CHAPTER-5

THE COMPARATIVE STUDY BETWEEN HINDUISM AND BUDDHISM

5.1 Introduction:

The Indian religious heritage is incredibly rich, diverse and ancient. The peoples themselves have long histories, with some of the pre-Aryan aboriginals dating back to the Stone Age (Noss 81). What evolved into Hinduism and then later branched off into other distinct religions such as Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism has left a rich legacy today. It is a legacy that is not only religious, but also deeply cultural. The followers of Hinduism and Buddhism today comprise twenty percent (Hinduism: fourteen percent; Buddhism: six percent) of the world’s population, having the third (900 million) and fifth (376 million) most adherents, respectively (adherents.com). Brief overviews, followed by a more detailed examination of similarities and differences, will help to clarify Hinduism and Buddhism.

Hinduism:

Brahmanism or Hinduism is not only the oldest of the mystery religions, or rather metaphysical disciplines, of which we have a full and precise knowledge from literary sources, and as regards the last two thousand years also from iconographic documents, but also perhaps the only one of these that has survived with an unbroken tradition and that is lived and understood at the present day by many millions of men, of whom some are peasants and others learned men well able to explain their faith in European as well as in their own languages. Nevertheless, and although the ancient and modern scriptures and practices of Hinduism have been examined by European scholars for more than a century, it would be hardly an exaggeration to say that a faithful account of Hinduism might well be given in the form of a categorical denial of most of the statements that have been made about it, alike by European scholars and by Indians trained in our modern skeptical and evolutionary modes of thought.
One would begin, for example, by remarking that the Vedic doctrine is neither pantheistic nor polytheistic, nor a worship of the powers of Nature except in the sense that Natura Naturans est-Deus and all her powers but the names of God’s acts; that karma is not “fate” except in the orthodox sense of the character and destiny that inhere in created things themselves, and rightly understood, determines their vocation; that Maya is not “illusion”, but rather the maternal measure and means essential to the manifestation of a quantitative, and in this sense “material”, world of appearances, by which we may be either enlightened or deluded according to the degree of our own maturity; that the notion of a “reincarnation” in the popular sense of the return of deceased individuals to rebirth on this earth represents only a misunderstanding of the doctrines of heredity, transmigration and regeneration; and that the six darsanas of the later Sanskrit “philosophy” are not so many mutually exclusive “systems” but, as their name implies, so many “points of view” which are no more mutually contradictory than are, let us say, botany and mathematics. We shall also deny in Hinduism the existence of anything unique and peculiar to itself, apart from the local colouring and social adaptations that must be expected, de, the sun where nothing can be known except in the mode of the knower. The Indian tradition is one of the forms of the Philosophia Perennis, and as such, embodies those universal truths to which no one people or age can make exclusive claim. The Hindu is therefore perfectly willing to have his own scriptures made use of by others as extrinsic and probable proofs” of the truth as they also know it. The Hindu would argue, moreover, that it is upon these heights alone that any true agreement of differing cultures can be effected.

We shall try now to state the fundamentals positively: not, however, as this is usually done in accordance with the “historical method” by which the reality is more obscured than illuminated, but from a strictly orthodox point of view, both as to principles and their application; endeavouring to speak with mathematical precision, but never employing words of our own or making any affirmations for which authority could not be cited and verse; in this way making even our technique characteristically Indian. We cannot attempt a survey of the religious
literature, since this would amount to a literary history of India, where we cannot say where what is sacred ends and what is secular begins. Our literary sources begin with the Rig Veda (1200 or more B.C.), and only end with the most modern Vaishnava, Shaiva and Tantric theological treatises. We must, however, especially mention the Bhagavad Gita as probably the most important single work ever produced in India; therefore the basis of all the later developments, it can be regarded as the focus of all Indian religion. To this we must add that the pseudo-historical Krishna and Arjuna are to be identified with the mythical Agni and Indra.

Buddhism:

The founder of Buddhism Siddhartha Gautama was born about 567 B.C. in Southern Nepal near Kapilavastu (about 130 miles north of the modern city of Benares). According to tradition, his father (Suddhodana), a petty ruler of the Kshatриya class, was informed by a Seer at the birth of his son, that Gautama was destined to become a great ruler. However, if he were to see four things - disease, old age, death, and a monk who had renounced the world - then the boy would abandon his earthly destiny in order to become the founder of a new way of salvation for the entire world. As a result, Gautama’s father sought to keep him from these experiences. He built a palace in the midst of a sheltered park and ordered that neither the sick nor the aged nor the dead nor the monk should be allowed near the palace. So it was that the boy grew up shielded from the world.

Tradition goes on to report that gods intervened and on successive days that as Gautama was being driven through his park, he saw a man covered with sores, a very old man, a corpse, and finally a monk. As Gautama was told what each one of these things were, he began to meditate on the meaning of these new experiences recognizing that all must grow old, perhaps become sick, and eventually die. However, it was the peaceful appearance of the monk which convinced him to abandon his family and seek salvation as a monk (compare this with the four phases of life in Hindu teaching). So we are told that one night he went to the door of his bed chamber, looked once upon his sleeping wife and son, and left never to return. Gautama shaved off his hair, put on a yellow robe, and went on his great quest for enlightenment.
5.2. Concept of Person or Man :

5.2.1. Hinduism View :

*Man, according to the Vedas, is the result of the Gods’ sacrifice of the divine primordial form of man. In a concept also found among many other peoples, the parts of this first being became the various living creatures, including man. The Puranas speak of Manu, progenitor of our race.* This concept also, to some extent, resembles the Hindu concept of man: ‘Eating, sleeping, fear and sex are common to man as well as animals. In human beings dharma (i.e. restraint by moral rules) is extra and special. Without dharma men are no better than beasts.’

According to Shankaracharya, this dharma is of two types: pravritti-lakshana and nivritti-lakshana. When one, observing the moral codes of conduct applicable to one’s station in life and society performs actions for enjoyment (kama) and acquisition of wealth (artha), one is said to be following pravritti dharma. A time comes, however, when one gets disgusted with sense-enjoyments and acquisition of wealth and aspires for final emancipation (moksha). The one embraces what is called nivritti dharma, characterized by renunciation of all worldly desires and selfish actions, and resorting to spiritual practice to attain liberation. Man rises from animal to human level by accepting pravritti dharma i.e. by observing social injunctions. He ascends to godhood and becomes divine by embracing the nivritti dharma.

In Hindu teaching man’s primary problems are caused by the effects of maya. In light of the illusory nature of both man and his actions there can be no recognition of sin in the sense of moral guilt. Sin itself becomes an illusion. Since man is at the same time part of the world soul, he cannot be separated from God by his sin.

The *Rig Vedastates,* ‘thousand-headed is the Man with a thousand eyes, a thousand feet; encompassing the Earth on all sides, he exceeded it by ten fingers’ breath. That Man, indeed, is this All, what has been and what is to be, the Lord of the immortal spheres which he surpasses by consuming food. Such is the measure
of his might, and greater still than this is Man. All beings are a fourth of him, three-fourths are the immortal in heaven. Using the Man as their oblation, the Gods performed the sacrifice. This evolved Man, then first born, they besprinkled on the sacred grass. With him the Gods performed the sacrifice, as did also the heavenly beings and seers. From this sacrifice, fully accomplished, were born the hymns and the melodies; from this were born the sacrificial formulas. When they divided up the Man, his mouth became the brahmin; his arms became the warrior-prince, his legs the common man who plies his trade. The lowly serf was born from his feet. The Moon was born from his mind; the Sun came into being from his eye; from his mouth came Indra and Agni, while from his breath the Wind was born.

In the Siva Purana, Brahma said, “Dharma, the means for achievement of everything, born of me, assumed the form of Manu at my bidding. I created from the different parts of my body innumerable sons. I was then prompted by Siva present within me and hence I split myself into two, one had the form of a woman and the other half that of a man. That man was Swayambhuva Manu, the greatest of the means of creation. The woman was Satarupa, a yogini, an ascetic woman. Together they created beings. Their sons and progeny are spread over the world both mobile and immobile.”

This Hindu concept of liberation, in turn, is based upon another concept of an ever pure, ever free, ever perfect, ever conscious spiritual entity in man called Atman (soul). According to Swami Vivekananda this Atman is the Real Man as against the body-mind complex which is only the apparent man. The relation between the real and apparent men has been beautifully described through an allegory in the Katha Upanishad:

Know the soul to be the master of the chariot and the body the chariot. Consider the intellect the charioteer, and the mind the reins. The senses, they say, are the horses, and their roads are the sense objects. The wise call Him the enjoyer when He is united with the body, senses and mind.
**Real and Apparent Man:**

The Hindus have further elaborated this concept by stating that the real man or Atman is conscious, ever free, blissful and immortal. The apparent man consists of five sheaths which cover the soul or atman. These are (1) the physical body or the physical sheath, (2) the vital sheath or the sheath of life-force, (3) the mental sheath, (4) the ego sheath, and (5) the Blissful sheath. According to another concept, the real man or the conscious soul or Atman has three bodies: (1) the gross physical body, (2) the subtle mental body and (3) the causal body which is made up of pure ignorance. At the time of death, the physical body dies, but the subtle mental body and the causal body remain and together with the conscious soul or real man, transmigrate to another physical body to be born again.

When we are awake, the gross physical body is active. In sleep, when we are dreaming, the physical body is inactive, but the mental body is active. But when we go into deep sleep and do not even see dreams, at that time even the mental body is not active and only the causal body in the form of ignorance remains covering the pure soul or Atman.

**Implications of the Concept of Divinity of Man:**

Swami Vivekananda laid the greatest stress, in his message, on the divinity of man because he knew men are divine, and since truth liberates, the only way to be free was to perceive the truth of one’s divinity. Secondly, we tend to think and act according to our concept of ourselves. This has profound practical, psychological and social implications. The concepts of man as a sexual, economic, tool-making or social animal may be useful to individual or society to a certain extent, but they are restrictive. If we consider ourselves sexual animals as Freud wants us to believe, sexual shall we become. If we believe we are economically driven machines, we shall run after money. If we think we are social animals, we shall become slaves of society. But if we consider ourselves ever free, blissful divinities, we shall enjoy freedom and bliss.
Swami Vivekananda used to illustrate this truth with the help of the story of a lion cub which was reared along with a herd of sheep from the very day of its birth. As it grew, it learnt to bleat and eat grass. Then this flock of sheep was attacked by another lion. He was surprised to find a full grown lion running away in fear. He caught hold of this younger lion, dragged it to the forest and told it that it was a lion and acting like a sheep did not befit it. To convince it, the older lion showed its reflection in the lake. The young lion was convinced that it was a lion and not a sheep and in a moment gave up its fear.

Once two young sons of a devotee were playing. One was Vivek and another, Shirish. They, for the sake of fun, added ‘ananda’ to their names, and became Vivekananda and Shirishananda, and, as their play demanded, started acting according to their new names. Vivek folded his arms and stood erect like Swami Vivekananda with a grave face. Shirish did the same. But then, for some reason, Shirish started weeping. Vivek was surprised, and asked his mother, ‘Can Shirishananda weep?’ That’s it! Weeping does not befit Shirish as long as he is ‘ananda’, a dignified monk. If children can temporarily change their behaviour in play according to their assumed identity, can we not change our identity and behaviour permanently?

Normally, we consider ourselves as physical body or a body-mind complex. It is extremely difficult to consider oneself as a conscious soul free from body and mind, and free from the five coverings or three bodies. All the Hindu scriptures are meant to teach this concept of immortal, pure, blissful, eternal soul as man’s real nature. This is the central theme of the whole Hindu philosophy and religion, which is taught in various ways through reason, mythology and stories.

What do we Mean by Divinity?

When it is said that according to Hinduism, man, in his essential nature, is divine, it causes confusion in many minds. Because by divine we generally mean God, and there are various views about God. Not only that, there are a large number of people-- secularists, materialists, communists, even Buddhists and Jains-- who do not believe in God. So unless it is clarified what we mean by divine, and what is the concept of divine in the scriptures of the Hindus, the Vedas, the confusion would persist.
Let us begin with certain primitive concepts of God. Our ancient aboriginal ancestors worshipped a God. Their God was generally a tribal God, a God which protected their tribe and helped the tribesmen to defeat the other tribes, who too had their God. This tribal God was very similar to the tribesmen, but was much more powerful. It is said by Swami Vivekananda that if a buffalo were to think of God, it will think of it as a big buffalo.

One concept of God found in the Vedas is that He is the ruler of certain elements of Nature. God Indra was the controller of clouds and rain. Varuna controlled the ocean. Vayu was the wind–god and agni was the fire-god.

Now, if we analyse the above mentioned two concepts, we shall find an interesting common factor. In both the tribal god as well as the god as controller of natural element, there is less limitation than an ordinary human being. The tribal man cannot defeat hostile tribes, but the tribal God can. Man has no control over nature, but Indra, Varuna and Vayu have. Thus God is he, who can control the external nature, be it man, animals or elements. Hence Swami Vivekananda has said, “Each soul is potentially divine. The goal is to manifest the divinity within by controlling nature, external and internal.”

