

# **Chapter - V**

## THE NOTION OF DHARMA IN BUDDHISM

The all inclusive term for religion in India was *Āryadharmā*, derived from "Ārya" meaning noble, and 'dharma,' which is derived from the root 'dhr' meaning to sustain or carry. *Dharma* really implies Religion, Law and Truth. Thus it is a system of man's conduct including right action, right living, as well as the whole panorama of man's duties. *Āryadharmā*, therefore, includes all the faiths of the Aryan people (Vedic and non-Vedic). The origin of the idea of *Dharma* goes back to ancient Iranian and Vedic-Aryan concepts. The Vedic-Aryan concept of *Ṛta* encompasses the whole range or order, the physical order of things, the mental, and moral laws as well, related to the whole scheme of things. In a sense *Ṛta*, and also *Dharma*, is the path leading to the Eternal, just like the rays of the sun, if one could travel on them, they would lead us to the sun. *Dharma* is a door to the eternal.

*Upaniṣads* laid greater stress on the belief in the Absolute as the only intrinsic reality and identified *Dharma* as the emanation from it. Buddha emphasised on the *Dharma* itself as the standard for conduct in the actual world rather than dwelling on the totally in comprehensible. "Absolute Reality", which was wholly beyond, just

as a wise teacher would direct the student to analyse the life-giving as well as death-dealing powers of the rays from the sun which envelope the student and his world, in order to fruitfully and wisely exist by those powers, rather than have the student aspiring to gaze at the unseeable solar orbit directly. *Dharma* was considered to be the all in all in the actual world for it was the image of the absolute truth, infallible justice and righteousness. The Buddha called *Dharma* the king of kings and taught that reverence and homage were to be directed towards *Dharma*.

In the *Samyutta - nikāya*, a Hīnayānist text *Dharma* is unwavering law of Causality (*Karma*) or Conditioned Origination and the law of *Karma* is all-pervading and its recognition is the most precious jewel (*ratna*) of knowledge.<sup>1</sup>

Buddha equated *Dharma* with the *Upaniṣadic* concept of Brahman and claimed that the way of the *Dharma* is the way of the Brahman or to dwell in *Dharma* is to dwell in *Brahman*. *Dharma* is the ground of being or not, it is the only path that must be followed by all to gain liberation.

However, before the traveller can find the path (*Dharma*) he must be able to recognize the true guide (the Buddha) and has complete faith in His guidance and direction.

In the traditional Indian thought, the Sanskrit term *Dharma* has a variety of ethical, legal, political, metaphysical and religious meanings which are often inter-related, norm of ethical conduct, universal righteousness, cosmic order and elements and teaching doctrine.

The term *dharmā* establishes itself as designating the basic, primordial constituents of the conscious stream of individual being, this is considered as subject of world - conscious experience. The present existence of the *dharmas* is momentary in as much as they are manifested in association with one another.

According to *Sarvāstivādins*, the *dharmas* come from the future if the causal conditions are such that they are summoned into momentary manifestation. As they flow into the past, they might retain certain characteristics which may enable them to re-manifest at a certain point in the future. Thus the three epochs (*adhvan* = the three "roads" or transitions of time, i.e. future, present and past) are "real" for the *Sarvāstivādins*.<sup>2</sup>

These "three roads" of time are connected with each other : the future with the present, the present with the future and past, and the past with both the present and the future itself.

The assertion of the *Sarvāstivādins* that "everything is", i.e. that all the *dharmas* have an essence and a givenness of their own,

which in their potentiality, is ultimate and transcendent. Thus the *dharmas* are mostly conceived as *dravyas* capable of coordinating with each other in order to travel from the *adhvan* (road) of the "future" into the *adhvan* of the "present" to be *deposited* into the *adhvan* of the "past". Only "aggregates" of *dharmas* and their actual presentation (*svalakṣaṇa*) are destroyed; their ultimate separate essences (*svabhāva*) cannot be destroyed.

The *Dharmas* are *Saraṇa* (in trouble). The term *raṇa* (turbulence) is directly connotative of *duḥkha* (suffering) which, is also often translated as "unrest". This "unrest" of the *dharmas* is the source of suffering.

Reality is analysed into a plurality of ultimate constituents called *dharma* which are as impersonal entities having each its separate character. The *Dharmas* are best understood as classes of phenomena rather than as stable universals. The starting point of the *dharma* theory is the flux of experience. *Dharmas* are, thus, constituents of experience.

The requirements of man in this world of ours have been described by the wise as *Dharma*, *Artha*, *Kāma* and *Mokṣa*.

A superficial analysis we would find that man's first aim in life is to be happy. This happiness he strives for will, on a little reflection,

be seen to consist of two kinds, viz - (1) momentary happiness (2) eternal happiness.

We remain contented with a particular type of happiness only so long as we do not think of a greater type of it. The greater type of happiness is *Mokṣa*. He who realises the real nature of this state of eternal bliss will never feel attracted by the lower sensual and mental pleasure of this world. To him second and third *Puruṣārtha* i.e. *Artha* or material riches and *Kāma* or desires will cease to have any charm.

The first *Puruṣārtha* or *Dharma* i.e. the performance of goodly and righteous deeds, is a *Sādhana* or pathway towards the attainment of the last viz. *Mokṣa*. The main object of the scriptures of any religion should be to prescribe the exact methods of practising this *Dharma*. In other words, these works are supposed to be the truest exposition of *Dharma*. The sacred books in our *Sanātana Dharma* which constitute our *Dharmapramāṇas* are fourteen in number.

These fourteen sacred books are : (1) to (6) the *Vedāṅgas* or the organs of vedas; (7) to (10) the four vedas; (11) *Mīmāṃsā* (12) *Nyāya* (13) the *Purāṇas* and (14) the *Dharma Śāstras*.

Of these the first ten have been described in several places in our religious literature as the manifestations of God Himself.

These fourteen books are thus the seat both of *Dharma* and

*Vidyā or Jñāna*. These are the paths or *Sādhana* in Hinduism which leads to the attainment of *Mokṣa Sāmrājya* or spiritual salvation.

The Vedas are the most direct among our *Dharma Pramāṇas*. The seat of *Dharma* in the Hindu conception consists of the fourteen scriptures, the Vedas, their six *Arigas*, and the four *Upārigas*. The four Vedas are the *Ṛg*, the *Yajus*, the *Sāma* and the *Atharva*.

