INTRODUCTION

Great and heroic people alter the times and world in which they live, but we cannot appreciate how they do this unless we understand the environments and backgrounds in which they lived. For this reason it is impossible to have a clear understanding of Buddhism unless we take into consideration the cultural, philosophical and religious background of India of about two thousand five hundred years ago.

In India in the sixth century B.C., religion in its true sense had disappeared and excellent social and moral rules were replaced by the caste system, with a view to give privileges to the Brahmanas and cruel and inhuman laws to the Sudras. For the Sudras, there was no religious performance, no religious observance and no social respect, therefore the Sudras and other outcastes wanted a change in their religious and social status. Goutama, the Buddha came to their rescue. He rebelled against the distinction between man and man and his compassionate heart searched for a means to help the humble and the oppressed.

His world-embracing sympathy led him to proclaim his method of self culture and holy living to the
suffering human beings. He invited all the poor and the oppressed to end their sufferings by cultivating virtues, by annihilating passions and evil-desires, and by spreading universal love and peace. The Brahmanas and the Sudras, the high and the low, the rich and the poor were all equal for him - all could equally achieve their salvation, the highest goal of human life. For this he invited all to embrace his Dhamma – The way of life. Human beings from all corners responded to the touching proclamation and Buddhism - His Dhamma - in the course of a few centuries, became the dominant faith not of a sect or country but of the whole of Asia.

The land of Maharashtra did not remain untouched by universal love, compassion and peace of the Buddha. During the course of Buddhist spread history reveals several interesting facts. The area now known as Maharashtra had become a well organised unit regionally, politically and culturally when Buddhism was introduced to the land.

"Culture has been defined by scientists in various ways, over a hundred and sixty definitions are listed in a critical review by Kroeber and Kluekhohn. But the simplest, the broadest and the pithiest one is by the eminent American anthropologist, Henry S. Coon, who identifies culture with the sum total of things people do as a result of having been so taught: 1"

1. Carlton S. Coon in the history of Man, p.5
   Quoted in S.Dutt - Buddhist Monks and Monasteries of India, p.19.
While describing Buddhist Culture Sukumar Dutt says, "India had in the past a culture that took its 'teaching' from Buddhism, one extraordinarily long-lived and wide-spread, that endured over a millennium and a half, spread in its flourishing periods within that wide span of time from end to end of the country. It has left its vestiges scattered all over the land, what are now 'archaeological remains'.

He makes his point more clear in these words, "Except for a struggling forlorn existence in a few obscure localities, the Buddhist religion, along with its monk-organization, the 'Sangha' was extinct in nearly all the parts of India over eight hundred years ago. It had been before that in a state of lingering decline for several centuries. The causes of this decline are complex and obscure and still await exploration. What comes, however, into comparative clearness is that Hinduism in its various forms that displaced Buddhism and amalgamated with itself many of its later developments and finally accepted its divine founder into its own Pantheon. But the culture Buddhism had 'taught' and the monkhood and monasteries it propagated undoubtedly survived; in fact, it remains to this day a vital functioning part of our cultural heritage."²

². Dutt S. - Buddhist Monks and Monasteries of India, pp. 19-20.
As stated above, among the subjects of cultural importance in India, Buddhism occupies a very important and unique place. In this regard we can say, Indian culture is composite and the Buddhist contribution to it during the two millennia and a half that Buddhism was a living religion in India, is so much a part and parcel of it that no true view of Indian culture is possible by ignoring the Buddhist contribution.

Buddhism had a long history in India. It moulded the Indian thought and inspired the fine arts, such as Architecture, Sculpture and Paintings of India. The Buddhist literature influenced not only our modern Indian languages but also the languages of Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Japan and many countries of Asia. The roar of Sākyasimha has been resounding and echoing throughout the world and will continue to spread in future in the form of its noble principles of humanity i.e. liberty, equality, fraternity and justice.