In the course of human evolution, human beings have gradually learnt to control nature with the help of science. Man has conquered the ocean by making a ship and a submarine. He has conquered space by making an aeroplane. He can produce fire and extinguish it at will. He can protect himself against rain. The whole history of mankind is an attempt to conquer nature and become God himself. Sociologically it will be noticed that those peoples or races or nations who have greater security and prosperity are less prone to worship a God outside. They are less religious as compared to the poor nations, poor peoples, because poor people have not been able to manifest the divinity defeating the enemies in the form of nature and hostile men and animals.

**Conquest of Internal Nature:**

But as civilization progressed, the humankind searched within and found that there is also an internal nature—the mind. Mind has its desires, ambitions and weaknesses. Man can become greedy, angry, and in the fit of anger and greed, he
can do evil deeds which might cause suffering to himself and others. It was realized that to conquer our mind is far more difficult than the conquest of external foes. So, man started finding a way to conquer the internal nature. The religious way is essentially the method of the conquest of the internal nature or the mind. A person who fully conquers his passions, desires, likes and dislikes aversions and attachment, even his love for life and fear of death, such a man in India is called Mahavir, the great conqueror. Such a person is worshipped as God because he or she has manifested the divinity within fully.

The Hindus have evolved a number of methods to conquer the mind and thus manifest the divine nature. One such method is yoga. A perfected yogi develops tremendous powers. According to the books on Yoga, a Yogi can fly in air, can become small as an ant or become big as a mountain. He can disappear from sight. He can even create new planets and govern them. He can read the thoughts of others see things far away and can listen to very distant sounds. If a Yogi gets perfectly established in truth, whatever he would speak will come to pass. If he practices non-injury to perfection, a stage comes when people lose their hostility in his presence. A lamb and a lion will sit fearlessly in the presence of such a Yogi. There are a number of such results possible by the practice of Yoga. Thus we find that Divine or Divinity of man also means the conquest of internal nature or mind. Hindus believe that all minds are interconnected. In fact the yogis believe that there is one ocean of mind throughout and our individual minds are like whirlpools at localized places. So they say that if one can control one’s own mind, one will be able to control all minds.

A third higher concept of divinity is also found in Hinduism. Although, as described above, by the practice of yoga one can get these superhuman powers, the highest yogic attainment is freedom from the bondage of nature. In spite of attaining the powers described above, a yogi may still be egoistic and selfish. He may use them to harm others. If he misuses them, he loses them and again becomes an ordinary human being. So the highest manifestation of divinity is the total freedom from the internal nature (mind) and external nature.
5.2.2. Buddhism View:

Concept of person plays significant role in modern bioethical debate as a number of the biomedical problems are concerned with a question: “That thing should be counted as person or not.” For example, the embryo explored by the scientist could be harmed in some cases. Normally the harm is meaningful if it occurs to person. The problem then arises if the embryo is person, the work done by the scientist in such cases can be debated in terms of morality. Abortion seems to be the explicit case showing that the definition of personhood is the most basic task. To judge whether abortion is morally wrong or not, we must know first the fetus is person or not.

The question concerning personhood is problematic in that it is closely involved with human biological developments in the womb. Certainly, at some stage of developments we could point out that the fetus is person because he or she can express some human basic qualities such as the response to outer objects, the reaction implying the feeling of pain, and so on. But at some stage of developments, the very beginning state in which the fetus has no any biological properties indicating that it is different from a cluster of cells, the concept of person seems to be hardly attributed to the fetus. There is some attempt by philosophers and scientists to set up a clear-cut definition of personhood through empirical ways such as using medical data. For example, they use the occurrence of nervous systems to point out that after the occurrence of the nervous systems the fetus is person, before that is not. Even though this method greatly benefits us, this does not mean at all that there is no problem in it. It could be said that such a definition of personhood is more practical than philosophical. Something practical does not necessarily need strong justifications. So those who adopt the definition of personhood as stated above can be questioned that why a thing without nervous systems should be counted not person.

What I try to seek in this chapter is something that combines both practical and philosophical nature together. It seems that ultimately the views concerning the problem of personhood can be grouped into two sides. The first side looks at
the issue in terms of convention. For the philosopher of this side, personhood is merely a convention of the society. We stipulate conventions for the purpose of social utilities. For example, to protect good people from the harm by bad people, we stipulate that people have the rights to their life and property; and we say that in such a case people are person in a sense of those who can claim the rights over their life and property when these things are violated. The murderer before committing murder is counted as a person also, but after that his personhood can be changed. In the case of death sentence, it seems that we do not accept that the murderer is a person. If we accept him as a person we can never punish him that way. From above, we find that one can be person at some time and cannot be at another time. It is a convention of the society, through the process of law, to determine personhood; and nothing else. Another side of the philosophers does not agree with that theory of personhood. For them, the study of personhood should not be merely associated with legal convenience. On the contrary, legal reasoning must be based on metaphysical reasoning or something deeper than legality. It seems that for the philosophers of the second side ontological investigation must be inevitably applied to the study of personhood.

In general, Buddhism shares the idea of the second side. One of the major characteristics of Buddhist philosophy is its naturalistic feature. Being naturalistic in this context means truths are out there in nature, not in human imagination. So, in exploring truths, Buddhism explores nature. In the case of personhood, what is explored by Buddhism is the nature of human being. This leads to the questions concerning the basic concepts of human life such as: what is the meaning of person according to Buddhism; when personhood occurs; what should be counted as the violation of personhood. We will examine theses questions as follows.

**The Meaning of Person:**

Normally, Buddhism is viewed as a religion that rejects the existence of the self. This sometimes leads to the understanding that there is no concept of person in Buddhist teaching. There are two meanings of personhood, as understood by Buddhism. One is the substantial meaning, and another is the non-substantial one.
The Hindu theory of person can be cited as the example of the first. For Hinduism, the self (atman) is the essence of human life. The definition of personhood in Hinduism is based on this self. The self as taught by Hinduism is rejected by Buddhism as Buddhism states that human life is composed of the five aggregates namely materiality, feeling, perception, mental formation, and consciousness; and these aggregates are not substances. But the rejection of the self does not mean that there is no concept of person in Buddhist teaching. Personhood according to Buddhism is still possible even though there is no self in human life. Buddhism defines personhood through psychological facts. For example, somewhere in the Buddhist texts, the Buddha says that suppose someone tries to kill you and you feel that you dislike the action of that man, the same action done by you is also disliked by other people. Buddhism believes that all human beings share a set of psychological properties such as self-love, death-hatred, and willing to have a good future. These psychological facts are something to be respected by other persons. The killing is wrong in Buddhist teaching because it violates self-love. Other moral codes in Buddhism can be also understood within this light.

The concept of person in Buddhism can be more understood if it is related to the contents of morality taught by Buddhism. The Five Precepts are the basic moral codes in Buddhism. They state that killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying or taking intoxicant is wrong. The first four statements are involved with other person, while the last one involved with oneself. As Buddhist ethics is naturalistic, any moral code in Buddhist teaching is understood to be justified by some natural facts. In the first four precepts two things are mentioned. The first is person’s life and the second is person’s belongings. Killing is concerned with person’s life, and we see from above that killing is wrong because it violates a psychological fact called self-love. Stealing, sexual misconduct with other’s beloved person or lying is wrong because it violates person’s belongings. It should be noted that when we say that killing is wrong.
Buddhism does not think that it is wrong because it violates the self of other person. The transcendental self is something beyond our observation, but psychological facts are totally observable. So using these facts as the grounds of personhood is more reliable. The last statement of the five precepts is involved with oneself. Taking intoxicants is wrong because it violates self-love. One who takes intoxicants does not love himself or herself, Buddhism argues. It should be noted that the concept of person in Buddhist teaching is in some sense closely connected with the concept of human life as the composition of the five aggregates. The connection between these two concepts can be illustrated as follows. First of all, the five aggregates play the role as the foundation of personhood. The dead man cannot be a person because he possesses only the body which is just one component of the whole five parts. The man in a coma state is counted by Buddhism a person because he possesses the whole five aggregates, even though he is not conscious. In the case of the man in the coma state, it declares that according to Buddhism the five aggregates under some conditions need not to function (to be assigned as aggregate). When we sleep and do not dream at all, it could be said that the mind and its components (mind and feeling, perception and mental formation) are temporarily out of function. So killing a sleeping man is wrong because the man has the whole five aggregates. This line of argument is applied to the case of person in coma state or in any deeply unconscious state. Euthanasia given to person in such a state is viewed by Buddhism not different from killing conscious person. In conclusion, if that thing is proved having the whole five aggregates it is counted by Buddhism as a person. It seems that in such a definition of person in Buddhism there is some problem concerning epistemological properties of the theory. We know that a sleeping man has the whole five aggregates because he can awake from sleeping. The patient in the coma state in some cases is very difficult to determine whether or not he or she will awake again. So the point is we know that a person has the whole five aggregates after his or her coming back from sleeping or deep unconscious state.

Suppose we have a patient in a coma state who finally dies in that state, the question is in the view of Buddhism this person has the whole five aggregates or
not. How we know that? The answer to this question from Buddhism is partly based on a religious belief that cannot be justified by sense experience. Buddhism argues that the body of human beings cannot survive without the support of the mind. As far as the body of the patient still survives, we can assume that the mind still exists. As the five aggregates are equated to the body and the mind, so in such a case we can say that the person still possesses the whole five aggregates; and that makes him or her 'person' in Buddhist perspective.

Summarily, the Buddhist concept of person is cantered on the belief in the equal roles of the five basic parts that constitute human life. According to that belief, there is nothing playing the role as the core of human life, like the soul in theistic belief. Even though the mind seems to play the role as the leader of life, the relation between the body and the mind in Buddhist perspective is known among those who study the Buddhist teaching that not the same as dualism says. For dualist philosophers like Descartes, the body and the mind are two independent entities and between these two things the mind plays the role as the commander of the body. It is clear that Hinduism says the same thing with Descartes. For Buddhism, the mind and the body are not completely independent. Buddhism accepts that the body as biological organism has its own history. Some modern biologists say that the history of human body is the history of the gene. The gene learns to survive and that makes a thing called evolution. Desire in the view of biologists is an instinct created by the gene to serve its survival. Buddhism accepts that desire is not completely located in the mind only. It is also located in the body too. So in practicing the teaching of Buddhism, Buddhists are advised to take care of the mind and the body equally. The enlightenment of the Buddha is well known among Buddhists as a state occurring from the balanced training of the mind and the body of the Buddha himself.

**When Personhood Occurs**

Normally the soul theory claims that personhood occurs when the soul enters the body. In the Buddhist texts there are some passages mentioning the seemingly alike as the soul theory says. The Buddha says that when three
conditions appear: mother and father have sexual intercourse, the mother holds a good biological state, and the mind is present; the occurrence of person arises. This statement mentions two components of human life. The first is the biological (or material) process, and the second is the immaterial one. What is called “mind” in Buddhism means something containing properties of energy rather than substance, like the soul. So the image of ‘Buddhist mind’ could be understood like the image of electricity. According to Buddhism, only biological fertilization is not enough to give rise to a new life. Modern Buddhist scholars seem to believe that when the egg and the sperm have united, if the mind does not enter as another condition the process of fertilization can never start. In the case of natural abortion, they explain that it occurs because of the departure of the mind from the going on fertilization process.

The Buddha did not give the explicit definition about when personhood starts, but the indirect sources seem to mention that according to Buddhism personhood starts at the first moment of fertilization. It is recorded in the monastic rules that one time a monk committed an abortion for a girl; the Buddha judged that his action is seriously wrong and that brought him a highest monastic crime. A monk who was given this kind of monastic crime judgment must be expelled from the monk community. Normally a crime done by the monk in the above case is the killing of an adult person. The Buddha considered the embryo as person like the adult, so the monk who killed the embryo through abortion was judged by Buddhist monastic rules as committing the highest crime as same as killing the adult. In the commentary to the rule said above, it is stated clearly that killing human being means destroying human life from the first moment of fertilization to human life outside the womb. So, even though the Buddha himself did not give the clear-cut definition about when personhood occurs, the Buddhist tradition, especially the Theravada tradition, clearly states that personhood starts when the process of fertilization takes place. It is widely argued by philosophers that why the embryo should be counted as person like people outside the womb. Some philosophers said that to equate the embryo to perfectly developed man is like equating the mango seed to the mango tree. For them, these two things greatly
differ. It seems that two sides of philosophers in the world are divided as they look to the different angles of the matter. The first side of philosophers looks to the embryo as merely biological unit. Certainly, as biological units the mango seed and the mango tree are not the same. Likewise, as biological units, the embryo especially at the beginning stage and totally developed person are not the same. One of the major differences between the embryo and the fully developed person is that the embryo has no any psychological properties such as thought, feeling, emotion, and so on. As these psychological properties are viewed by as the essences of personhood, the embryo is not person as it lacks these properties.