The *Mahābhārata*, like the *Manusmṛhitā*, gives various definitions of *Dharma*. God is the author, the protector (*dharmagoptā*) and the possessor of *dharma*. He is the creator of Vedas, which prescribe certain actions and prohibit others. The Divine Law is the moral standard - what is wrong is forbidden by him. Moral perfection constitutes his nature.

*Dharma* sustains the social order, protects the people, and brings about social cohesion. The *Vedas*, *Smṛtis*, and customary conduct are the sources of morality. *Ācāra* is the foundation of *dharma*. Good conduct is *dharma*. Virtuous persons are characterised by it. It is the principal characteristic of *dharma*. Sometimes it is regarded as superior to the Vedas. *Dharma* is a customary conduct. *Dharma* is what is approved and performed by virtuous persons. *Dharma* is what is approved by one's own conscience. *Dharma* is non-injury to all creatures. What is conducive to non-injury is *dharma*.

The vedic prescriptions, customary conduct, good conduct of virtuous persons, and social welfare are regarded as *dharma*. The good of mankind or social solidarity is the highest *dharma*. The conduct of the virtuous for the good of mankind is the best.

Dharma is of two kinds : (1) *dharma* prompted by desire for fruits (*Sakāma*) (2) *dharma* free from desire for fruits (*niṣkāma*) the former leads to happiness in heaven, which is non-eternal. The latter leads to realization of identity with Brahman. *Abstention from actions for realization of empirical ends is dharma.*

When there is conflict of duties, the authority of Vedas is final. The Vedas, reason and good conduct of virtuous persons are the means of knowing *dharma*, which is one and uniform. The conscience of every person is the true test of *dharma*.

The *Mahābhārata* emphasizes inner purity of mind, *Dharma* is good character, which can conquer the world. By performing the right actions and abstaining from wrong actions always one can attain good character.

The Jainas regard subtle, corporeal particles of matter (*Pudgala*), which produce effects, as *dharma*. The *Sāṅkhya* regards a particular modification of the mind (*manas*) as *dharma*. It is not a quality of the self. The *Vaiśeṣika* regards a specific quality of the self

as *dharma*. The Nyāya regards an unseen quality (*apūrva*) of the self produced by the performance of prescribed duties as *dharma*. Prabhākara regards a supersensuous transcendental ought (*apūrva*) as *dharma*. Kumārila regards the prescribed acts or duties which are conducive to good as *dharma*.<sup>3</sup>

Śabara says, "*Dharma* is conducive to the highest good (*Śreyas*) of the moral agent". Prabhākara points out that *Apūrva* or the supersensible Moral Imperative (*niyoga*) is conducive to the highest good, - which is indicated by the vedic injunctions. *Dharma* is *Apūrva* or supersensible ought revealed by the authoritative suggestion (*preraṇā*) produced in the self by the Moral Imperative (*niyoga*)<sup>4</sup>. The concept of *Dharma* has been discussed by Nāgasena in one of his answer to the king Milinda. Nāgasena told the king that Buddha cannot be pointed out, for he has attained *Nirvāṇa*. But it is possible to point to the Lord by means of the body of *Dhamma*. The word *Dhamma* has been used in the Instrumental case and is rarely met with in the *Theravāda Canon*. Nāgasena uses the word *dhammakāya* to mean as the body of doctrine, the doctrine taught by the Buddha. Nāgasena has convinced the king about the pre-eminence of the Lord and said that, 'who sees *Dhamma* sees the Lord', for *Dhamma* was taught by the Lord. Hence, the tendency of Nāgasena was taught by the Lord. Hence, the tendency of Nāgasena is clear and claimed to teach the Buddha-way as pointed out by the Master.

Venerable Nāgasena said to the king that according to Buddha,

*Dharma* is "the best in the world,"<sup>5</sup> which we are seeing now and which we have seen not yet. But according to our view the devout layman who has followed the Excellent Way, for whom rebirth has passed away, who has attained to insight, perceive *Dhamma*. But *Dhamma* does not mean that the rule of conduct is wrong, though to this point creates a double-pointed problem. If *Dhamma* is best then rule of conduct is wrong and if the rule of conduct is right then *Dhamma* is wrong. The rule of conduct is right in the sense that there are twenty personal qualities in a man, of which *Samanaship* of a *Samana*, are the two outward signs,<sup>6</sup> which are worthy of respect.

The best form of attaining these are self-restraint, and the highest kind of self-control, *right conduct*, calm manners, mastery over deeds and words, long-suffering, sympathy, the practice *Ekattakariyā*, *Ekattābhirati*, *Patisallanam*, *not Samādhi*, fear of doing wrong, asking questions of those wise in the *Dhamma* and *Vinaya*, freedom from attachment. By being perfect in all, accomplished in all, a layman can reach forward to the condition of *Arahatship*. The layman who has already entered on the Excellent Way can see the company of *Arhat*. It is because he has joined the noblest brotherhood.

Moreover, Nāgasena said to the king, it is because one knows that not only all the twenty personal qualities which go to make a *Samana*, and the two outward signs found in the *Bhikkhu*, but that

he carries them on, and trains others in them, just like a royal prince who learns his knowledge, and is taught the duties of a *Kṣatriya*, at the feet of a Brahman who acts as family Chaplain.<sup>7</sup>

Moreover, Nāgasena replied to the king that by the greatness and the peerless glory of the condition of the *Bhikkhus* - a layman, a disciple of the faith should attain to the realisation of the *Arahatship*.

The king was satisfied with Nagasena's powerful and great wisdom as to the solving of the problem to the precedence of the *Dharma*.<sup>8</sup>

In the modern period the same problem of *Dharma* or religion has been discussed in different ways by Swami Vivekananda and many other renowned philosophers of India. Vivekananda is interested in the problem of the origin of religion or *Dharma*. He feels that two theories regarding the origin of religion or *Dharma* have gained acceptance among scholars. One is the Spirit-theory of religion, and the other believes that Religion originates in the apprehension of the extra-ordinary or the super-natural.

Vivekananda says that if we compare the two views, we find that there is a common element in both of them, an element which is more fundamental than either of them, and which, in reality, expresses itself in both. Vivekananda calls that element "the struggle to transcend the limitations of the senses."

