

Education, Social, Cultural and Environmental Conditions of Buddhism

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ABSTRACT

Generally there was no chance of an individual rising in the social scale, but for a group this was possible, over a number of generations, by adopting more orthodox practices and following the rules of the Smritis. Thus the Indian class As an invader he was loathed, but once he had come into contact with Indian ways and was less strange and forbidding his status might improve. In fact it was not blood which made a group untouchable, but conduct. system was always somewhat fluid, This study shows the lower caste's rights, for they had no possibility of freeing themselves from the servitude which was their by reason of birth. This is where the theory of Karma assumed its full significance; since being born into a particular caste was considered the fruit of acts accomplished in previous existences, it was quite clear that the sudras had to their debit a heavy load of evil deeds from their past lives. Since this debt ruled the condition of the individual throughout his present life and could only be modified at the next rebirth, the clear implication was that there was no hope of their improving this situation during their lifetime. They had one single means of achieving rebirth in a superior class, and that was to perform their allocated duties conscientiously. This idea was responsible for an under-standable feeling of inferiority on the part of this underprivileged caste, more especially as the whole concept was „ carefully maintained by the ruling classes, and showed itself in the behaviour of everyone throughout India. We lack much information about the composition of this caste, but it appears to have included servants of all sorts. Wage-earners, workmen, labourers and minor functionaries. Thus, on the basis of present work, we could found that socio-cultural and environmental conditions of Buddhist period was the glory of Indian ancient history.

Keyword: Buddhism, Untouchables. Monarchical, Brahmanical. Gravediggers,

Introduction

Social cultural and environmental conditions of early and ancient Indian Buddhism. In respect of Rigvedic society, the earliest literature of the first period, three classes of society are very frequently mentioned, and named Brahma, Kshatra, and Vis. Buddhism roles for emancipation. In this chapter, the present author shows that the four classes, the priest, warrior, peasant and serf, were crystallizing throughout the period of the Rg veda. They have survived to the present day. The Sanskrit word used for them, varna, means "colour" and itself

indicates their origin in the development of the old tribal class structure in contact with people of different complexion and alien culture. The Buddhism which developed in the south-western corner of the Indian world had its birth on the northern border. The region lying east of Kosala between the Himalyan heights and the Ganges contained, in contrast to the huge monarchical states mentioned above, a quantity of small republics, born of independent clans. Ascetics were classed among the outcastes because their

complete detachment from society made the term 'without caste' perfectly applicable to them.

Result and Discussion:

The statute of castes (varnadharma) could never really be applied strictly enough to prevent mixed marriages, and the lawgivers had, from a very early date, to face up to the facts and make the system somewhat more flexible. Although it was more or less admitted that legitimate unions between those of different castes might in fact take place, the children issuing from these unions, whether legitimate or not, were considered to have forfeited their rights because they did not belong definitely to a particular caste. Polygamy certainly aggravated this situation by those multiplying such births. The opprobrium attaching itself to those of 'mixed' origin extended to two generations. But the discredit thrown upon them did not prevent them obtaining honourable posts or exercising well-esteemed professions such as that of bard, herald, equerry, physician or scribe. This brought them much closer to the 'pure' sudras than to the 'excluded' classes or the 'untouchables'.

The reaction of philosophers of the 6th century B.C. rejected the values of ordinary society, with the very important exception that they agreed, with most people, that happiness was the aim. Naturally their conceptions of happiness and how actually to attain it diverged widely from ordinary ideas. They lived as far as possible outside ordinary society, seeking truth and happiness, and most of them decided that real happiness consisted in peace of mind. Some of them returned to society as teachers, trying to persuade people that the usual ways of seeking happiness through wealth and power would not work and would in fact lead to more unhappiness. The trend of society, many of them sought to point out, was to produce more and more unhappiness, to get steadily worse. Hence there was a need to counter this process within society, to produce more happiness by applying the truths which the philosophers had discovered, this unhappiness being again primarily peace of mind.

The kingdom of Magadh, in fact, gradually extended its power over almost the whole of India and thus became capable of exerting considerable control over the sramana communities. The effect of this on the history of Buddhism must be studied below. Here we may note that it is of the utmost importance for understanding the history of India and of Indian religion and philosophy that the political unification realised by Magadha did not last. Non-unification, non-centralization, means freedom from any single controlling authority. It makes possible intellectual freedom. It enables philosophers to be independent of governments, because if they find one government uncongenial they need not remain on its territory but can emigrate. On the other hand there were certain disadvantages for Indian philosophy in the lack of political stability which non-unification entailed and especially in the fact that the various states in India were much weaker in the face of foreign invasions than a united empire would have been. Foreign invasions were at times absolutely disastrous for the intellectual life of India and particularly for Buddhism.