Another side of philosophers looks into another dimension in human life. They believe that the embryo is something more than biological unit. The soul is the essence of human being and this thing has been placed inside the embryo already. So, the embryo is person as it has the soul. Even though in general Buddhism shares the view with the second side, Buddhism seems to accept that we should not overlook the biological facts of the embryo. In the Buddhist texts, the biological differences of man and animal are mentioned and these differences make moral actions given to different man and animal different also. Killing elephant and killing monkey are not the same as Buddhism thinks that killing elephant is more wrong. The different weights of wrongfulness in this case are closely connected to the different sizes of the two animals. The size should be understood as the example of biological properties. In detail, other deeper properties such as the complicated developments as explored by modern biology should be added. Normally Buddhism accepts that killing human being is more wrongful than killing animal. In the texts, it is said that because human being possesses moral properties while animal does not. Moral properties in this case mean the potential to think and judge in terms of morality. In the view of biologists like Darwin, moral properties are shared by man and animal. The difference is merely the degree. That is, these properties are more developed in human being. Buddhism seems to share this view. So the concept of person in Buddhism is partly based on the acceptance of biological facts.
Animals in Buddhist perspectives are also person like human beings. Being person in the Buddhist context means containing moral properties that must be respected by others. When a man kills a tiger, he commits a wrong doing. Likewise, when a tiger kills a man, the tiger must be responsible for the action in terms of morality too. However, as Buddhism accepts that personhood in man and animal differs in degree, morally bad actions done by animals are viewed less blamable comparing with those done by human beings. This can be applied to morally good actions too. It should be noted that man differs from animal in biological facts. Buddhism accepts that animals have the mind like human beings, but the animal mind has the limited potential because it is placed inside the lower developed organism comparing with human body. In the case of human being, a mad man is also person. So harming the mad man is morally wrong in Buddhist perspective. However, as personhood in the mad man is lower than personhood in ordinary man, the actions done by the mad man are much lesser blamable comparing with ordinary people.

The point concerning the Buddhist concept of person is that personhood in Buddhist perspective has the varieties of degree. When applied this to the status of the embryo we will find that even though the embryo is counted as person the degree of personhood of the embryo cannot be compared with fully grown person. This seems to be the middle way between the two extreme views as said above. The belief that the embryo is person makes us to be extremely cautious when we have to deal with embryonic experiments. On another side, the belief that personhood of the embryo cannot be compared with one of the fully grown person makes us have more ways to choose when we are confronted with a serious moral dilemma as found in the case of the use of embryonic stem cell for curing the disease of fully grown people. Even though Buddhist ethics is considered to be absolutistic in general, the utilitarian considerations in some cases are allowed by Buddhism. In the Buddhist texts sometimes the Buddha says that if we are compelled to do the evil things, choose to do the lesser ones. Abortion in some case is considered by Buddhist ethics as doing the lesser evil, so it is not questioned by Buddhists. In Buddhist Thailand, there are two cases of abortion allowed by law. The first is the abortion committed by a girl being raped and
getting pregnant. The second is the abortion taken to protect the life of the mother. These cases are never questioned by Buddhist church in Thailand because we well know that Buddhist ethics considers the utilitarian reasons in the cases like this.

**Personhood is Violated Under What Conditions:**

Normally Buddhism views that killing is the violation of personhood. The first precept in Buddhist morality prohibits killing on the grounds that it is the violation of personhood. It seems that killing in this context does not include the moral suicide. In some religion suicide is prohibited as an evil. Buddhism considers suicide as something to be examined in detail before judging in terms of morality. That is, Buddhism does not view that all suicides are wrong. Taking one’s own life for the benefits of other persons could be counted ‘suicide’ but this kind of suicide is not wrong in Buddhist perspective. In the Buddhist texts, there are a number of stories telling the tales about the merit accumulation of the Bodhisatta (a person with intention to be a Buddha in the future). To be the Buddha in the future, the Bodhisatta must practice the things called ‘perfections’ (parami). One of the major perfections is the donation (dana). It should be noted that there are two kinds of donation in Buddhist perspective. The first is property donation and the second is life donation. Of these two, life donation is the most excellent. The story tells that in some circumstances the Bodhisatta donates his life. This seems to imply that the taking of one’s own life in reasonable circumstances is not the violation of personhood and counted as good deed in Buddhist perspective.

The basic problem concerning the use of stem cell from the embryo for medical purposes is centered on the concept of personhood violation. The major objection to the use of stem cell is that it is not different from killing one person and using the body of that person to cure the life of another person. This objection is very strong and this makes any attempts to support the view that we can use stem cell difficult. However, Buddhist ethics has the idea that in terms of social morality if we consider that between allowing and not allowing the use of embryonic stem cell allowing is more reasonable the use of stem cell in such a case is possible like allowing reasonable abortions as said above.
The embryo whose stem cell is used is not in the position to judge that he or she is willing to donate his or her life or not, so the taking of stem cell can be either killing (in the case the embryo is not willing) or devoting of life (in the case the embryo is willing) and between these two possibilities we can never know which one is true. According to Buddhist ethics, the killing of the willing person is counted as killing and that action is wrong. There is only one case in which the taking of willing person’s life is not killing. It is the taking of life done by the life owner and done on good motivations such as to protect a great number of people or to cure the life of more valuable persons comparing with the life donor. We find that this principle cannot directly be applied to the case of the embryo as we cannot know that how the embryo thinks. Actually, the embryo at the beginning stage, say within two weeks, has no any thoughts. How we should deal with such a situation. Some people argue that this case is like the case of a person in the deepest comma state. A man in a vegetarian state has no any thoughts. So the society must make decision in behalf of such a person. Normally when we have to judge on behalf of another person we use ourselves as the frame of reference. Buddhism, Confucianism, and some philosophical theories in the world share the ethical principle that the good thing is what we want other persons to do for us and what is bad is what we do not want other persons to do to us. In the case of the embryo we could apply this principle that: suppose the embryo were a member of the society and knowing the situations concerning the need of the embryonic stem cell as we know, how he or she will judge the matter. Suppose again that the embryo in our imagination says that in such a case it is unreasonable not allowing the use of the embryonic stem cell, what we can conclude is that the use of embryonic stem cell in that case is morally right. Capital punishment in its nature is the violation of personhood, but some of us think that the society have to allow this thing on the grounds of social necessities. In terms of personal ethics, Buddhism views that killing a criminal who commits very serious crime is wrong as it is a violation of personhood. But in terms of social ethics, Buddhism views that if death sentence is proved to prevent serious crimes this thing can be allowed in a Buddhist community. So we can say that the
violation of personhood can be possible in some cases within social dimensions. The use of embryonic stem cell is partly like the case of death sentence, abortion and euthanasia. These things can be either moral or immoral mainly depending on the reasons behind the actions. Buddhism is well known as a religion that considering ethical issues in terms of conditioned phenomena. According to Buddhism, for example, we cannot ask that: “Is killing wrong in Buddhist perspective?” What we can ask is that: Is killing in such conditions wrong?” So, killing in some case could be wrong while in some case it is not necessary to judge so. What said above does not mean that Buddhist ethics is relativist ethics or situational ethics. Buddhism believes that things in nature have some essential properties and these properties will determine the results of what we have done. For example, killing regardless of conditions is the violation of personhood, so killing is a bad thing in itself to some extent. However, Buddhism teaches that killing when judged as situation related to conditions can vary because of various conditions. It may be possible that in some case the weight of necessity found in conditions seems to dominate the badness of killing, in such a case Buddhism teaches us to use wisdom. Capital punishment in some conditions could be pointed out necessary, this makes killing legally and morally possible even though it is the bad thing as said above.

5.3. Concept of God :
5.3.1. Hinduism View :

The most popular among the Aryan religion is Hinduism. “Hindu” is actually a Persian word which stands for the inhabitants of the religion beyond the Indus valley. However in common parlance Hinduism is a blanket term for an assortment of religions belief, most of who are based on the Vedas, the Upanishads and the Bhagwad Geeta.

Common Concept of God in Hinduism :

Hinduism is commonly perceived as a polytheistic religion. Indeed, most Hindus would attest to this, by professing belief in a multitude of Gods. Some
Hindus believe in the system of three God while some Hindus actually believe in the existence of thirty crore i.e., 330 million Gods. However learned Hindus who are well versed with their scriptures insist that a Hindu should believe in and worship only one God.

The major difference between the Hindu and the Muslim perception of God is the common Hindus belief in the philosophy of Pantheism. Pantheism considers everything living and non-living to be divine and sacred. The Hindus therefore consider the trees, the sun, the moon, the animals and even the Human beings as manifestations of God. For the common Hindu, everything is God. In Hinduism God is known as Brahman, Isvara, Paramatman or Supreme Self. He is also often addressed as Bhagavan, Parabrahman, Siva, Vishnu and Yaksha.

The soul is known as Atman or Self or the individual Self. The Self and Supreme Self are the two eternal entities of creation. One is enjoyer and the supreme Lord of the macrocosm and the other is the enjoyer and lord of the microcosm of a living being.

In Hinduism, the phenomenal world, which we call Samsara, is transient, where as the world of Brahman is eternal and imperishable. In samsara a being is subject to modifications, aging and death. This is the suffering from which one must escape finally into the realm of Brahman and become free from the shackles of mortal existence.

There are several theories and schools of speculative philosophy in Hinduism which try to explain the relationship between God or the Supreme Self and soul or individual the Self, but there is no unanimity among them.

In a wakeful state, no one knows for sure the true equation between God and His creation. We cannot say conclusively whether they are the same or different.

Philosophers and scholars have been exploring and speculating about it since the ancient times, but as history proves they have not able to reach a conclusion. Since, both the Self and the Supreme Self are beyond the mind and
body, neither of them can be grasped with the senses or the intellect. Hence nothing can be proved about them empirically or in a wakeful state, except through an inner personal spiritual experience.

In Hinduism, there are essentially three views regarding creation: projection, transformation and super imposition. According to the first, creation was a projection of God’s power just as light is projected by the sun in all directions.

According to the second, creation is a transformation of God’s materiality and mutable aspects. According to the third, creation is a superimposition, just like a movie on a silver screen or a dream on a resting mind. These three views in turn influence our views regarding the relationship between God and His creation.

**Advaita :**

According to one school the whole universe is one and only one reality. Brahman or God is the only truth. The rest is His Maya or His concealing and deluding power. There is no distinction or duality between God and the soul except in our perception. God and the soul are one and the same. There is nothing like a soul separating itself from God and then entering the body as a separate entity.

The soul has never been separated from God and would never be. When the light of the sun spreads, it enters into everything. So is the case with Brahman. The same Supreme Self pervades all beings like space and envelops them all. The same Supreme Self acts as individual souls without undergoing any change or division. This is the Advaita or non dualistic school of philosophy.

**Vishistadvaita :**

According to another school of philosophy, there is no actual division or separation between God and Self. But as He comes into contact with His own Nature or Prakriti, He becomes reflected in various gunas and aspects of the latter, resulting in the creation of diversity and numerous life forms. In truth there is no diversity. It is just a reflection of God, just as your reflection appears in water, glass or in a mirror.
The reflection of God in sattva is Isvara, the Supreme Lord. The reflection of God in rajas is Hiranya Garbha (Cosmic Egg), the soul of creation of which all the individual souls are a part. The reflection of God in tama’s is Viraj (the shining one), the body of creation of which all the elements, objects and beings are a part.

These are the triple aspects of Brahman in creation. In reality they are His reflections and disappear when He steps away from Nature. You may call the Father, the Holy Ghost and the Son. In other words, God and His creation are identical whatever difference arises is notional and temporary. This is called Vishishtadvaita or qualified non-dualism school of thought.

**Dvaita:**

According to the third school of thought, known as the Dvaita, popularized by Sri Madhvacharya, there are two sets of reality and they are eternally different and never the same. God and His creation represent two distinct and eternal realities. The liberated souls may come into the presence of God but never merge into Him. The souls are also not created by God.

Like God they are eternal, but unlike Him, they are dependent entities in various stages of liberation and bondage. The bound souls are caught in Samsara, the cycle of births and deaths due to their delusion and desire ridden actions. When they are liberated, they reach the highest heaven of God and live forever in His company, with no prospect of rebirth or bondage again.

**The Truth:**

These are the major currents of thought in Hinduism that are speculative in nature but provide a glimpse in the nature of reality with their own set of beliefs and justifications. Each of the three schools draws their conclusions and validations from the same Vedas, the Brahma sutra and the Bhagavadgita, interpreting the verses according to their beliefs.
These speculative philosophies are beyond the understanding of ordinary Hindus. It does not deter them from worshipping God in their own ways. Indeed, existence is such that no one can tell us what is the ultimate nature of reality and whether what we experience is real or an illusion. A subject like this cannot be clarified or explained by anyone to our complete satisfaction. One has to arrive at the truth by Himself and experience the transcendental state personally. Only then perhaps one can transcend the speculative thinking and enter into the light of true knowledge.¹

**Relation Between God and Soul:**

According to the Vedas, the scriptures of the Hindus, the highest Divinity or God is called Brahman. This is actually another name for God. Brahman is said to be present everywhere, pure, conscious, immortal bliss and knowledge absolute. It is said that the human soul is also of the same nature. According to one school of Hindu philosophy, man and Brahman in their real nature are one. According to another school of Vedanta, individual soul is a part of Brahman, like a limb in a body or a branch of a tree. According to the third school, individual soul is separate from Brahman but related to it, and of same nature. We do not need to go into these philosophical details. The main point is that the soul of man is pure, immortal, conscious, full of bliss and knowledge. These characteristics are covered due to mental impurities like attachment and aversion, fear, hatred, anger, lust, etc. As one removes these, one gets more and more joy, more and more knowledge.