Vivekananda takes the specific examples of dreams and says that it is quite probable that the first glimpse of religion or *Dharma* might have come through dreams. If mind can go on working in the state of sleep, which also is apparently almost a state of temporary death, there is no wrong in supposing that it can go on working even when the body is dissolved for ever.

The best way to appreciate the religion or *Dharma* is not to try to define it but to highlight such aspects of religion without which it would be difficult to call a religious act in the true sense of the term. *Dharma*, according to Vivekananda, is a growth from within, it is inherent in the very constitution of man. It has got super-natural content. It is an attempt to transcend the limitations of the senses. Vivekananda clearly says that religion is awakening of spirituality in man, or that it is the realisation of Divinity.<sup>9</sup>

According to him, there are three aspects of *Dharma* or religion. Philosophy, Mythology and Ritual. But truly universal *Dharma* must rise above these petty differences, and must seek to have universality. True religion must be universal.

Therefore, the ideal *Dharma* must harmoniously balance all the aspects of religion or *Dharma* viz. philosophy, emotion, work and mysticism. And this *Dharma* is attained by what is, in India, call *Yoga*-

Union. Religion or *Dharma* is realisation, not talk, nor doctrine, nor theories.... it is being and becoming, it is the whole soul becoming changed into what it believes.

*Milinda pañha* plays an important part in preserving the saying of Buddha. *Abhidhamma Piṭaka* occupies an important position. Nāgasena is said as an expert in *Abhidhamma*. Nāgasena has mentioned *Abhidhamma* as a meeting place of different roads.

In the *Abhidhamma Piṭaka* the term *Abhidhamma* has been employed as many as eleven times:

- 1) Nāgasena is said as an expert in the *Abhidhamma*.
- 2) Nāgasena is said to have mastering the whole of the *Abhidhamma Piṭaka* only after one exposition.
- 3) Nāgasena has recited to the company of *Arhats* the seven *Abhidhamma* books in full.
- 4) Nāgasena has preached to the lay devotee the deep *Abhidhamma* and the doctrine related to emptiness.
- 5) Nāgasena has expounded the philosophy of *Abhidhamma* to the merchant.
- 6) Nāgasena has again resorted to the *Abhidhamma* in his explanation to *Anantakāya's* query about principle of life.

- 7) Nāgasena has again turned to the *Abhidhamma* for the classification of feelings numbering one hundred and eight kinds in all.
- 8) Nāgasena has explained the non-existence of soul with reference to the *Abhidhamma*.
- 9) Nāgasena has mentioned *Abhidhamma* as a meeting place of different roads.
- 10) Nāgasena has referred to persons who are experts in the *Abhidhamma*.
- 11) Nāgasena has indicated that an earnest student of yoga should possess the knowledge of exposition of *Abhidhamma*.<sup>10</sup>

*Abhidhamma Piṭaka* is an explanation to the different problems for the understanding of the *Dhamma* than referring to other *Piṭakas*. The explanations and illustrations of various problems with regard to the *Dhamma* have been put forth by Nāgasena to the king Milinda with apt similes. The presentation of these similes has been made with such an effect that bears its originality. The purpose of these are apt to explain the difficulty of the *Dhamma*. The profuseness and variety of these similes tend to show the remarkable knowledge on the part of the compiler.

*Abhidhamma* is the place where three or four roads met. As the flower-bazaar of a city is studded with different kinds of flowers, so are the different subjects of meditation (*ārammaṇa*) which have been exposed by the Buddha. Through the practices of any one of which one could attain and reach the city of *Nibbāna*. A man may be anointed himself with the morality of taking Refuge (*Buddha, Dhamma and Saṅgha*), of moral habits and of restraint in the recitation of *Pātimokṣha*, the fragrance of which pervades all quarters. As the mango fruit before it is ripen passed through different stages, viz. immature, unripe, fresh etc. and it may be consumed in its different stages according to the likings of the people, such is the fruit of different stages of attainment as shown by the Buddha. It is on four paths leading to *Arhatship*, concepts of emptiness (*Śuññatā*), signless (*animitta*) and undirected (*appaṇihita*). Hence it is upon the will of the person to gain the fruit of any of the paths he likes. By the application of drugs one is free from bodily pain and suffering. Those who have longing for the highest insight (*arhatship*) and hear the Four Truths are set free from rebirth, old age, death, grief, lamentation, pain, sorrow and despair. So with the drinking of the sweet doctrine of drugs, the poison of evil dispositions disappear. As the medicines cure the ailing, the Buddha has laid down thirty seven constituent qualities (*bodhipakkhiyadhammas*) by following of which men purge themselves of wrong views, wrong aspiration, wrong speech, wrong

modes of livelihood, wrong endeavour, wrong mindfulness, wrong meditation; and with the application of emenities he has prescribed through which lusts, malice, confusion, pride, false views, doubts, agitation, consciousness and shamelessness and all the evil dispositions are vomitted out. The jewels as have been appraised of by the Buddha are morality, meditation, wisdom, emancipation. One can attain bliss through practising morality.<sup>11</sup>

Nāgasena exerts himself with all his might and puts forth a good number of similes. Ultimately he convinces the king by clearing his doubts.

There is a basic similarity between Tharavāda and Sarvāstivāda. Reality is analysed into a plurality of ultimate constituents called dhamma which are defined as impersonal entities having each its separate character. The *dharmas* are best understood as classes of phenomena rather than as stable universals or *tattvas*. The starting point of the *dharma* theory is the flux of experience. To classify experience and isolate its recurring patterns of causes and conditions so that it may be possible to remould the course of life, this was the prime task of the *Abhidharma*. *Dharmas* are, thus, constituents of experience. The earliest division was made between consciousness and its objects - *nāma and rūpa*. Then consciousness was subdivided into six types and corresponding to each were posited

types of objects. The *Abhidharma*, however, did not succeed in remaining a pure phenomenalism. Its interest in discovering and positing causes always tended to lead it to hypothetical entities which threatened to acquire a transcendent character.

