

Hinduism and Buddhism: The Process of Mutual Fecundation

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◆ It is a matter of fact and truth of history that the mother and matrix of Buddhism is the Hinduism of the fifth-sixth centuries BCE. The general understanding is that Buddhism took origin and grew strong as a reaction to the Brahmanic advocacy of sacrifices, priestly craft and ritual centred religiosity. Buddhism at the same time exerted immense influence on Hinduism. We are dealing with this aspect of the history of religion in India. ...

◆ Some verses in the *Gita* have direct bearing with passages in the *Dhammapada*. *Gita* VI.4 says: "One should save the self with his own self. One should not destroy the self. The self indeed is the benefactor of the self; and self is also the enemy of the self." The parallel text in *Dhammapada* (verse 160) is: "The self is the lord of self; who else could be the lord? With self well subdued a man finds a lord who is difficult to obtain".¹ ...

◆ There is no doubt that Advaita Vedanta was massively influenced by Buddhism. Some of the later theist Vedantins like Ramanuja, the founder of Visistadvaita Vedanta, even characterized Advaitins as *pracchanna-baudhas*, meaning Buddhists in disguise.

◆ Gaudapada's Advaita: Gaudapada, the first Advaitin, wrote a commentary on *Mandukya Upanisad*, the shortest of all ancient Upanisads, in four chapters, entitled *Mandukya-karika*. The first chapter is more or less a real commentary of the Upanisads. The other three chapters, especially the fourth chapter, expatiates the principles of Advaita where he heavily relies on Buddhism, especially Nagarjuna's (ca.200 CE) Madhymika philosophy. "Gaudapada thus flourished after all the great Buddhist teachers Asvaghosa, Nagarjuna, Asanga and Vasubandhu; and I believe that there is sufficient evidence in his karikas for thinking that he was possibly a Buddhist, and considered that the teachings of the Upanisads tallied with those of the Buddha".² ...

◆ By the time Sankara came into the scene Buddhism was already on the decline, and it is believed that he dealt the deathblow to Buddhism. Badarayana in his *Vedanta-sutra* refutes different schools of Buddhism in fourteen *sutras* (*Vedanta-sutras* II.2.17-30). In his commentary to these *sutras* Sankara vehemently attacks Buddhism. ...

◆ Buddhist Moral Values in the Hindu Religiosity:

The Middle Path: One of the central teachings of Buddhism is the Middle Path principle. It normally never imposes impossible practices on its followers.

The Principle of *Ahimsa*: *Ahimsa*, of course, was an important spiritual principle and social virtue in Hinduism. *Mahabharata* says: *Ahimsa* is the supreme duty".³ But it is with the spread of Buddhism that the Indian psyche rose up to the real spirit of this great principle

Art and Architecture. ...

"Buddhism may not exist in India as a sect; that is because it has permeated the entire religious and philosophic thought of India and percolated into the deepest recesses of the religious mentality of the present-day Hindus. The consequence is that it will not be incorrect to say that every Hindu is a Buddhist, in spite of all outward appearances to the contrary"⁴.

¹ Transl. of *Dhammapada* by S. Radharkrishnan. Cf. S. Radharkrishnan, *The Dhammapada, with Introductory Essays, Pali Text, English Translation and Notes*, Madras: Oxford University Press, 1982 (7th impression).

² Surendranath Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy*, Vol.I., Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1975, p.423.

³ *ahimsā satya-vacanam sarva-bhūta-hitam param / ahimsā paramo dharmah sa ca satye pratiṣṭitah // (Mahābhārata III.200.4.)*

⁴ Satkari Mookerjee, "Buddhis in Indian Life and Thought", in *The Cultural Heritage of India, Vol. I*, eds. Suniti Kumar Chatterji et al., Calcutta: The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, 1993 (reprint), p.575.