**Divinity in All:**

When the Hindus say that man is divine, this means that all men and women are divine. When by following the discipline of yoga, one starts realizing that one is divine and not mortal, he also, to that extent, starts seeing that others are also divine and he starts behaving with others similarly.

¹ Dr. Zakir Abdul Karim Naik : Concept of God in Major Religions, Islamic Research Foundation.
There was a saint named Pavahari Baba in India a hundred years ago. One day a thief entered into his cottage. As he was tying the bundle of the stolen goods, the saint woke up. Leaving the stolen articles behind, the thief ran. The saint also followed him with the bundle of articles. After a long chase, the saint caught the thief, and with folded hands addressed the thief as God and gave the bundle to him. The result was that the thief was transformed, gave up stealing and became himself a saint. Since the saint saw the divine within himself, he actually saw the same in the thief. His experience of this divinity was so strong that he behaved also in the same manner. This conviction forced the thief also to think that he too was God. Pavahari Baba used to see God in snake, cat, rat, dog, in every creature. Only such saints of spiritual realization can prove by their actions the truth of the Divine nature of man. But they also prove that every one can realize one’s true divine nature.²

5.3.2. Buddhism View :

Buddhism and belief in God :

Buddhism believes in the existence of neither God nor soul in a theistic sense. It is basically a religion of the mind, which advocates present moment awareness, inner purity, ethical conduct, freedom from the problem of change, impermanence and suffering and reliance upon one’s own experience as the sole teacher, rather than an external authority, on the Eightfold path.

Unlike other major religions of the world, Buddhism is not centred around the concept of God or an universal supreme being, who is responsible for the creation and dissolution of the world and the existence of sentinel beings. Buddhism does not even support the existence of an eternal and unchanging soul. According to Buddhism the whole existence is in a state of flux and there is nothing that is either permanent or unchanging. The Buddhist scriptures, however do confirm the existence of devas or celestial beings, bodhisattvas or pure beings, both heavens and hells and other planes of existence.

² www.sriramakrishnamath.org/
But none of these are permanent entities. They all are subject to change and evolution. It is said that the Buddha either maintained silence or discouraged questions when he was asked to confirm the existence of a Supreme Being.

**Buddha’s Views on God:**

The Buddha did so with a purpose. He wanted his followers to remain focused upon Nirvana without distractions. Therefore, he did his best to keep them focused upon that single and virtuous goal, without getting distracted by theological speculation or intellectual disputation, which was the common preoccupation for many scholars and religious teachers of his time.

However, this does not mean that he favored the notion of God as the ruler and creator of the worlds and beings. The Buddha did not believe in hidden causes but apparent causes that made sense to the mind and the intellect. Karma was a hidden process, but its effects could be felt and experienced by one and all. Hence no supernatural testimony was required to establish its universality or working.

Once in a while, he expressed his opinions about creation and the role of God. When Ananthapindika, a wealthy young man met the Buddha at the bamboo groove at Rajagriha, the Buddha made a few statements about the existence of God and the real cause behind the creation of beings in this world. These views are summarized as below:

1. If God is indeed the creator of all living things, then all things here should submit to His power unquestioningly. Like the vessels produced by a potter, they should remain without any individuality of their own. If that is so, how can there be an opportunity for anyone to practice virtue?

2. If this world is indeed created by God, then there should be no sorrow or calamity or evil in this world, for all deeds, both pure and impure, must come from Him.

3. If it is not so, then there must be some other cause besides God which is behind Him, in which case He would not be self-existent.
4. It is not convincing that the Absolute has created us, because that which is absolute cannot be a cause. All things here arise from different causes. Then can we can say that the Absolute is the cause of all things alike? If the Absolute is pervading them, then certainly It is not their creator.

5. If we consider the Self as the maker, why did it not make things pleasant? Why and how should it create so much sorrow and suffering for itself?

6. It is neither God nor the self nor some causeless chance which creates us. It is our deeds which produce both good and bad results according to the law of causation.

7. We should therefore “abandon the heresy of worshipping God and of praying to him. We should stop all speculation and vain talk about such matters and practice good so that good may result from our good deeds.

The Buddha did not encourage speculation on the existence of Isvara, (God) among his disciples. He wanted them to confine themselves to what was within their field of awareness, that is, to understand the causes of suffering and work for its mitigation. He preached that initially each being was a product of ignorance and illusion and subject to suffering, karma and transmigration. He therefore urged his disciples to contemplate upon the Four Noble Truths, practice the Eightfold path, lead a virtuous life by performing good deeds and works towards their final liberation from all becoming and changing. It is difficult to categorize Buddhism as an atheistic, theistic or agnostic tradition. There is enough justification to place Buddhism in any or all these categories. As explained in the concluding part of this article, Buddhism has elements of both theistic and atheistic traditions of ancient India, but none of them provide us with a comforting ground to categorize it in either of them with conviction.

Although founded by the Buddha, Buddhism, like Hinduism, is a complex religion, which underwent profound changes after his death, resulting in the formation of many sects and sub-sects, some of which made a radical departure from the original teachings of the Buddha to the point of standing in their own light as independent religions.
Were he alive, the Buddha would be surprised to hear about many traditions that rely upon his name to promote their teachings but show marked disregard for his original teachings, doctrinal matters and stand points. What binds them to Buddhism and keeps them in its fold is their adherence to the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path.

While scholar may keep arguing about the essential nature of Buddhism, it is the firm opinion of this writer that based upon the teachings of the Buddha, it is difficult to place Buddhism on the same footing as Hinduism or Christianity and consider it a theistic tradition.

The Buddha ascribed no role to God in creation, in human suffering or in the liberation of beings. For the Buddha the world was a godless world in which both good and evil were produced by the actions of individual beings. While many beings had no choice, human beings and those above them had a unique opportunity to exercise their discerning intellect (buddhi) and chose right living to escape from the law of karma and the cycle of births and deaths.

Therefore, to awaken their minds to the idea of righteous living and virtuous actions, he taught the world the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path, ascribing no role to God in either of them and putting the entire burden of resolving individual suffering upon the individuals themselves.

In drawing His conclusions and formulating Dharma and the Code of Conduct (Vinaya) for the monks, he assiduously avoided all manners of speculation about the supernatural to the extent possible, keeping his focus firmly fixed upon the causes as well as solutions to the problems of human existence within the realm of the mind and its abilities, and without alluding to anything beyond that.

If he believed in transcendence or eternal realities, he kept them out of the purview of his discussion and deliberation, even when he was pressed for a clear answer, considering that it was a major distraction for his followers in their quest for Nirvana and for himself, in his attempts to show them the right way.
Belief in Gods and Bodhisattvas:

While Buddhism does not believe in the existence of an all pervading eternal God who is the cause of the causes, it does believe in the existence of Noble beings or gods of heaven. The Buddhist texts mention the names of several gods, whose names are similar in many cases to the names of their counterparts in Hinduism.

However, while the deities of Hinduism are eternal, those of Buddhism are not. They live for longer duration of time, but like all beings, they are prone to decay and subject to the cycle of births and deaths.

Some of the gods whose names appear frequently in the Buddhist Canon are Brahma, Indra, Aapo (Varuna), Vayo (Vayu), Tejo (Agni), Surya, Pajapati (Prajapati), Soma, Yasa, Venhu (Vishnu), Mahadeva (Siva), Vijja (Saraswati), Usha, Pathavi (Prithvi) Sri (Lakshmi) Kuvera (Kubera), and Garuda.

The texts also refer to the existence of celestial beings such as yakkhas (Yakshas), gandhabbas (Gandharvas), Nāgas, and demons such as Bali and his sons, Veroca etc. Brahma figures frequently in Pali Canon, which refers to not one but several Brahmans inhabiting different planes. Like other gods, Brahma in all these worlds is subject to change and decay.

Apart from them, Mahyana Buddhism refers to the Bodhisattvas or compassionate beings and primordial Buddhas who inhabit the higher heaven and act as the guardians of the world.

The Bodhisattvas are truth beings, who are fully qualified for Nirvana. However, out of compassion they decide to postpone their liberation and work for alleviating the suffering of the sentient beings upon earth.

The primordial Buddhas are personalized embodiments of different aspects of Buddha Nature, possessing dharma-kayas (bodies of truth), such as Samantabhadra, Vajradhara, Vairochana, and Adi-Buddha, among others. The gods of Buddhism have greater powers than humans, but unlike the gods of Hinduism, they do not enjoy absolute powers. They have the ability to impact our
lives, but they cannot change or alter the course of life upon earth beyond a point. Besides, since the gods are not liberated beings, their actions have consequences and like humans, they are also subject to the laws of karma. Therefore, if gods indulge in wrong actions, it will lead to their downfall. The same is not true in case of primordial Buddhas. They are not subject to decay and they possess immense supernatural powers.

Life in heaven is not a class privilege. The gods are not created by a supreme Being. They reach the world of gods through self-effort and good karma. Ordinary human beings, through their good effort can be reborn in the worlds of gods.

Although it is not encouraged, Buddhism does not rule out the possibility of humans taking birth in the world of gods and gods, having lost their virtue and due to bad karma, taking birth in our world. Since life in heaven is equal conducive to suffering, Buddhists aim for liberation rather than rebirth in the heavens.

5.4 Yajna, The Vedic Sacrifice :
5.4.1. In Hinduism :

The present chapter also attempts to discuss the nature and role of Vedic sacrifice in Vedic literature and the ways this topic is expressed by relevant commentators on the subject. Issues of Vedic practices will be discussed along with their purpose, in so taking into account the historical approach to sacrifice/ offering (yajna/ agnihotra/ homa/ agnihoma/ havan) and its evolution in time. The period covered is from the early era of Vedic literature known as Samhitas, until the later era dominated by the Upanishads. Issues of yajna practices in the present days will be addressed along with their relevance.

Vedic period of Hinduism starts with the proto-historic Hinduism/ early Vedic period, (until approx. 5th c. B.C.E.) and continues into the classical period (until approx. the 5th c. C.E.) (Hinnells, 1994, pp. 194-196). The early Vedic and

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classical periods of Hinduism contain four layers of sacred literature namely Samhita (consisting of Rig Veda, Yajur Veda, Sama Veda and Atharva Veda), Brahmana, Aranyaka and Upanishads. The first two layers are usually referred as Karma Kanda, the section that emphasizes on action, whereas the last two layers are known as Jnana Kanda, the section that emphasizes on knowledge. The later section of Veda is seen as pertinent to the Classical period of Hinduism. Yet, most important of all is the fact that the above division is based mainly on the attitude towards sacrifice (yajna). Although the purpose of practicing yajna remains the same, the way of its performing evolved in time along with various layers of Hinduism.  

Yajna in itself is to be seen as the very essence of Veda. From the early times, the ritual was understood to be the link between the human and the Divine and a vehicle towards liberation. By such a link, the human could access the Divine and fulfill the very purpose of the human existence, that being to worship the Divine as the Creator of all things. Yet, in its incipient form yajna practice was in connection with the cyclical natural phenomena particularly the seasons (ritu) and the overall order of things perceived in nature. The place of human beings within the whole system of things was attentively taken into account. In this manner, from empirical observations, the concept of Cosmic Order or Divine Order (rita) developed and the practice of yajna became gradually a rite of ontological significance.  