The *Sarvāstivādins* also tried to tackle the problem arising from an apparent duality in the nature of *dharmas*. There is, on the one hand, the *dharma* in itself (*dharmasvabhāva*), on the other hand, its numerous examples (*dharmalakṣana*), constantly arise and perish. Thus the constant passing away of consciousness does not in some sense destroy the very element of consciousness. The mystery of time was thus made the subject of profound reflection.<sup>12</sup> In some sense even within the process of change, there is a persistence in time. The past and the future are not simply unreal. Vasumitra explained that the present state of the element is defined by actuality or functioning (*kāritra*). The past and the future thus have an ideal as well as potential reality.<sup>13</sup>

Similar conception of Religion or *Dharma* can be found in the writings of Tagore, Gandhi and S. Radhakrishnan. So the importance of the question of the king Milinda can be easily traceable in modern time also.

### **TAGORE'S VIEW OF RELIGION OR DHARMA**

Tagore's views on religion or *Dharma* is that it should not be confined to any group or sect or tribe or nation. Man picks up that

particular form of *Dharma* that suits him, but in the final analysis it transcends all such particular forms.

Ordinary religions, according to Tagore, are just aimless wanderings. The aim of true religion is the realisation of one's kinship with everything. Religion or *Dharma*, is a sort of homesickness. Like a flock of homesick cranes flying night and day come back to their mountain nests, the religious man is also on his sacred voyage to his eternal home. In the *Gītañjali* the poet bursts out in a religious fervour, "No more sailing from harbour to harbour with this my weather - beaten boat ..... now I am eager to die into the deathless."<sup>14</sup>

Man has to realise his kinship with everything, he has to cultivate a universal feeling of love. That's why He says, in his *Gītañjali*, he will never shut the doors of his senses. The delights of sight and hearing and touch will bear thy delight.

*Dharma* or religion is not an escape; it is life and existence. True Religion should not be confused with religious institution. When the religions have to make way for religious organisation it is like the river being dominated by sand beds, the current stagnates and its aspect becomes desert like.<sup>15</sup> "Dharma is the inner-most nature, the essence, the implicit truth of all things", "only when the tree begins to take shape that you can come to see its *dharma*."<sup>16</sup> Tagore says, "In my language the word religion has a profound meaning. The

wateriness of water is essentially its religion, in the spark of the flame lies the religion of fire. Likewise, man's religion is his innermost truth."<sup>17</sup> The innermost essence of man is the presence of Divinity in him. Religion is nothing but an attempt to realise this Divinity.

Thus, "Religion consists in the endeavour of man to cultivate and express these qualities which are inherent in the nature of man, the eternal, and to have faith in them."<sup>18</sup> Religion is the realisation of man's unity with Divinity. In religion man realises himself in the perspective of the infinite, because the supreme person dwells in the human heart. Tagore never abandons the spiritual essence or heights of his Hindu tradition, in the Upaniṣads and in the Vedānta but he does not insist on its enrichment and fulfilment in the world and in the activity in his search for ideals and for a spiritual fulfilment. The Religion of man, thus consists in the reconciliation of the universal spirit with the individual.

### **WHAT IS RELIGION ACCORDING TO GANDHI ?**

The basic conviction of Gandhi is that there is one reality - that of God, which is nothing else but Truth. If truth is God, sincere pursuit of Truth is religion. Religion is ordinarily defined as devotion to some higher power or principle. Devotion to Truth is religion. Religion is the

expression of the permanent nature of man. It has the character of purifying and elevating one's nature. Religion has the power of arousing in man a sense of spiritual restlessness. The ultimate religious ideal is nothing but the realisation of God. Religion involves a conscious and sincere love and striving for Truth.

For Gandhi, religion is not just a theoretical concept that seeks to satisfy intellectual curiosity and urges, it is, for him the way of life, a practical necessity. Religion should pervade every aspect of life. Gandhi recommends that the religious man must practise renunciation by living in the midst of men.

Gandhi's conception of religion and the religious way of life is nothing but the path of "*Niṣkāma Karma*" as shown by the *Gītā*. Gandhi calls the *Gītā* his guru and tries to follow the *Karma Mārga* as preached in the *Gītā*. Religious recommendation is that the fruits of one's effort are to be left to God, who, if likes, will associate one with the results. True religion and true morality are inseparably bound up with each other. Religion is to morality what water is to the seed that is sown in the soil.<sup>19</sup>

Whatever is good and virtuous is moral, a sense to the good and the bad is the moral sense, and trying to live in accordance with the dictates of this moral sense is Morality.

The conception of Religion or *Dharma* according to S. Radhakrishnan is also akin to the ancient concept as well as to the concept of *Gītā*. Radhakrishnan says, "Religion is not a creed or a code but an insight into reality." He says, Religion is that discipline or the way of life which enables man to "make a change in his own nature to let the Divine in him manifest himself."<sup>20</sup> Religion implies a faith in the ultimacy of absolute spiritual values and a way of life to realise them. Great religions or *Dharmas* have often been prophetic, or have been based on truth. Religion is the affirmation of the ultimacy of Religious Experience.

India, who is strong by her spiritual heritage from the beginning had many sages, prophets and brave sons at the time of her extreme disaster and moral crisis. They cultivated the seed of morality in the Indian soil, religious urge and spirit of fresh energy of human being for the revival of values of Indian society. As a saviour of the country Buddha, Sri Ramakrishna, Vivekananda etc. appeared in the soil of India. Buddhist interpretation of *Dharma* is a revolt against the superstitions, exploitations, blind-faith, social disorder and moral degradation. The path shown by Buddha was respectfully followed by Ramakrishna, Vivekananda etc. In fact, they have referred to Buddha in several occasions. Appearance of Buddha in India was very significant as observed by Vivekananda. Buddha was the triumph

in the struggle that had been going on between the priests and the prophets in India. It was a critical time when the masses of people were debarred from all knowledge. The priest had made a secret of the Vedas and they wanted to govern the whole society according to their rule. Buddha preached the most tremendous truths. He established the equality of all men and women to attain spirituality by following the path of *morality* or *Dhamma*. In this connection Vivekananda says, "No amount of preaching can ever shock the Indian soul, but it was hard for India to swallow Buddhists doctrine"

