

Chapter One

Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Notes and References:

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