Vedic culture (note 1) evolved on the basis of yajna having primarily the purpose to create harmony. This harmony refers mainly to issues of nature and the place of human beings within the environment, but also to the harmony within a human being. Deities (gods), as principles of life, natural phenomena or psychosocial tendencies in the human, were conceptually acknowledged and became instrumental to obtain the harmony the humans were looking for. The archetypal and phenomenal, thought and action were integrated into a single reality and self-

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aware self-determination (Frawley D., p. 40) Yet, the human-Divine link played by the role of yajna was to obtain gods’ favours either in the external world or as benefits for practitioner’s psyche. The overall kinds of goals were in the forms of good crop, cattle, good weather, progeny, good health, happiness of any kind, etc. Yet, besides the common goals yajna has specific characteristics pertinent to every Vedic era.⁶

Vedic scriptures point out that sacrifice was essential from the very beginning of creation. Prajapati (Lit. ‘lord of creatures’), a god having a major position in the early Veda, was described as the embodiment of sacrifice. In Br.,I.2.7 (note 2) Prajapati identifying himself with the universe desires: “May this body of mine be fit for sacrifice” for the purpose of creating the world. Gradually the early Vedic pantheon emerged as being dominated by the fourfold godhead namely Indra, Agni, Soma and Surya. Extensive hymns were consecrated to these gods as is written in the Rig Veda (Lit. ‘Veda of praise’), the most ancient sacred book of Hinduism. As offerings were done to honour somebody, the ritual was performed depending on those goals.⁷

During the early Vedic period there were five great kinds of sacrifices namely brahmayajna, devayajna, pitriyajna, manushyayajna and bhutayajna as sacrifices to Brahman (the highest Reality), to devas, to ancestors, to human beings and to all living creatures respectively.²¹ They apply to the two manners of performing sacrifice, either the shrauta rite that was done by Vedic priests according to shruti (i.e. sacred literature of Divine revelation) rules or grihya (domestic) rite performed by a householder man in many cases assisted by his wife (patni). However the shrauta rite is much elaborated, its aims extending far beyond the purpose of a household.⁸

The shrauta rite was particularly attentive to what the necessary objects were and how they have to be used within the sacrificial arena. Particular attention was given to how the actions were to be performed or how the participants had to

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⁷ Mahadevananda Giri, Swami Vedic Culture, University of Calcutta, 1947.
behave during the time of ritualistic activities. The enclosure (vedi) of the sacrificial ground was systematically arranged in an arena suitable for that specific purpose according to what the ritualistic literature recommended. Some objects used were the woods sticks (arani or idhma) in order to help kindling the sacred fire by friction. Other objects were logs of wood (samidh) as fuel, the offering spoon as sacrificial instrument/ utensil (sruca or agnihotrahavani), the pressing-stone of soma stalks (gravan), the sacrificial vessel (camasa) holding soma and food offering, the list of objects being quite long. Within the vedi there was an area known as antarvedi surrounding the fire-pit (kunda) in which the sacrificial fire (agni) has to burn various offerings. The antarvedi area has to be strewed with sacred grass (kusha) on which water was sprinkled according to specific rules. The fire sacrifice/ offering/ oblation (agnihoma) was patronized by the Vedic priests (ritvija) (vide intra) in charge with putting into the sacrificial fire articles consisting of nourishments (annahoma) like milk, clarified butter, cereals, fruits, various powders, vegetables and flowers, etc.⁹

The basic shrauta rite involved the participation of four Vedic priests, each one having specific attributes. They were known as hotri, adhvaryu, udgatri and brahman (brahmin) each priest could have three helpers if necessary. The Vedic priests were all chanting priests. As tradition stipulates, hotri was the priest chanting the hymns of Rig Veda while performing oblation into the fire, adhvaryu was the one chanting the hymns of Yajur Veda while performing adhvara, i.e. his duties before the sacrifice itself. Udgatri priest was the one chanting the Sama Veda hymns, while brahman priest seen as the most learned was the supervisor of the entire ceremony and the one chanting the hymns of Atharva Veda. Yet, the central figure of the sacrifice was seen to be the adhvaryu priest for the fact that he was the one measuring the sacrificial ground, building all that was necessary and preparing the materials to be used like, articles of oblation, utensils, woods and water. He also used to kindle the fire for expected offerings. Thus, the adhvaryu priest’s skills to perform correct his duties were of utmost importance for the rituals of fire sacrifice. The very success of yajna was dependant on having the right set-up before the ceremony of chanting and offering could start.¹⁰

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⁹ Radhakrishnan S. The Principal Upanishads, Harper Collions Publisher, India New Delhi, 1997.
As the scriptures suggest, the ways of performing yajna was different according to the aim in sight by the sacrificer, the one beneficiary of the rite. As fire sacrifice could be an offering to brahma, deva, pitri, manushya or bhuta, the aims of fire sacrifice have to be compatible with what was in their powers. The shrauta rite was a personal affair between the sacrificer and the unseen Divine forces that could give to the sacrificer his objects of desires. With the completion of yajna ritual by the final offering (purnahuti), its fruits were expected to materialize after a certain period of time, the power of fire sacrifice being seen as transitory. Considering the Vedic periods of time, yajna ritual evolved, in so bringing the transformation of the Vedic ritual itself.

It is on the account of the transformation of the Vedic ritual that the Hindu tradition evolved to retain the concept of yajna in different forms. The change was mainly related to the gradual internalization of the ritual. Thus, from a rite of overt expression of much detail elaboration, the rite evolved around the human being as a central point. The internalization of fire sacrifice into the microcosmic world of the human body becomes predominant during the Classical period of Hinduism dominated by Jnana Kanda. This period emphasized on knowledge as the way to obtain the same fruits that could be procured by the shrauta kind of ritual performed during the early period as above described. Thus, during the Aranyaka and especially the Upanishad periods of Vedic times, the elaborated shrauta rite lost its dominance, in so a new kind of approach to yajna taking the front stage.

The important development during the later periods of Veda was that devas (gods) descend in order to become homologous with the psycho-physiological functions of the human body. Hierophany was thus internalized within the human body in the following terms: “The organ of speech (vak) (of the sacrificer) is looked upon as Agni (‘fire’)” (Br.,III.1.3), “the eye (cakshus) of the sacrificer is Aditya (‘sun’)” (Br.,III.1.4), “the vital force (prana) (of the sacrificer) is looked upon as Vayu (‘air’)” (Br.,III.1.5), “the mind (manas) of the sacrificer is Candra (‘moon’)” (Br.,III.1.6). The Self which was seen as of nature of Hiranyagarbha (‘the golden egg’) is identified in Br.,II.1.17 as being in the heart. The four Vedic
priests were also internalized as Br.,III.1.3-6 points out: “speech is the hotri”, “the eye is the adhvaryu”, “the breath is the udgatri”, “mind is the brahman”. Now, the new kind of sacrificer taking the role of imago mundi is no other but the spiritual aspirant himself that strives towards the knowledge (jnana) of Brahman as the highest reality. Not only the external world finds correspondence within the aspirant’s internal world, but also his internal world is reflected in the external world (lokas) of magnifying proportions thus: “the organ of speech (vak) itself is the earth, the mind (manas) is the sky and the vital force (prana) is heaven” (Br.,I.5.4). Yet, the entire interconnectivity of macro and micro universes as seen in the Upanishads does persistently address the issue of spiritual liberation (kaivalya) by the means of knowledge.

Basically, the entire literature of the Upanishads emphasizing on knowledge of reality was conducive to kaivalya as fruit of the new approach towards sacrifice. The essences of the Upanishads are their most relevant conclusions, the four great sayings (Mahavakyas) namely: Tattvamasi, Ahambrahmaamasi, Prajnanam Brahma, Ayamatma Brahma (note 3). They summarize the whole philosophical concept, in which the central figure becomes the human being. This shift of centrality is essential in order to understand what happened to the concept of yajna itself. Not only Brihadaranyaka Upanishad but also other major Upanishads like Ishavasya, Chandogya, Katha, Kena, Aitareya, do emphasize on the knowledge of Brahman as essential to liberation. The transition of the outer yajna towards the inner yajna is suggestively described in Garbha Upanishad one of the minor Upanishads. According to it, the sacrifice could be performed by the sacrificer within one’s own body that has all the necessary articles/items and functions required by yajna of the shruta rite.

This is how Garbha Upanishad sees the correspondence between the outer yajna and the inner yajna performed with and within the human body: “The mind and the organs of the senses become the sacrificial vessels; karmendriyas (organs of action) are the sacrificial instruments. … In this (sacrifice), the body is the sacrificial place, the skull of the head is the fire-pit, the hairs are the kusha grass;
the mouth is the antarvedi (the raised platform in sacrifice).” Furthermore, the above scripture goes into much detail to define the correspondence between the outer form of yajna and human physical body, its function, capacities and any qualitative experience it might have. In a total expression of the inner aspect of yajna, Garbha Upanishad concludes that the importance of the sacrifice becomes paramount: “All who are living (in this world) are the sacrificers. There is none living who does not perform yajna. This body is (created) for yajna, and arises out of yajna and changes according to yajna.”. The conclusion is that body and mind become the repositories of qualities that are consistent with the essence of the Upanishads presented in the Mahavakyas (vide supra) towards the attainment of liberation.

In practical terms liberation becomes a total experience of life in which the right mental attitude and knowledge are necessary. This fact is outlined by the concept of sacrifice known as atmarpana (‘offering to Atma’). This all-encompassing concept is seen in a broad sense as the conscious attitude of a person to offer one’s own actions to the Divine in order to sanctify the ordinary human existence. On these lines, the action of working with the hands becomes mudra, the gesture of praise of the Divine; the act of talking becomes japa, the uttering of sacred formulae; the act of eating becomes yajna, the offering of nutrients to the Divine; the act of breathing becomes agnihotra, the sacrifice/consumption of the air into the act of breathing, etc.

Thus, it is not surprising that the sexual act of intercourse itself is seen as yajna. This is how Br.,VI.4.3 describes the correspondence of the bodily parts of a woman and the instrumentality of yajna: “Her lower part is the (sacrificial) altar, (her) hairs the (sacrificial) grass, her skin the soma-press. The two labia of the vulva are the fire in the middle.”23. Thus, the man is the one doing the offering in the form of sexual penetration of the woman and sperm ejaculation as a final offering (purnahuti). The woman in this case is the entire vedi area in which the ritual is performed. It is thus a sanctification of the sexual act that becomes sacred. Although using a different terminology, a much similar approach was developed
in great detail in Hinduism by the concept of tantra. It becomes clear indeed that the act of union (yoga) in various forms is central to the new approach to yajna. On these accounts, the practice of yoga in itself, as union (yuj) with the Divine, could be seen as performance of yajna.

As the specialised literature stipulates, the yoga practice as life transforming allows somebody to aspire to the highest state of liberation known under different names, yet one word has become well-known that of jivanmukti. Thus, jivanmukta is that person who attained liberation, but still manifests in a human body. Yet, the human body is not an ordinary body anymore, but is now sanctified by the yoga as an act of sacrifice. This is how Eliade writes on the qualitative experience of life as yoga that is much consistent with the idea of imitatio dei: “The ideal of yoga, the state of a jivanmukta, is to live in an ‘eternal present’, outside time. ‘The man liberated in life’ no longer possesses a personal consciousness – that is, nourished in his own history – but a witnessing consciousness, which is pure lucidity and spontaneity.”

On these lines, relevant classical yoga literature presents the importance of sacrifice for the purpose of liberation. In the well-known Bhagavad Gita work, that is a book of yoga par excellence, one reads (BG, III.9).: “The world is bound by action (karma), unless performed for sake of sacrifice (yajna)” (note 4). Furthermore, “By this (yajna) you nourish the gods and the gods will nourish you; thus by nourishing one another you shall attain the Supreme goal (i.e. liberation).” (BG, III.11). In this manner the wishes of the sacrificer become fulfilled because “…the gods nourished by sacrifice shall bestow on you the enjoyments you desire” (BG, III.12). In an fundamental conclusion, yajna is seen at the basis of the creation itself because “Brahma, the Creator, in the beginning of the world created human beings together with yajna and said: By yajna you shall prosper and yajna shall fulfill all your desires.” (BG, III.10).

Considering various forms of yajna and its development in time, as above described, the question of today’s relevance of all forms of yajna does arise. Indeed, nowadays, mainly in India, all forms of yajna are still practiced. The
shrauta rite could assemble together thousands of people to attend, each person
could take a personal resolution (sankalpa), a wish sent to gods via the offerings
in oblation. Yet, the domestic rite (grihya) is widely practiced in many households
following the tradition within that family. Yajna in the form of yoga is popular all
over the world.

   Yagna or yajna is an outer form of worship in which offerings are made to
different deities in a prescribed and systematic manner by qualified priests to
supplicate them, so that they would assist the worshipper in achieving certain
results in life.

   The chanting of mantras while performing the sacrifices is expected to
ensure fulfillment of specific desires, the overall welfare of an individual, a group
of people or the entire society. The simplest form of yajna is the domestic ritual
performed by the householder who would offer simple oblation into the sacred
fire lit in his house. A more complicated version involves setting up of three to
five fires and pouring of offerings into them such as food grains, ghee or butter,
and other vegetable substances by chosen and qualified priests, chanting mantras
simultaneously, invoking various gods especially Agni, Indra, Varuna etc.

   Some yagnas are performed on large scale for the general welfare of the
entire community, to increase fertility of soil, to invite rains, to welcome peace
and wealth etc. Depending upon the degree of complexity, these yagnas may last
from a few hours to several days. The number of priests participating and
conducting the ceremony would depend upon the nature and objective for which it
is performed.

   Yajna is a vedic sacrifice which has an outer aspect and an inner aspect. To
the vedic priests, yajna was the means to invoke gods and seek their blessings and
favors. They used to perform these yagnas for various purposes and at various
times during the year, at the time of sowing, at the time of harvest, at the time of
initiating some important social event or before going to wars. One very popular
yajna of those days was the Asvamedha Yajna, or the Horse Sacrifice which used
to be performed by powerful kings to show their Valor and the extent of their
influence. This yajna is now almost extinct in practice.
The outer aspect of yajna consists of building an altar, generally with bricks, kindling fire using specific types of grass and wood and then pouring into it oblations such as ghee or clarified butter, food grains, sesame seeds, and water to the accompaniment of chanting of sacred verses from the Vedas.

The inner or hidden aspect of Yajna is known to those who are familiar with the Vedic rituals. The yajna is the means of worshipping the highest God or one’s own inner self. In the Bhagavad-Gita Lord Krishna explains that every aspect that is associated with a ritual of sacrifice, the act of offering, the oblation, the sacrificer himself and the sacrificial fire as well is Brahma (4.23). In the subsequent verses He enlists the various types of sacrifices people perform with various objectives in their minds (4.25-4.30) and concludes that sacrifice in the form of knowledge is superior to sacrifice done with material things.