Buddhism is a religion without God. Generally *Dharma* is God-centric which moves the whole world. Particularly in *Hīnayāna*, it is due to *Dharma* that the fruits of *Karma* are accumulated and every individual gets mind, body and worldly things according to his own *Karmas*. In the *Hīnayāna* school the Buddhists do not have any room for idol-worshipping or God-worshipping. One of the important grounds for disbelief in God is the problem of evil. He thought that God was the confusing concept misleading the masses to the way of superstitious and instead of being strong foundation of religion it destroys the real spirit of religion. Such a concept if not properly understood in the light of the idea of sacred or of the 'Holy', it is very dangerous to pollute the fresh temperament to realise the Truth from the deepest depth of intuition. Buddha established a religion of self-

conquest. Sri Ramkrishna used to say that Buddha is knowledge as such, Truth as such, consciousness as such. He has realised what *Nirvāṇa* is *Sat* under a tree. It was Buddha's great teaching that it is man to be loved. The love of man in Buddha philosophy was expressed in the way of establishing utilitarian ethics in life. Buddha pointed out *Nirvāṇa* as the goal of life. Man is a complete final being. The essence of religion in Buddhism is a change in man's nature. Dharma or Religion is nothing but the awakening of moral sense or morality. Man's nature is nothing but the attainment of his own nature of humanity which was covered by all kinds of evils like selfishness, desire, delusion and dishonesty. The only remedy is in making man unselfish. We need to teach people to obey the laws rather than to make more laws.

Ignorance and craving are the substratum of the empirical life. From *Avidyā* we must rise to *Vidyā*, *bodhi*, enlightenment. Buddha said with his dying breath, "None can help you, help yourself, work out your own salvation."

Buddhists philosophy of Religion is nothing but the religion of man which is one and universal. To feed out humanity, to reach to the perfection, to realise eternal infinite consciousness within him is the goal of religion. Buddha says - let us start from where we are. If we go beyond desire and are neither desirous of pleasure nor desirous

of getting rid of pain, we reach a state of equanimity. That is the ideal state and that is *Nirvāṇa*.

Buddha established a religion of man although he did not feel that he was announcing a new religion. He was in the first place to bring a movement of reformation. Moral conduct with the aim of achieving the good and happiness of mankind was the essence of religion according to Buddha. Compassion was the source of his morality and good of all was the goal of his moral conduct. He made religion democratic by doing away with caste barriers and distinctions based on birth. He emphasised on good conduct instead of rituals and formalities of religion.

Buddha emphasised ethics or morality based on noble instincts and emotions such as compassion, friendliness and non-injury. This approach shifted the emphasis from theory and tradition of religion. So practice of religion in the form of ethical conduct which is in fact the most important aspect of all real religion. Buddha emphasised moral conduct as means which led to calmness of mind. He was thus able to introduce new values in the field of religion and religious conduct.

In modern time, the same saying was uttered by Sri Ramakrishna, that service of man is the service of God and that is *Dhamma*.

The philosophy of Buddha was enlightened into the light of Indian spirit of humanism contained with the idea of equality, love and compassion at the time of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda once more. They observed Buddha in a magnifying glass and picked up the cream of his philosophy encouraging it for starting revolution against superstition and blind thoughts.

A relativist and instrumentalist conception of Morally good characterised by hedonistic overturns, throws suspicion even upon the ethical integrity of the causal elements or actions. For an action is called "good", because it will produce a materialistically pleasant state of being in the future. Is it really 'good' ? In reply, we must say that charitability is good, not in and for itself, but because it produces a pleasant state of being.

The Buddhist believe in the theory of momentariness on account of which they cannot accept the permanent character of an object. Such impermanent character also exists in the feeling of pleasure, universal etc. this amounts to the acceptance of *Sarvasūnyvāda*. An object is known in four ways : (a) existent (b) as non-existent (a) as both existent and non-existent and as different from existent and non-existent (*Sadasadbhinna*). The object which is free from this four-fold ways of description is called *Sūnya*. If existence (*Sattā*) becomes the essence of an object, the function of the

instrumental causes (*Kāraṅkavyāpāra*) for its manifestation would become useless. As the 'existence' is diametrically opposite to 'non-existence' there cannot be an object bearing both existence and non-existence and also an object devoid of both existence and non-existence.

*Sūnyatā* is the nature for this indeterminable, indescribable nature of a thing. If each and every nature of an object is imagined, there is no reality in it. An object is called indescribable as it is dependent on other thing. In other word, it is the *Dharma* of a thing that it depends on other thing for its origination. *Dharma* does not exist there if it is not *Sūnya*.

It should be clearly borne in mind that the truth in the phenomenal level points to the attainment of the truth in the absolute level. An individual can transcend this world and attain the world of *Nirvāṇa* by the practice of moral qualities, which is latent in himself. Though Buddha had never directly described this state after considering its indescribable character, the state is not capable of being known through ordinary intellect. That's why Buddha kept mum when asked about the transcendental world, which indicates that the truth of the transcendental experience cannot be described in the light of ordinary intellect and description. The transcendental reality which we are talking about cannot be expressed through any *Kalpanā*

as it has got *parāmarthasatyatā*, as mental construction can reveal an object having *Samvṛti Satyatā* accepted in Buddhism. Buddhism has followed the Middle path (*Madhyama*). It does not accept the extreme views, i.e., absolute reality and absolute unreality of the things. To say that an object has got relative means to say that it is neither absolutely real nor absolutely unreal.

In the present time, suffering of mankind is found in *global* level due to the adoption of violence in mind, body and speech. All individual beings have become disintegrated because they are suffering from this worldly diseases (*bhavaroga*) due to the absence of right vision (*samyag dṛṣṭi*) of the objects. If the nature of an object is known as *Śūnya*, an individual may be free from the wrong notion of an object. The detachment towards the enjoyable object is possible for a man if he realises that the nature of the known object is relative, conditional and apparent. The *phenomenon* of *Upakṣā* which is accepted as a *Brahma-vihāra* is possible if the void character of an object is realised. Detachment towards an object gives rise to *Upakṣā* where a man can remain indifferent in loss and gain and in different ups and downs of life. The detachment and *Upekṣā* again are related to the understanding of the void character of an object in the sense as mentioned earlier.

Nāgarjuna has highlighted this point with the metaphor of

mirage. According to him, an individual who, thinking sands as water, comes to know that it is not at all water is not at all pool. In the same way, a man who considers this world as having existence just like mirage and afterwards comes to know its absence is a real knower having no infatuation towards the external world.