It dotted almost the whole of India as a cultural movement from Kashmir to Kanyakumari and from Maharashtra to Bengal with its remarkable caves, temples, monasteries Chaityas and stupas. An Encyclopaedic work can only do justice to the various aspects of this religious and cultural movement in India. Dr. Nalinaksha Dutt emphasized the need of a work in the following words, "It is,
therefore, desirable that sectional histories of this
All India Movement should first be written as preparatory
to the production of an Encyclopaedia."\(^3\)

Some of the scholars have now started to realise
that such work is worthy of more serious attention. Dr.
Nalinaksha Dutt has therefore worked on 'Development of
Buddhism in Uttara Pradesh,' Dr. P.C. Alexander on 'Buddh-
ism in Kerala', Dr. N.K. Sahu 'Buddhism in Bihar', Prof.
F.M. Hassaain, 'Buddhist Kashmir' and Prof. S.M. Pahadia on
'Buddhism in Malwa.'

From this point of view the present work is con-
fined to 'Buddhism in Maharashtra. Its growth, develop-
ment and the cultural impact it has made, has a value of
its own. Although the Buddha did not visit ancient
Maharashtra in his life time he allowed his Bhikkhus
Sona and Punna to go to Maharashtra and preach the Dhamma
to the people. Bavari a noted ascetic Brahman came to
Maharashtra and settled down on the bank of Godavari near
Patitthāna, modern Paithan, and sent his sixteen disci-
plines to ask some questions to the Buddha. Thus the
Buddha and his Dhamma were introduced to Maharashtra
during the life time of the 'Enlightened One'. Hence the
study of Buddhist Maharashtra is necessary for the stud-
ents and the people who wanted to know about their
glorious past.

\(^3\) Dutt N. - Development of Buddhism in Uttar Pradesh -
Preface, p. 2.
The present study, Buddhist Maharashtra: A cultural study deals with the following heads in detail:

**Topics:**

1. Locating Ancient Maharashtra Geographically.
2. Social, Economic and Religious conditions of Maharashtra.
4. Asoka: His Life and Mission in Maharashtra.
5. Chinese Travellers on Buddhism in Maharashtra.
7. Revival of Buddhism in the twentieth Century in Maharashtra with a special reference to the conversion of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar.
8. Summary and Conclusion.

In the first Chapter the geographical boundaries of Ancient Maharashtra are considered with a brief account of the ancient countries or regions, important cities, rivers and mountains. While dealing with the subject, original sources in Pali have been given priority as evidence, after that follow the inscriptions, accounts of Chinese travellers and other sources.
An account of social, economic and religious conditions of Maharashtra follows next. The social, economic and religious life of the people of ancient Maharashtra, the religious beliefs, customs and practices, their deities and social order of the people are treated in detail.

The next chapter deals with the missionary life of the Buddha. Here the brief life of the Buddha, origin of his religious mission, the Samgha or the Order, missionary life of the Samgha, the places of Buddha’s visit and Vassa are traced from Pali literature.

In the chapter on Asoka: his life and mission in Maharashtra, a brief life sketch of Asoka the Great is given. Impact of Buddhism on Asoka, his conversion to Buddhism, reasons leading to the conversion of Asoka to Buddhism, Asoka’s social and religious works, the details of the missionaries he sent to different countries and specially to Maharashtra to propagate Buddhism, his humanism and the impact of Buddhism on the life of people during the reign of Asoka, are all treated in detail.

An account of the Chinese Travellers on Buddhism in Maharashtra follows next. In this chapter brief information of Chinese travellers or pilgrims is given with reasons for their coming to India. The religious and
social information or account of Maharashtra gathered from their travels, the places of importance traced from them are dealt with.

The next Chapter deals with the Chief Buddhist Centres and monuments in Maharashtra, a history gleaned from Buddhist monuments, monasteries, Viharas, caves, cave-inscriptions. Here in this Chapter the study of the inscriptions has been made and historical as well as cultural information has been gathered from these inscriptions in respect to ancient Maharashtra.

The Chapter Revival of Buddhism in the twentieth century in Maharashtra follows next. Discoveries of various monuments, caves, monasteries, scientific study of these place by scholars have been considered. Buddhism attracted people, their conversion to Buddhism has been dealt with here. The study of Pali language and literature in the Universities in Maharashtra, Rational thinking of Buddhism, Scientific approach in solving the problems of life etc. have been traced in this Chapter.

Conversion of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar to Buddhism and its impact, the brief life and mission of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar has been given in this Chapter. Buddhism as a way of life, his vision in selecting Buddhism, changes in
the life of the people after conversion, who were the untouchables and the future of Buddhism have been dealt with in the Chapter.

The last is the Concluding Chapter.