble truths, such as, there is *dukkha*, it has a cause, it must be removed and the method of removal is by following the middle path; eight fold path: right view, right aspiration, right speech, right conduct, right livelihood, right endeavour, right mindfulness and right-contemplation; and *prajnaparamitas*: charity (*dana*), morality (*sila*), patience (*ksanti*), energy (*virya*), meditation (*dhyana*), wisdom (*prajna*), expediency (*upaya*), vow (*pranidhana*), strength (*bala*), and

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<sup>63</sup> Ambedkar, B.R. *The Buddha and His Dharma*, People's Education Society, Bombay, 1957, p.306.

knowledge (*jnana*), which imbibe the deepest feeling of human welfare. All these are means and ways of humanism fit one to help and to free others.

To sum up, we can say that the Buddhist humanism does not show any concern about the transcendent and the absolute, nor for any prayer for divine succour and guidance. The Buddhist humanism has a profound meaning only when we conceive men as human beings living together. The ethical-spiritual ethos of Buddhism, which asserts that man exists only in social relations and that every man can fashion himself to be an Enlightened One, is invaluable for all civilisations and societies of the world. The Buddhist passionate drive towards humanity and humaneness and benevolence of people is of perennial value for the modern civilisation. Thus, it can be said that the Buddhist humanism is the greatest antidote to the shallow, self-destructive and senseless cultural currents in the world today. It must combat the prevailing, strong, world-wide prejudices of colour and race, caste and creed, low and high, reduce the increasing social distance between the have and have-nots and enlarge the domains of compassion, liberty and equality for all human beings in the world. The great humanism of Buddhism is profusely reflected with the remark of Buddha: "My Dhamma is a dhamma of justice for all. Proclaim it freely to all men; it will cleanse the good and evil, the rich and poor alike...whoever is compassionate will feel the longing to save not only himself but all others." <sup>64</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Narasu, P.L. *The Essence of Buddhism*, Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1954, p.117.