One who understands *Sūnyata* (voidness) can understand dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*). The knower of dependent origination alone can realise Four Noble Truths which are the causes of the removal of thirst etc. Due to this an individual can know the real *Dharma* as well as the cause of it and its result leading to the knowledge of suffering. Those who know these can know the real nature of happiness and suffering, and also know the means of the attainment of happiness and removal of suffering.

This state is known as right vision (*Samyagdr̥ṣṭi*). Ignorance towards the real nature of an object is the main cause of our suffering. The morality is possible only through the change of attitude towards the objects of enjoyment. The real or right knowledge of them can associate us with detachment from which moral action is possible. All other ways like right resolve (*Samyak Samkalpa*), right speech (*Samyagvāk*), right conduct (*Samyak Karmānta*), right livelihood (*Samyagājīva*), right effort (*Samyag Vyāyāma*), right attention (*Samyak Smṛti*) and right concentration (*Samyak Samadhī*) follow

from the right knowledge of the objects. All other moral actions like *Maitrī*, *Karuṇā* and *Muditā* apart from *Upekṣā* are possible due to having the non-essential or void character of objects.

*Śūnyavāda* is the root cause of restoring world-peace by way of removing violence, exploitation etc. is accepted by Nāgarjuna who has said that the person knowing *Śūnyavāda* knows the meaning of all and if otherwise, he does not know anything. Rahul observed that *Śūnyavāda* does not accept the reality of this world.

The philosophy of Indian origin was based from the very beginning on a moral foundation. It is stated that none was allowed to study the Upaniṣads if he is not properly initiated and if he has not performed his civil and religious duties.

In philosophy there is a system which considers morality and formulates the principles of conduct from an absolute point of view and desecrates the factors of distinction between right and wrong that are formal and rigorous in the extreme. This aspect of Buddhist philosophy may be highlighted following the line of Hindu scriptures.

The Ethical philosophy of the *Bhagavadgītā* rejects these two extreme conditions. It does not accept the high apriori road of Kant cleared of everything that is empirical. The world of sense and sensibility is recognised by *Gītā*. However, the main function of Ethics

is to investigate true moral which is opposite to rational or freedom. The approach of the *Gītā* towards problems of conduct is synthetic on account of the fact that the states of moral life are stages in continuous development.

According to *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā*, there should be a complete harmony among the spiritual excellence, mental efficiency and physical fitness. Sri P.N. Srinivaschari has accepted the importance of it and compared the phenomenon with the modern system of psycho-analysis. He says - "It is interesting in this connection to note a novel theory of prānaism according to which the *Gītā* is a manual of mind-cure analogous to the modern system of psycho-analysis. It is claimed that this interpretation would solve many of the problems of the *Gītā*, till now enshrouded in mystery. The main problem of the *Gītā* is said to be how a diseased and disorder mind like that of Arjuna, suffering from a 'division of the conscious and the sub-conscious phases of the ego', can be restored to moral health by supreme psycho-analyst like Kṛṣṇa. It is urged that the disorder in the mind is due to the habitual repression of the impulses from the outside and of the emotions of the mind. The accumulated and suppressed feeling shows itself in perspiration, palpitation, cardiac pains, tremor, fear and grief. Arjuna suffers, according to this view, from psycho-neurosis.....Kṛṣṇa is said to cure the disease of Arjuna's mind by directing it to be divine

qualities of the psycho which constitute the *Daivīsampat*. The divine consciousness is then aroused and the mind is said to be cured. Then Arjuna exclaims '*naṣṭo mohaḥ smṛtirlabdḥā*'. ("My delusion is destroyed, I have now regained my memory").

From the above discussion it can be said that there should be harmony between the physical fitness and mental tranquillity for the attainment of spiritual bliss. The consumption of *Sāttvika* food give rise to the fitness of body by way of generating *Sattvagūṇa* in it which can provide one with mental stability. When an individual is possessed of *Sattvagūṇa*, he can have awareness of the *daivī - sampat* existing in him. For the attainment of the same the harmony between physical fitness and mental stability is essential. Keeping this harmony in view, it has been stated '*Sarīramādyam khalu dharmasādhanam.*' From this maxim it is known that the body is not to be neglected, because it becomes the means of the performance of dharma.

In the *Bhagavadgītā*, *yajña* or sacrifice is taken as the essence of ethical life. Without the sense of sacrifice an individual cannot think of serving other social beings. This view has been beautifully elaborated by Sri P. N. Srinavaschari. He says - "*Yajña* or sacrifice is the essence of ethical life."

In order to bring the ethical purification and perfection of an individual in thought, word and deed (*mānas, vāk & kāya*), austerity

(*tapas*) is essential. The perfection in mind will come into being when there is control of mind existing in freedom from anger, self-restraint and desire for social welfare.

The Upaniṣad also teaches us to adopt what is good (*śreyah*) but not pleasant (*preya*). An action may be good if it can serve the broader interest i.e., the welfare of himself as well as that of other social beings. That which brings universal welfare is called 'good' while that serves narrow interest of an individual is *preya* or pleasant. The Upaniṣadic seers speak in favour of 'good' in order to do justice to others. Those who adopt 'good' are associated with welfare while adopting pleasant objects (*preya*) they are dissociated with the welfare. (*Tayoḥ śreya ādadānasya sādhu bhavaṭi/hiyate'rthād ya ū preyo vṛmīte*).<sup>21</sup> That is why, the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* advises an individual to do those actions that are *anavadya* i.e., faultless from all standpoints.

Those who are engaged in doing welfare to others are called *Dhārmikas* in the true sense of the term. In the *Bhagavadgītā* it is said that self exists in all beings and all beings are in self. ("*Sarvabhūtaṣṭhaṁ ātmānam ātmani sarvabhūtaṁ*")<sup>22</sup> All the good qualities that are essential for the said justice are originated from this notion of self. The qualities which make a man's life fruitful are called *Sadguṇas*.<sup>23</sup> In the *Māhābhārata* it is said that all these qualities are

to be obtained for the development of complete humanity. The forgiveness (*Kṣamā*), steadiness, non-violence, equality, truth, non-miserliness (*akāraṇya*), shame (*hrī*) etc. are included in the *Sadguṇas*. The selfishness or miserliness is described as a defect which counters the human nature (*kāraṇyadoṣopahatasvabhavāḥ*).