In Chandogya Upanishad, the yagna is compared variously to the world (section 4), the god rain (section 5), the earth (section 6), man (section 7) and woman (section 8). The comparison can be summarized in the table as shown below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parts of Yagna</th>
<th>World as Yagna</th>
<th>Rain as Yagna</th>
<th>Earth as Yagna</th>
<th>Man as Yagna</th>
<th>Woman as Yagna</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fire</td>
<td>world</td>
<td>rain</td>
<td>earth</td>
<td>man</td>
<td>woman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fuel</td>
<td>sun</td>
<td>air</td>
<td>year</td>
<td>speech</td>
<td>sex organ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smoke</td>
<td>rays</td>
<td>cloud</td>
<td>space</td>
<td>breath</td>
<td>desire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flame</td>
<td>the day</td>
<td>lightening</td>
<td>night</td>
<td>tongue</td>
<td>vulva</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coals</td>
<td>the moon</td>
<td>thunder</td>
<td>quarters</td>
<td>eyes</td>
<td>friction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sparks</td>
<td>stars</td>
<td>thuddering</td>
<td>intermediate quarters</td>
<td>ears</td>
<td>pleasure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oblation</td>
<td>faith</td>
<td>soma</td>
<td>rain</td>
<td>food</td>
<td>semen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The result</td>
<td>soma</td>
<td>rain</td>
<td>food</td>
<td>semen</td>
<td>fetus</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The physical or the outer aspect of the Vedic rituals was always viewed with suspicion by the followers of gnana marg. In Satapatha Brahmana we told that gods and demons tried to perform the sacrifice. The demons tried to perform it externally while the gods kindled the fire within themselves and thereby became immortal.
The Mandukya Upanishad is very clear in its attitude towards the sacrifices, “Unsteady are the boats of 18 forms of sacrifice, which are part of inferior karma. The deluded who take delight in them thinking that they would lead them to good fall again into old age and death...” Again, “These deluded men regarding sacrifices and works of merit as most important do not know any other good. Having enjoyed in the high place of heaven won by good deeds, they enter again this world or still the lower ones.”

The same Upanishad also declares the knowledge of the Vedas and rituals, grammar, etc., to be the lower (apara) knowledge, while the higher (para) knowledge is that one by which the Imperishable Brahman is realized.

Almost a similar view is echoed in the Bhagavad-Gita by Lord Krishna who cautions us against empty ritualism (11.48). The knowers of Vedas who worship God through sacrifices would ascend to heaven and return from there, but they would not attain liberation.

Even today there are many educated Hindus who are not very serious about performing the yagnas. For most of them they are just a part of the tradition, whose significance either we have lost or which are no more relevant to the present day world.

The rituals generated controversy even in ancient India, resulting in the rise of many independent schools of thought around sixth century B.C., foremost among which were the school of charvakas, the samkhya school of Purusha and Prakriti, and most importantly, the religions founded by Mahavira and the Buddha. The last two were openly against the empty ritualism of the Vedic religion and the extent of materialism that had crept into it by that time.

It is a fact that the incidence of performing the yagnas and other forms of sacrifices is slowly coming down in modern Hindu Society, primarily because of the influence of western education, the complexity involved in performing them and the decreasing number of priests who are well versed in the art of performing yajna according to the Vedic injunctions.
But like many traditions in Hinduism, the tradition of yagnas still continues though with reduced vigor. Some devout Hindus still believe in their efficacy and organize them for various purposes, sometimes in public for a social cause or sometimes in private for a personal gain. Whether eventually the outer aspect of yajna would yield place to the inner aspect only time can tell.\footnote{Hinduwebsite.com - General Knowledge & Reference Section}

5.4.2. Buddhism View of Yagna:

Among others, Buddha both upheld and clarified the concept of Yagna in language that laymen could comprehend. This goes contrary to the widespread belief that Buddha condemned the concept of Yagna.

Meaning and Symbolism of Yagna:

The word *Yagna* is derived from the *Yaj* root as forming *Yaj Pujayaam* or *Yaj Sangatikaranam*. *Yaj* itself means *to make an oblation to, to sacrifice, oblation, adore, honour, worship, respect, revere*, and so on. From a purely ritualistic standpoint, it encompasses men, materials, form, structure, semantics, and mechanics.

Yagna in a social and philosophical context, also implies several nobler aspects of sharing, interaction and harmony that spans the entire universe. As it is commonly understood, Yagna is not performed in isolation barring the *Brahma Yagna*, which Brahmacharins (celibate Vedic students) perform. Mostly, a Yagna involves a congregation of varying numbers with the manifest goal of preserving *Rta* or the Cosmic Order. It follows that Yagna at the philosophical level, represents a deeper symbolism.

I’d like to look at Yagna as a neat formula handed to us to maintain the said Cosmic Order. It is similar to a mathematical formula to solve a problem. Although the formula by itself represents nothing, one cannot do without it because the problem will remain unsolved.
Yagna as Sacrifice:

A common miscomprehension of Yagna is in terms of semantics: in the sense of its usage as “sacrifice” implying cruelty. Performing a Yagna is an act of free will. Individuals performing a Yagna do so on their own accord for the implicit purpose of preserving the spiritual harmony of the universe. No book, authority, or personage prescribes—much less commands—performing a Yagna. However, this prescriptive aspect proves exactly how things can go wrong.

Inculcated as a desirable ritual over several generations, Yagna lost its original symbolism and degenerated into mere ritual. And this made it easy for those who chose to exploit this aspect, which is what happened in Buddha’s time. Buddha condemned this, the Yagna-as-mere-ritual, not the original symbolism.

Buddha and the Vedic Yagna: Similarities:

Buddha presents his understanding of Yagna in such simple terms as “My Yagna involves no animal sacrifice, no money to be spent,” and so forth. What he cloaked in such simple language was his emphasis on the superiority of the internal yagna (antar yagna). In Buddha’s words:

*Make thy heart the sacrificial pit, and*

*Thy soul the sacrificial fire*

[to householders unwilling to become renunciates]

*Thy parents verily are venerable as the Agni*

*So welcome them always,*

*Thy wife and progeny the sacrificial fire*

*So treat them with such respect as it deserves, and*

*The Shramanas (monks) the fire to whom*

*Thou should’st pour all thy oblations.*

It is easy to discern Buddha’s inspiration for these precepts. They read almost like a photocopy of these verses of Yajur Veda’s *Jnana Yagna*:
Loosely translated,

… [thus] Soul is the officiator,
Devotion the wife,
Body as the Samit (small pieces of wood),
Heart the sacrificial pit,
Hair the dried blades of grass (to be offered to the fire),
Veda/englightenment the fire,
Desires the ones to be sacrificed,
[Our] Anger the animal to be killed (and offered to the fire)...

It is now amply clear what “sacrifice” stands for. Yet the misrepresentation of Yagna-as-sacrifice persists for several reasons, chief of which is political. Buddha’s angst as we have seen, was directed towards the exploitative behaviour in the name of Yagna, and not against Yagna itself. Which presents a problem Veda-baiters choose to ignore: if they decry Yagna, they necessarily need to accept the symbolism that Yagna represents. It is equivalent to saying, “I condemn curd but I don’t accept the existence of milk.”

Buddhism followers practice Threefold Training – Morality, Wisdom and Concentration. Buddhism can be worshipped in monasteries, pagodas, nunneries and temples. Buddhists refer to people who are followers of the teachings of Lord Buddha.

5.5. Social Justice :

The concept of social justice, which was central to the political thought generating and sustaining the French Revolution of 1789, as conceived by modern theorists, is barely two hundred years old. In the western tradition when we turn to earlier periods, we find that whenever and wherever social institutions like family, clan, occupations etc. arose, justice was sought in thought and beliefs of mankind, and social justice had no role in it. However, the idea of human dignity and the
importance of human existence has been the basis of all cultures. Still, almost all of the ancient philosophies and religions paid scant attention to issues of social justice in the modern sense. Walking down the memory lane to Protestantism and the Renaissance, and ultimately back to the Biblical concept of human being, we see that social issues have been addressed from early times. However, it did not concern itself with the basic questions of social justice. It was only from the eighteenth century that social justice emerged as an important issue in political thought and social philosophy in the West; and the use of the term ‘social justice’ in official documents started from the latter part of the nineteenth century.

Normally, social justice means justice sought by the individual in all spheres of social life. It involves certain rights that are held to be exercisable by the individual against those who possess political and economic power and against harmful social customs as well. Nevertheless, society has also some rights vis-à-vis the individuals, who compose it. The rights of the society, however, take the shape of duties and obligations of individuals. Rights of individuals may be designated as freedom and equality, while social rights may be designated as the moral and legal obligations of individuals. As an individual can experience freedom only in a society, which is necessarily moral, the rights and duties of the individual may be held as inter-connected. Hence a healthy society would comprise a couple of essential components — freedom and morality. Moreover, in the development of an individual, i.e. his talents and capabilities, the role of society is crucial. In other words, progress of the individual is impossible in the absence of a progressive society, a society which contributes to the progress of the individual. Thus, the most important issue of social justice is how to save morality without undermining individual freedom and moral sense.

In the backdrop of the above discussion it can be safely held that the concept of social justice is quite close to the concept of humanism. Humanism may be defined as a philosophy and an attitude of mind which gives primacy to human individual and recognizes his/her right to live as a free individual with dignity. Such recognition is the basic principle of social justice. Thus, humanism provides philosophical background to the concept of social justice.
5.5.1. In Hinduism:

Be it an insect, a plant, or a human being, Hinduism believes in the fundamental unity and divinity of all life. It accepts all life as sacred, exhorting each individual to look at the world with the eye of a seer and the mind of a scholar. It inculcates in us an ability to appreciate the diversity of this world, to become aware of its attractions and mindful of the ubiquitous presence of God in its every aspect.

A true follower of Hinduism knows well that as a human being, higher on the scale of evolution, he has the rarest and the grandest opportunity to look at himself and the world around him with the mind of man and the vision of gods and that through that combination, he can experience the ultimate truth voiced by the Upanishadic seers:” One in all and all in One”.

This is the thumb rule. This is what Hindus are expected to be in truth and what they should be doing according to the philosophy of the Hindu scriptures. But in reality, a great majority of the Hindus fail to see the unity. Brought up in a society that is organized on the basis of caste system and on social values that are centered around the concepts of karma and maya, an average Hindu is more obsessed with the problems of his evolutionary impasse and preordained existence than with the harsh realities of the illusory world.

Hindu society has always been divided deeply on the basis of caste, region, gender, language, beliefs, occupation and ideology. And every average Hindu considers these inequalities justified and puts up with them. Hinduism recognizes social and economic inequalities as inevitable constituents of society because of the individual differences in the nature of their karma.

If a person is born rich or into a higher caste it is because of his karma and if someone is suffering or born in a poor caste, he has to blame himself and his previous actions. Each individual who lives here is a continuation of his past and is fully responsible for his or her reality. Therefore how can anyone blame others for one’s own suffering? This is the logic that prevents effective collective action in Hindu society.
The same logic goes when people choose leaders who are corrupt, inefficient or anti social. The same thing happened when foreign powers invaded the subcontinent. People put up with suffering because they believe that they are responsible for it in the first place and that they need to endure it as a part of their salvation and progress. Improvement in the macro environment would be hardly possible in a society driven by that kind of mindset.

Hinduism therefore is not suitable for a political ideology that would strive to establish a socialist society based upon forcible restriction of the freedom of individuals and sharing of wealth. India tried unsuccessfully to inculcate the ideals of socialism among Hindus. Those who tried to rub it on the Indian masses over looked the fact that socialism and communism contradicted with the fundamentals of karma and maya and therefore would never succeed in the country so long as the roots of Hinduism were intact in the soil. The idea of free enterprise goes well with Hinduism because it is very much in harmony with the theory of karma. Free enterprise is natural to Hinduism. So also the theory of survival of the fittest.

Modern Hindus are however aware of the harshness of poverty and the need to give charities. If not out of compassion, they do it at least for the sake of their own good karma. People share each other’s suffering, with an understanding born out of their sensitivity to the suffering of the soul and with the belief that such sharing by itself is a good karma.

A Hindu is not generally passive to the harsh realities of this world, because in grained deeply in him is another equally potent concept, the concept of illusion or maya, according to which the world out there is unreal and illusory and to worry about it is a less attractive option than to escape from it.

For a Hindu the problems of the world are therefore essentially the problems of illusion and ignorance, and our problems illusions with an illusion. To think about them and to worry about them is also a part of that illusion. The best way to deal with this problem is to withdraw into oneself and strive for salvation or turn to God and surrender to Him. Underlying the beliefs and the perfectly matching logic is a hidden pessimism and a sense of resignation, which are responsible for the stoical indifference and philosophical attitude of most Hindus.
The Hindu caste system which we will discuss later and which was a blot on Hindu society, survived in its worst format because of this line of pessimistic thinking. A person who was born in a lower caste was not supposed to attack the caste system or the privileges of the upper castes, because according to the concept of karma no one actually denigrated that person. He landed himself into that reality and it was his responsibility to pull himself out of it through his good actions. Endurance was then the only solution and way to salvation.

The caste system led to a great misery and perpetuation of great injustice for a large section of people. It survived because people believed that their status in the system depended not much upon their birth in this life, but upon their actions in their previous lives. Metaphysically it is a perfect logic and if we look at caste system from this angle, perhaps we do not find enough reasons to condemn it.