To complete the well-being of mankind the next Buddha, Maitreya, will then occur in the world, will teach the doctrine and show the 'best life'. At its conclusion the Sutra summarises the doctrine, including self-possession, meditation and the exercise of pervading the whole universe with thought charged with benevolence, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity. The Buddha's idea of the perfect ancient society before degeneration took place, which is also of interest as the happy society of the future, restored after the abolition of war and violence. The conception of evolution is characteristically Buddhist in that the loss of the original innocence took place through the operation of the causal laws concerning attachment, desire and so on. Someone became 'wanton' and tasted the Earth, as a result feeling (sensual) desire (trsnā). Here what interests us is the nature of the society of happy beings, beautiful, radiant, feeding on joy. Even when beings had

become more like human beings, living on the Earth and enjoying delicious plants growing on it, there was for a long time no essential social change. At the conclusion of the admonitions to a layman which we have just read, we are told the householder asked to be a lay disciple of the Buddha. He says that he goes to the Master as a refuge (sarana), likewise to the Doctrine and to the Community of Monks as refuges. Going to these three 'refuges' constitutes formally becoming a lay disciple in Buddhism.

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In the first of these sutras the Buddha is asked why men are seen to live in such a variety of circumstances, inferior and superior, short lived and long lived, suffering much or little illness, having little or great wealth, having understanding or poor understanding, and so on, His answer is that all this depends on action (Karman), it is action which divides beings in this way. Asked to elaborate this he says that if, for instance, a man or woman takes life, say as a hunter, he or she will be reborn in misery, an evil destiny, ruin, purgatory. Or, failing that, if he or she is again born as a human being it will be as a short lived one. In the opposite case of one who abstains from taking life, is compassionate for the benefit of all living beings, the rebirth will be in heaven or, failing that, as a human being with long life.

They had one single means of achieving rebirth in a superior class, and that was to perform their allocated duties conscientiously. This idea was responsible for an under-standable feeling of inferiority on the part of this underprivileged caste,

more especially as the whole concept was „ carefully maintained by the ruling classes, and showed itself in the behaviour of everyone throughout India. We lack much information about the composition of this caste, but it appears to have included servants of all sorts. Wage-earners, workmen, labourers and minor functionaries. To these were added small clerks, tradesmen and craftsmen; some of the latter, however, were able to exercise relatively lucrative trades and crafts, and even practise husbandry. On the whole they were too conscious of their despicable situation to make any attempt to escape from it, but it must not be assumed that therefore led an unbearable existence. Many of them worked for wealthy tradesmen and landlords, were paid a regular wage, fed lodged and received further benefits in kind; agricultural workers, for example, were paid a fifth of their wages in goods and produce if they were fed and lodged, or a . Third if not. They remained attached to the same family, from father to son. Their low status compelled them to eat only the remnants from to wear his cast-off clothing and to make use only of discarded objects. The employer was supposed to treat them decently, and they were in fact protected, to some extent, by the law; he was obliged to make a contract with them, a document enumerating the names of all the employee's dependents. While the sudra was expected to give proof of zeal and professional competence, his master was in his turn obliged to furnish him with the instruments necessary for his work and to replace those which were out or -defective. The contract laid down the number of hours to be worked and the wages to be paid, and specified the goods and produce which would normally be provided over and above the wages. If the wages were not paid or if the contract was unjustifiably terminated, the employer was liable to prosecution. The outcastes all had trades or crafts which were despised, or even condemned, by religious orthodoxy, either because their work involved the taking of human or animal life, or because their functions involved some ritual

defilement. Included in these two categories were hunters, fishermen, butchers, curriers, executioners, gravediggers, undertakers, those who sold liquor, sweepers, and, during certain historical periods. This work also emphasizes that many Brahmanical. Texts and thinkers were as much liberal as the Buddhist, probably more, in their social outlook.

They nevertheless took part in the dharma; but their benefits there from were limited to seeking redress under the law, and, under certain conditions, the opportunity to study the sacred texts of Hinduism, namely the Puranas and the Scriptures known as the Tantras, to take part in private but not public rites, This was the limit of their rights. The lower caste's rights, for they had no possibility of freeing themselves from the servitude which was their by reason of birth. This is where the theory of Karma assumed its full significance; since being born into a particular caste was considered the fruit of acts accomplished in previous existences, it was quite clear that the sudras had to their debit a heavy load of evil deeds from their past lives. Since this debt ruled the condition of the individual throughout his present life and could only be modified at the next rebirth, the clear implication was that there was no hope of their improving this situation during their lifetime.

Conclusion:

The present work deals that the untouchable was not altogether without hope. Though he was denied access to the temples and the comforts of orthodox religion, Buddhist monks preached to him, and the more enlightened wandering ascetics would give him instruction. The untouchable dying in defence of brahmans, cows, women, and children secured a place in heaven. Orthodox texts contain frequent warnings on the evils which arise when sudras and outcastes grow too powerful, and this would seem to show that a candala might occasionally become influential.

The Social and religious inferiority. Their caste, in Vedic times, seems to have included the

dark-skinned aborigines conquered by the Aryans, to whom were added later some of the poorer Aryans themselves and certain other people who had forfeited their rights for one reason or another. They were therefore not only despised from the earliest times, but also considered impure. This work reveals with the servile class which was not homogeneous since, even here, distinctions were made between the 'pure' or 'unexcluded' and the 'excluded'. The latter were practically identical with the 'outcastes'. It is certainly true that Buddhism recognised the right of and gave opportunity to even downtrodden people to enter the sangha.

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