The concept of *Dharma* in the *Mahābhārata* is the welfare of the whole world. The main objective of *Dharma* is to think about the welfare of the whole world and become maliceless towards all beings. (*'Mānasam sarvabhūtānām dharmamāhurmaṇīṣiṇaḥ/ yasmāt sarveṣubhūteṣu manasā śivamācaret*)<sup>24</sup> and "*Adroheṇaiva bhūtānām yaḥ sa dharmāḥ satām mataḥ*".<sup>25</sup> To make friendship with all beings without doing any harm to them is also *Dharma* ("*Sarvabhūtahitam maitram purānam yaṁ janā viduḥ*").<sup>26</sup>

In *Mānavadharmasāstra* Manu's concept of *Dharma* is similar to that of the *Mahābhārata*. *Dharma*, as Manu opines, is the means of the attainment of the good (*Śreyah*) which is described by the Vedas as heaven etc. It has been stated afterwards that *Dharma* is always performed by honest and intellect persons having no malice etc. and it is always supported by one's conscience ("*hṛdayenābhyanujñāto*").<sup>27</sup> In other words, that which is performed by the honest, maliceless, intellectual person and that which can associate us with our well-being and highest good is called *Dharma*. Those who are really *Dhārmika*

in nature should possess thirteen types of moral characters which include service to others (*aparopatāpitā*), non-jealous to others (*anasūyatā*), softness in temperament (*mṛdutā*), non-harshness to others (*apāruṣyam*), friendliness (*maitratā*), capability of speaking lovable words (*priyamvadatā*), sense of gratitude (*kṛtajñatā*), pity to others (*kāruṣyam*) etc.. All these moral characters are described as preconditions of Dharma on account of the fact that these mortal characters are to be developed for justice to the social beings. ('.....*aparopatāpitā anasūyatā mṛdutā apāruṣyam maitratā kāruṣyam praśāntiśceti trayodaśavidham śīlam*).<sup>28</sup>

From this it follows that *Dharma* has been taken in the sense of morality in broader sense of the term in Hinduism also.

Rabindranath is of the opinion that human character has two different aspects: on one side a man is in search of satisfaction within this worldly object and on the other he longs for something which does not come under the purview of this worldly object. When an individual has confined himself in performing some works in order to fulfil his own this worldly interest, it is due to his animal-nature. That which leads us to the world of sacrifice or renunciation is called humanity or the religion of man. An individual man is internally identified with the Universal Man and hence he does not want only happiness but more than that or whole world (*bhumā*).<sup>29</sup> Rabindranath

observes : "And I say of Supreme Man that he is infinite in his essence, he is finite in his manifestation in us, the individuals".<sup>30</sup> The harmony between finite and infinite is actual liberation. This doctrine is beautifully represented in his poem *Vairāgya*.

In the view of Aurobindo, the chief aim and duty of human spirit are respect, service and progress of human being. The religion of humanity is the religion against the oppression, cruelty and exploitation of man, no other considerations are to be taken for determining the religion of humanity. Like Tagore, Sri Aurobindo also has realised that the ego is the enemy of the manifestation of religion of humanity.<sup>31</sup> Both of them as again recognised the spirit within us can bring real unity of a man with another man. After the attainment of spirit the religion of humanity which can give love, mutual recognition of human brotherhood, sense of human oneness and practice of human oneness in thought, feeling etc. can be attained. Sri Aurobindo thinks that the human brotherhood existing in Self and by the Self is the most fundamental thing from which liberty and equality follow.

Man has a feeling that there is in him some meaning that has yet to be realised. The spirit of love, dwelling in the boundless realm of the surplus, emancipates our consciousness from the illusory bond of the separate self, trying to spread its illumination in the human world. Tagore has pointed out that the existence of surplus power

existing in the ear which is united in the spirit or universal man is indicated.<sup>32</sup> Rabindranath has heard the echo of this truth in a song of Baul where the universal Man is described by them as "Man of the heart" for whom we should search within our mind, but not in the external world.

Mīmāṃsakas observed *Dharma* is always associated with good. Any injunction leading to our well-being is called *Dharma*. If an individual maintains the direction of the Śāstra and if this leads him to his well-being, it would be treated as *Dharma*.

The Buddhist also believed in the concept of *sat*. They admit that an object is to be understood as *sat* if it has got some causal efficacy (*arthakriyākāritvaṃ*). In other words, an object is *sat* if it has capacity to serve our purpose and to fulfil any action. The object which does not serve our purpose is called *asat*. A man may be described as *sat* or *asat* after keeping his *arthakriyākāritva* by way of doing social welfare, adopting *maitrī* and *karuṇā* etc. or *anarthakriyākāritva* respectively in view. An object having causal efficacy is taken as *sat*, our existence being endowed with causal efficacy is *sat* in the true sense of the term. On the other hand, our existence which is not endowed with such causal efficacy is called *asat*. A man having unique character and free from imaginary attributes is self-luminous.

A man who is self-luminous through his own auspicious deeds is *sat* who is otherwise known as *Sura*.

The view has found its echo in the religious poem composed by Kabir which runs as follows :

*"Vāḍa huyā to kyā huyā  
jaise vaḍī khejur  
pānthako chāyā nāhi  
phal lāge atidūr." 33*

That is, a man born in a high society or having high education etc. is insignificant to the society if he does not engage himself in auspicious works like social welfare etc. when an individual can maintain an harmony between his own welfare and that of social members, he becomes converted into a *sat* or *sura*. If a man having body does not possess any mentionable quality and action, he does not have *sattā* in the true sense of the term, which is indicated by the term pure *sattā*. Here 'quality' and 'action' denotes the good qualities like social service, broadness of mind etc. and good actions like service of mankind, performance of the duties towards family or social members respectively. If there is a harmony among body (*dravya*),

good qualities (*guṇa*) and good action (*karma*) in an individual, the real *Sattā* prevails there.