5.5.2. In Buddhism:

Buddha realized the deeper significance of human existence. He concentrated upon the primacy of human interests and felt that no super human or divine entity, other than his deeds, would be able to change man’s destiny. Hence, the Buddhist philosophy may be characterized as Humanism. Humanism is not merely a theory but it is predominantly practical in outlook. Basically, it is concerned with the ways that would be helpful in the elimination of human suffering. Buddha fully realized the voidances of mere theoretical solution of suffering. It is due to this reason that his doctrine of ‘Four Noble Truths’ is not only able to explain clearly the human suffering, but also the way to its elimination in the form of ‘Eightfold Path.’ Through the recognition of theory and practice Buddha discovered the way to the humanization of man and the regeneration of man as a strictly human being. All this projects Buddha as an ardent supporter of social justice and, thereupon, a champion of human rights.

Interestingly, more than two thousand years back Gautam Buddha raised the issue of liberty, equality and fraternity as a revolt against the tyrannical, hierarchical social system in India. Although Buddhist thought seldom addresses the issue of social justice in the modern sense, that is, in terms of such things as
human rights, the fair distribution of resources, the impartial rule of law, and
political freedom, still it takes up social issues sincerely and upholds that
communal good can be realized through the promotion of individual morality.
Search for enlightenment holds primacy in Buddhism. Having taught his disciples
and helped them become enlightened, he then urged them to preach to others.
Buddha asked his disciples to work for others, but asserted that in order to help
others one must first become enlightened and, thereupon, be healed. It has been
clarified through one of Buddhist dictums: ‘One who is sick cannot cure others’.
Hence, it would not be proper to claim that Buddhism is oblivious to the
interpersonal dimension of human experience. The original belief that one who is
sick cannot cure others came to be radically transformed by the bodhisattva ideal,
which appeared in the later phase of Buddhism known as Mahayana Buddhism.

Although Buddhism is mainly concerned with ethical problem, viz. that of
suffering, it presupposed the metaphysical problem that everything is
impermanent. Buddha felt that the two problems are correlated. Therefore, in
order to discuss social justice in Buddhist perspective it is apparently proper to
discuss it in the light of the two basic tendencies in Buddhist thinking —
metaphysical and ethical.

Metaphysical Point-of-View:

The crux of metaphysical view-point in Buddhism is that all things are
subject to change and decay (sarvam antiyam). It is based on the Buddhist
cardinal doctrine of ‘everything is suffering’ (sarvam duhkham). Buddha was
absolutely convinced through his own observation that the whole world is full of
misery. Long and arduous years of penance made him realize that misery is due to
the transient character of reality. Explaining this aspect of Buddhism Rhys Davids
says:

According to Buddhist, there is no being, there is only a becoming, the
state of every individual being unstable, temporary and sure to pass away.
Everything, be it person, a thing or a God, is, therefore merely a putting together,
of component elements. Further, in each individual without exception, the relation
of its component parts is eternally changing and never the same for two consecutive moments. Putting together implies becoming; becoming means becoming different, and becoming different cannot arise without dissolution, a passing away, which must inevitably at some time or other be complete.\textsuperscript{12}

Apropos to the thesis of impermanence, it appears that the concept of ‘social justice’ would be alien in relation to Buddhist philosophy. This is for the simple reason that the basic precept of social justice involves an autonomous and free individual, which appears to be contradictory to the principle of impermanence. Moreover, justice presupposes others as well; and it is the other which makes the concept of justice meaningful.

Undoubtedly, Buddhism is a man centered religion, but the centrality of man does not in any way go against the theory of impermanence. However, Buddhist’s concept of man is somewhat different from the common view that there is an abiding substance in man. The general belief is that while body goes through changes, \textit{atma} does not change. However, according to Buddha, there is no such soul, as there is no continuity of an identical substance in man. But he does not deny the continuity of the stream of successive states that compose one’s life. In his view, life is an unbroken series of states in which each of the state depends on the condition just preceding and gives rise to one just succeeding it. Thus, Buddha explained continuity of life series on the basis of causal connection running through different series. Hence, in order to focus Buddhist view on social justice, it is seemingly plausible to project it in the light of their concept of man.

\textbf{Concept of Man in Buddhism :}

By denying the existence of any super-natural controlling power, Buddhists reject ritualism and emphasize upon human will and action. They posit man as the maker of his destiny.

The importance of human action and will may be derived from the last sermon of Buddha to his disciples whom he preached to take only themselves as their guide and light. Buddha says,

“You should be carried away in favour of a doctrine... neither by hearsay, nor by tradition, nor by scriptural authority nor by mere logic or argumentation, nor even by teacher’s personal charm, and such other things. You should accept a doctrine only after employing your own reason and discretion, after having known it to your utter satisfaction and conviction”.  

Such views of Buddha led early Buddhists to adopt a consistently dynamic and analytic approach to personal identity. But Buddhists were not interested in understanding man’s nature for its own sake. Their highest goal was Nirvana, which they characterized as the cessation of all suffering. Being a thorough realist and empiricist, Buddha not only accepted the reality of man, he also did not rest content with the realization of the plight of man.

However, Buddhists view of man is an implication of their doctrine of ‘self’. They used the word ‘self’ to denote two separate entities, one is metaphysical and another is psychological. The latter sense of self is identified with that of ‘man’. Hence, the denial of self, in the former sense, does not mean the denial of man. The denial is restricted to a unitary, homogeneous, non-empirical substance called atta, ‘self’. Either such a substance itself has been held illusory or the identification of empirical self with it has been questioned. This is signified by the anatta (no-self) doctrine. But denial of unitary self is not denial of soul."  

Additionally, in the Pali Texts man is viewed as a union of body (form, i.e. nama) and consciousness (rupa). While consciousness denotes the mental

aspect of man, body denotes the physical. Hence, personhood is ascribed as a composition of body, feelings, cognition, activities and consciousness. These five factors are supposed to be the base of the cosmos as well. Hence, man is microcosm of the macrocosm. Birth is explained as the unification of the said factors, and death as their breaking up which leads consciousness to move on to start a new person. The stream flows on a continual flux that still retains a distinct identity. Every link of the series influences the following links and the links that come later. All links belonging to the same chain automatically accept the responsibility for the deeds by the preceding link. The series or link of lives reaches a final end only when one succeeds in overpowering one’s ignorance (inability to see the truth) and attachments which requires arduous mental and physical training and a special kind of intellectual ability. Realizing the peculiarity of human existence, Buddhists assert that man recognizes the distinction between what he is and what he is destined to be. Hence, what man is destined to be is not unconcerned with what man is. In other words, the goal is enlightenment which is concerned with the spiritual aspect of life; it cannot be separated from the other aspects of life, such as social, political, psychological, cultural etc. Since all these are concerned with the ethical life of man, it is now appropriate to discuss Buddhist’s ethical view-point.

**Ethical Point-of-View :**

Emphasizing on human will and action, Buddhists assert that man is the ultimate architect of his own destiny. Besides, they put equal stress on wisdom and on the development of character towards moral excellence for the benefit of both individual and society. Buddha ascribes man with profound freedom. Buddhists purport that towards the attainment of a higher state of existence this freedom should be exercised by anybody. Buddhism, however, is humanism in the sense that it rejoices in the possibility of a true freedom as something inherent in human nature. For Buddhism, the ultimate freedom is to achieve full release from the root causes of all suffering: greed, hatred and delusion, which clearly are also the root causes of all social evils.
It will not be an exaggeration to state that the Buddhist ethics fully rests on a rational basis rather than on theological basis as is found in early Vedic ethics. Hence, Buddhists enjoined a short list of responsibilities to individuals through the five precepts which were taught in the Buddhist world from the time of Buddha. The precepts are as follows:

I undertake the precept (I) to abstain from the taking of life; (II) not to take that which is not given; (III) to abstain from misconduct in sensual actions; (IV) to abstain from false speech; (V) to abstain from liquor that causes Intoxication and indolence.\(^\text{16}\)

These precepts were applicable to each individual and, thereupon, to all sections of society. To weaken, and finally get rid of them in oneself, and, in society, is the basis of Buddhist ethics. And here Buddhist social action plays a predominant role.

In Buddhist social philosophy we find that the society was supposed to involve three divisions. These divisions were the Sangha i.e. the spiritual community, the society of the common people or householders and the state which was supposed to take care of the former. The three were conceived as interlinked and interdependent, as the well being of one depended upon the well-being of the other two.

As I have discussed elsewhere,\(^\text{17}\) society is a world comprising individual persons, each intrinsically valuable. Every rational society tries to foster and encourage the highest possible development of all the capacities of personality in all of its members. The end is justice or right ordering of a society and is called social justice. It is a balance between individual rights and social control. It ensures the fulfillment of the legitimate expectations of the individual under the existing laws. It is also an assurance to provide him benefits and protection in case of any violation or encroachment of one’s rights. In other words, social justice is


an integrative concept. Therefore, in order to ascertain social justice in Buddhist’s perspective, it appears plausible to discuss it with equal stress on all the three aspects of it viz. legal justice, political justice and economic justice, as the Tripitakas do contain social, political and economic teachings.

1. Legal Justice:

Legal justice is equality in the eyes of law. Every strata of people are subject to the same legal system. Although at the time of Buddha there was no fully fledged system of law as today, still the spirit of legal justice was, undoubtedly, inherent in the idea of equality, as Buddha was in favour of providing equal platform to each and every individual irrespective of caste, creed and sex.

Buddhists viewed all human beings as equal; therefore Buddhism was committed to the principle of human equality. Buddha attacked the caste system which divided the society in upper and lower castes, thereby depriving the lower castes of certain rights such as the study of Vedas. Repudiating the superiority by birth, he declared that:

No Brahman is such by birth
No outcaste is such by birth
An outcaste is such by his deeds
A Brahman is such by his deeds.¹⁸

Buddha has been considered as a democratic crusader against the inequalities of the caste system and the empty pretensions of the Brahmanical theology. He is regarded as having weakened the foundations of the prevalent religious and social structure by repudiating the revelatory character of the Vedas and by challenging the arrogant claims to dignity, importance and merit to Brahmin priests. The following lines clearly depict the rejection of ascriptive superiority based on the physical fact of birth in a particular gotra and family:

“Ask not of race, but ask of conduct,
From the stick is born the sacred fire;
The wise ascetic though lowly born
Is noble in his modest self control.”

Again, in the Brahmanavagga of the Dhammapada we find some of the classic verses eulogizing the moral attributes of a Brahmin:

“I do not call a man a brahmana because of his origin or of his mother; he is indeed arrogant, and he is wealthy. But the poor who is free from all attachments, him I call indeed a brahmana.”

“Him I call a brahmana who does not cling to sensual pleasures, like water on a lotus leaf, like a mustard seed on the point of a needle.”

Another prime feature of social justice at the age of Buddha featured in the treatment of slaves. Buddha condemned slavery in every form. Buddha may be declared as the pioneer of abolition of slavery. He avers five ways in which a master should serve his employees. These are (a) work should be assigned in proportion to the employee’s health, (b) due food and wages be given to them, (c) proper care should be taken in his sickness, (d) specially tasty luxuries should be shared with him and (e) holidays should be given to them at due intervals. Buddha was so much compassionate for the working class that he stressed that they be treated with as much consideration as a member of one’s own family.

Again, at the time of Buddha the status of women had considerably gone down. Buddha tried to give a place of honour to women. He did not accept the prevailing Brahmanic view that a son was indispensable for a man’s salvation. Although in the early years Buddha refused to admit women to the Sangha or community of celibates but later on he allowed the order of the nuns to be found. Nevertheless, “he enjoined on a young girl of marriageable age the universal

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20 Dhammapada (Nalanda Ed. of the Tripitakas), Eng. Trans. Max Muller, Nos. 396-401.
virtue of loyalty, respect and obedience to elders, efficiency in house-keeping, love of peace etc. But nowhere in Pativrityam (loyalty and devotion to husband) the later Brahmanic ideal of surrender and all absorbing devotion to husband was preached.22 Buddhism recognized the individuality and independence of women, and their parity with men. Hence, a girl could remain unmarried by becoming a Bhikkuni. Even a widow could find respite in renunciation. Buddhism also checked the spread of purdah (veil) system that was prevalent in some royal households.

From the evidence of the Buddha’s discourses or suttas in the Digha Nikaya, it is clear that early Buddhists were very much concerned with the creation of social conditions favorable to the individual cultivation of Buddhist values. An outstanding example of this, in later times, is the remarkable “welfare state” created by the Buddhist emperor, Asoka (B.C. 274-236). Walpola Rahula stated the situation — perhaps at its strongest — when he wrote that “Buddhism arose in India as a spiritual force against social injustices, against degrading superstitious rites, ceremonies and sacrifices; it denounced the tyranny of the caste system and advocated the equality of all men; it emancipated woman and gave her complete spiritual freedom.”23

It is clear from the facts, stated above, that we cannot characterize Buddha as having begun with the explicit intention of challenging the Brahmin priesthood, and raising the economic and social status of the downtrodden, the slaves and the outcasts. But he stressed the cultivation of those elevated sentiments such as a sense of universal compassion (metta) and creative altruism, the fostering of which was bound to reduce social exploitation and social tension.