There are some *sat-puruṣas*, good people, who engage themselves in the good of others sacrificing their own self interest; the *Sāmānyas*, the generality of people, on the other hand, are those who engage themselves in the good of others so long as it does not involve the sacrifice of their own self-interest. There are some others, the *Mānavarākṣakas*, devilish men, who sacrifice the good of others without gaining thereby any good to themselves or to any one else.<sup>34</sup>

It is true that at present day society the melody is completely lost due to having this devilish attitude in man and it can be regained if this attitude is removed. *Satpuruṣas* can be brought again. For this our nation's moral health is to be improved. Swami Ranganāthānanda observes : "The moral health of the nation entirely depends upon this immense group. Steadying itself by drawing inspiration from the small minority of the *Satpuruṣa* group above it.....the self criticism which is evident in our nation today, and which is a sure sign of the basic health of our society will slowly generate the necessary moral forces to cure the nation of its present ailments. The ailment is a moral and the remedy has to be a moral remedy. We all desire that our nation should be healthy, physically as well as mentally.....Cynicism, self-centredness, and utter unconcern for others are more deadly than

the most deadly physical diseases and viruses that cause them; for they corrode the nation's resolve to be free, to be united and to march onward to progress. We cannot be blind to the fact that this disease has already invaded our body-political, including our youths. We have to take energetic measures to arrest the further progress of this disease and to eliminate it from the body-politic. And the nation has to be alert thereafter to see that these deadly mental viruses do not invade our society again.<sup>35</sup>

If an individual tries to attain the moral health, he would be regarded as *Sura*. A *sura* can be described as *amāyika*, which comes from the word *māyā*. This interpretation is completely different from that of Śamkara.

The particular meaning of the term "*māyā*" is followed from the meaning of the term '*amāyika*', which is used in an ordinary sense.

The term *māyā* may find support in the episode of the Rāmāyana where Mārica was found to take the artificial form of a deer (*māyāmṛga*) in order to help Rāvaṇa to abduct Sītā from Rāma's custody. The deer was called *Māyamṛga* as it was artificial in character. The term *māyā* is used in the sense of artificiality is again evidenced from the usage of the terms "*māyā-krandana*" i.e. artificial crying or crocodile tears, '*māyāvanam*' i.e., artificial forest. These terms do not mean 'real crying' or 'real forest'. An individual who frequently takes

an artificial form is described as *māyāvī*. The magician is described as *māyāvī* on account of the fact that the magical performance of him is artificial, but not real.

The qualities like 'broadness', 'self-extension' etc. are honoured in the society in as much as they are the products of *amāyikatā*. The notion of *māyā* can be obtained from the literal meaning of the term. The root '*mā*' existing in the term '*māyā* means to limit'. That which absolutely limits us is called *māyā*.

The *māyika* or mechanised situation is described by the ancient seers as *mṛtyu* (death), *tamas* (darkness) and *asat* (non-existent) while *amāyikatā* is *jyoti* (light), *amṛta* (immortal) and *sat* (existent). Our constant prayer is to reach from death to Immortality, darkness to light, and *asat* to *sat*, which is described in the Upaniṣadic mantra.<sup>36</sup>

In fine, it may be concluded that above mentioned *amāyikatā* exists in the simple true nature of a man which is free from crookedness, hypocrisy, or artificiality or mechanisation. This remains in the life of a baby and in his smiling glance towards mother's face and hence there was melody which could appease other's heart. This situation is lost and hence constant prayer is done to get back this type of *amāyikatā*.

The echo of such prayer is found in Rabindranath Tagore's poem which runs as follows :

*'Ye sur bharile bhāṣābhola gīte,  
Śisur navīn jīvan vāṅsite,  
jananīr mukh-tākāno hāṣite,  
se sure more vājāo.'*<sup>37</sup>

When an individual attains *suratva* after removing *asuratva* from him, he will have different characteristics like inner force (*śakti*), forgiveness (*kṣānti*), peace (*śānti*), shame or the sense of obligation (*lajjā*), respect (*śraddhā*), fortune (*Lakṣmī*) etc.<sup>38</sup> A sura will look at other social beings in the eye of forgiveness as his mind is full of satisfaction (*tuṣṭi*), peace (*śānti*) due to the absence of turmoil caused by asura in the form of nescience.

It has been stated in the *Devīmāhātmya* that all other *Suras* have extended their hands of co-operation after providing their ornaments, weapons etc. to Durgā for making her perfect.<sup>39</sup> It indicates that she is not able to defeat asura without the co-operation of others. In the like manner, an individual becomes perfect or attains *suratva* if he gets co-operation from other social beings who have already attained it.

The image of Durgā in Hindu Religion gives us the glimpse of

another eternal truth. God is found to dominate Asura in the battle and at this time she is depicted to have undertaken this easily without any tension, which indicates her self-confidence. Self-confidence may come due to having much vigour inside. On the other side, *asura* is found to lose self-confidence due to having excessive anger in him. Durgā is luminous through her vigour and self-confidence and hence, her complexion appears like the colour of the flower called *Atasī* while asura has lost himself with anger, which is indicated through his black complexion, the symbol of ignorance.

The picture of fighting between Durgā and Asura gives us a lesson which is important for our transformation. The goddess as it gives us direction 'you should not possess anger and disregard your soul like asura, but be self-confident after gathering vigour from within'. The anger is one of the enemies because it makes a man blind due to which he cannot discriminate between good and bad. Moreover, anger makes a man vigourless instead of augmenting energy in him.<sup>40</sup>

An individual has two types of nature; real nature and artificial nature. The real nature of an individual is manifested in his simplicity which is possible due to removal of the enemies like anger etc. while the artificial nature due to having excessive ego etc. hides his real nature. In order to get rid of this artificiality it is the prayer of an ordinary person : '*Rūpam dehi, Jayam dehi, Yaśo dehi, dviṣo jahi*'<sup>41</sup> i.e. give

me beauty, victory and fame, and destroy enemies. The interpretation of the icon of Durgā given earlier and its relevance in common social beings who are yet to attain suratva would be more firm-footed if the significance of this prayer is explained in the light of this theory.

All these Divine qualities are nothing but moral qualities. In Buddhism one is always advised to adopt these moral qualities; and hence there is no necessity of admitting any Super Power or God apart from these qualities. Buddhism is not contrary to other religions so far as morality is concerned. An effort has been made to evaluate the position of Buddhism after giving a fresh interpretation of what our tradition says.

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