Through the cultivation of compassion it is possible to rise above the drives of physical nature and also above the socially antipathetic forces of opposition, conflict and antagonistic competition. Social accommodation and adaptation are bound to follow as the consequences of the practice of metta. With its notions of maitri and karuna, Buddhism teaches man to cultivate that softness of feelings which shudders to commit the least injury to the creatures.

22 Ibid., p. 129.
In the language of modern social sciences, the message of Buddha conveys that merit has to replace all kinds of subjective considerations like bias, caste preference, prejudice etc. The Madhuriya Sutta of the Majjhima Nikaya propounds absolute equality of all the four orders so far as the punishment for evil deeds and reward for meritorious actions, both in this secular world and beyond, are concerned. It ridicules the claims of Brahmanical superiority as unfounded and illogical.

In short, Buddhist social action is justified ultimately and, above all, by the existence of social, as well as individual karma. It is concerned with relieving suffering immediately, and ultimately believes in creating social conditions which will favour the end of suffering through the individual achievement of transcendent wisdom.

2. Political Justice:

The basis of political justice is that politically or economically stronger people must not be empowered to violate legal system.

Verily in Buddhism there is no explicit body of social and political theory comparable to its psychology or metaphysics. Nevertheless, a Buddhist political theory can be deduced primarily from basic Buddhism i.e. from Dharma. Buddhism is of the view that political power is essential to fashion and sustain a society whose citizens are free to live in dignity, harmony and mutual respect, free of the degradation of poverty and war. In such a society of good heart, all men and women find encouragement and support in making the best use of their human condition in the practice of wisdom and compassion.

Political action, thus, involves the Buddhist ideal of approaching each situation without prejudice, but with deserved circumspection in questions of power and conflict, social oppression and justice. These social and political conflicts are the great public samsaric driving energies of our life to which an individual responds with both aggression and self-repression. The Buddha Dharma offers the possibility of transmuting the energies of the individual into wisdom and compassion.
This may indicate that Buddhist movement was mainly concerned with ethical advancement and psychic illumination and not with political affairs. Nevertheless, political repercussions did ensue from Buddhism. In the Brahmajala Sutta, Gautama Buddha emphatically states that he is vitally interested in social cohesion and co-operation and in the act of reconciling those people who are divided. Early Buddhism did have significant political consequences. From the evidence of the Buddha’s discourses, or suttas in the Digha Nikaya\textsuperscript{24}, it is clear that early Buddhists were very much concerned with the creation of political conditions favorable to the individual cultivation of Buddhist values. An outstanding example of this, in later times, is the remarkable “welfare state” created by the Buddhist emperor, Asoka (B.C. 274-236).

The Buddhist political justice enjoins special responsibility to the king. As the head of state he must adhere to specific code of conduct, as he is at the helm of affairs of the state. Buddha felt that the personal moral conduct of the king, along with his officials, would be expressed in the political affairs of the state. Thus, the righteous character of the state would help to prevail universal righteousness on earth. Hence, deliverance through peaceful coexistence would become easily attainable for all. In some passages of the Pali Texts a parallel has been drawn between a Buddha and a monarch, as both held the same esteemed place in the eyes of the people. The two have the same objective, i.e. the well-being of people. Both are also an integral part of the ordinary empirical existence, and the political good and well-being is assured through them. The Kutadana sutta of the Digha-Nikaya explains that the safety of the people and their economic, as well as material prosperity should be of special concern for the state and the government. Political power may manifest and sustain social and economic structures, which breed both material deprivation and spiritual degradation for millions of people.

Buddhists are, thus, concerned with political action, first, in the direct relief of non-volitionally caused suffering now and in the future, and, secondly, with the

creation of social karmic conditions favourable to the following of the way that leads to the cessation of volitionally-caused suffering, the creation of a society which tends to the ripening of wisdom and compassion rather than the withering of them.

3. Economic Justice:

The basis of economic justice is that although people differ in mental and physical capabilities still everyone must have enough.

Buddhist economic justice follows from the precept of non-stealing — ‘I will not steal’. Buddha spoke against individual stealing as he felt that it causes suffering. Similarly, stealing (or exploitation), which a powerful group or society practices against less powerful group or society, would cause suffering and, thus, is antithetical to the basic Buddhist principle. Buddha felt that it is not right for some to feast while many starve. Buddhism is the Middle Path between luxury and need; hence all people must have sufficient for health and well being, and in order to support efforts to fulfill higher needs. Inequality fuels resentment, anger and, ultimately, violence. In order to prevent violence there must be rough equity.

As the attitude of Buddhists was inclined towards ethical quests and psychological perfections, its philosophy did not provide any exclusive program for the economic betterment of the mass. If any person was economically thwarted then he could join the Samgha and, thus, escape the stigma and privations of the economic world. But there was no relief provided by Buddhism to him if he continued to remain in active social life.

At the time of Buddha economy was not industrial. The trade and commerce was in agricultural products and not in industrial commodities. There was no large scale manufacturing system prevalent at that time in spite of the mention of ‘shresthis.’ The prevailing economy of the time was rural.

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Nevertheless, Buddhist scripture for economic mores can be classified in two, one for the house-holder and the other for monarch or king. While preaching to the house-holder, need of hard work with righteous duties without any speculations was emphasized. Stressing upon economic order to be cultivated by the monarch, Buddha held that the root of social evil was poverty and employment. This was not to be bribed by charity and donations, which would only further stimulate evil action. The correct way was to supply food and seed to those who lived by agriculture and cattle breeding. Those who lived by trade should be furnished with the necessary capital. Servants of the state should be paid properly and regularly so that they should not find ways to squeeze the \textit{janapadas}. New wealth would, thus, be generated and the \textit{janapadas} liberated from robbers and cheats. A citizen could bring up his children in comfort and happiness, free from want and fear in such a productive and contented environment. The best way of spending surplus accumulation, whether in treasury or voluntary private donations, would be in public works, such as digging of wells and water-ponds, and planting groves, along the trade routes.\textsuperscript{27}

This is a startling modern view of political economy. To have propounded it at a time of Vedic \textit{Yajna} to a society that had just begun to conquer the primeval jungle was an intellectual achievement of the higher order. Schumacher puts the essence of Buddhist economics as follows:

“While the materialist is mainly interested in goods, the Buddhist is mainly interested in liberation. But Buddhism is ‘The Middle Way’ and therefore in no way antagonistic to physical well-being... The keynote of Buddhist economics is simplicity and non-violence. From an economist’s point of view, the marvel of the Buddhist way of life is the utter rationality of its pattern — amazingly small means leading to extraordinarily satisfying results”\textsuperscript{28}

\textsuperscript{27} P.T.Barole, “Buddhism’s Contribution to the world civilization”, in \textit{Contribution of Buddhism to World Civilization and Culture}, p.32.
Buddhists lay emphasis on the purification of human character. Character necessarily is formed by, besides other social influences, the nature of a man’s work. And work properly conducted in conditions of human dignity and freedom, is beneficial both for the workers and his products. From the Buddhist point-of-view, the function of work is at least three-fold:

(i) to give a man a chance to utilize and develop his faculties;
(ii) to enable him to overcome his ego-centeredness by joining with other people in a common task; and
(iii) to bring forth the goods and services needed for existence.

This attitude has in itself the grains of distinctly far reaching consequences. If one goes by this view of labour, it will imply that any organization or management of work in a manner that becomes “meaningless, boring, stultifying and nerve-racking”, for the worker would tantamount to being both asocial for human beings and an inhuman lack of compassion coupled with the basest form of profit motive. At the same time, any comprehension of leisure as an alternative to work would tantamount to a complete misunderstanding of one of the basic truths of human existence, i.e. work and leisure complement each other, and any lopsided emphasis will destroy either the joy of work or the bliss of leisure.

The Buddhist concept of labour, which aims at enabling the individual to overcome his ego-centeredness by joining him with others in a common task, finds fulfilment in a Marxist economic system. In a communist society also the whole community works for the common good and not for the good of any individual. In the process it gives every individual a chance to utilize and develop his faculties. The Marxist motto “From each according to his capacity, to each according to his need” underlines the dignity of human labour and common good which is really a momentous fact of any economic system. Once the whole human community accepts this principle of common good the society will restructure itself, address itself to the welfare of the people and pave the way for social justice. Thus, collective co-operative system was for the first time introduced through Buddhist Samgha, which can be said to be an ancient socialism.
5.6. Performance of Rituals and Ceremonies :

5.6.1. In Hinduism :

Each year, thousands of Hindus make a pilgrimage to India’s Ganges River. The Ganges is considered a sacred site in the Hindu religion. Most Hindus come to bathe in the water; an act they believe will cleanse and purify them. The sick and disabled come in the belief that the holy water might cure their ailments.

Daily Rituals :

In Hinduism, these rituals are always meant to inculcate feelings of devotion and to bring about the divine orientation of human life. As a part of his householder’s responsibilities, a devout Hindu is expected to perform certain rituals every day starting from morning till evening.

These rituals include: making offerings to the gods, to all beings, and to the departed souls especially before partaking any food, showing hospitality to others and continuous remembrance of God through recitation of the Vedas or some holy scripture.

In addition, the householder is expected to perform oblations both in the morning and in the evening. The morning rituals include bathing or physical self-purification, offering prayers to the Sun, chanting the Gayatri mantra, applying certain specific religious marks on the body etc.

The marks would differ from person to person depending upon whether the individual belongs to Saivite or Vaishnavite sects. These rituals are meant to be performed by the householder who has chosen to lead a worldly life.

While it is a fact that most of these practices were confined to the upper castes of Hindu society in the past and many still follow them even today, though not with the same degree of devotion and enthusiasm, most of these rituals have been in recent times either discontinued or replaced by short and simple practices, reflecting the changing nature of Hindu society.
The new forms of daily rituals of present day Hinduism include performance of puja, practicing meditation and yoga, recitation of holy scriptures, reading religious books, participating in “satsang” or visiting the company of holy men, doing some charitable work, visiting temples and holy places, or chanting of some mantra or the name of a specific god.

The religious marks which the devout Hindus used to apply in the past on various parts of their body in a manner prescribed by the scriptures, have now become a rare sight and in some cases have been replaced by a simple mark called tilak either on the forehead or between the eye brows.

Many modern Hindus do not wear any religious marks at all on their bodies, or are shy of wearing them, though the women still sport a tilak on their foreheads. It is however not entirely incorrect to say that many of them do so out of habit and as a part of makeup rather than out of any specific religious consideration. The trend is catching up in the west also and many wear tilak as a matter of fashion not knowing its true spiritual significance!

Yajnas:

These are the outer forms of worship in Hinduism, reminders of its direct connection with the Vedic religion of the ancient past. During the performance of the yajnas, offerings are made to different deities in a prescribed and systematic manner by qualified priests to supplicate them, so that they would assist the worshipper in achieving certain results in life.

The chanting of mantras while performing the sacrifices is expected to ensure fulfillment of specific desires, the overall welfare of an individual, a group of people or the entire society.

The simplest form of yajna is the domestic ritual performed by the householder who would offer simple oblation into the sacred fire lit in his house. A more complicated version involves setting up of three to five fires and pouring of offerings into them such as food grains, ghee or butter, and other vegetable substances by chosen and qualified priests, chanting mantras simultaneously, invoking various gods especially Agni, Indra, Varuna etc.
Some yajnas are performed on large scale for the general welfare of the entire community, to increase fertility of soil, to invite rains, to welcome peace and wealth etc. Depending upon the degree of complexity, these yajnas may last from a few hours to several days. The number of priests participating and conducting the ceremony would depend upon the nature and objective for which it is performed.

It is a fact that the incidence of performing the yajnas and other forms of sacrifices is slowly coming down in modern Hinduism, primarily because of the influence of western education, the complexity involved in performing them and the decreasing number of qualified priests who can perform yajnas effectively according to the full Vedic injunctions.

**Japa**:

Japa has become a very popular form of worship in modern day Hinduism. Especially with the rise of bhakti movement and the popularity of many yogis and babas, japa has entered the hearts and minds of many devout and spiritually inclined Hindus. Japa means continuous recitation of God’s name either silently in ones mind or aloud in a group. Continuous recitation of God’s name is expected to purify the mind of the devotee and fill his consciousness with divine thoughts and vibrant spiritual energy. The regular chanting is expected to create certain vibrations in the body and mind which would facilitate the spiritual transformation of ones ordinary self.

In Hinduism, from earliest times, heavy emphasis has been laid on proper recitation of the Vedic mantras and slokas. Even today in the Vedic Schools, the students would spends hours, days and years trying to capture the subtle nuances of Sanskrit pronunciation. In japa, we do not come across any such rigidity. The individual has ample freedom to practice it according to his convenience and inner prompting. The practice of japa is therefore in line with this very ancient tradition, but devoid of the pedantic approach common to the chanting of the Vedic mantras.
However there are certain rules. One should practice japa either for one's own welfare or for the welfare of others, but never to harm or injure others. It is better if it is done out of pure love for God rather than for any selfish purpose. Thirdly to be effective, the chanting should begin with the sacred syllable “AUM”.

**Significance if AUM :**

AUM is considered to be a very sacred word. It is Sabda Brahman, the very Brahman itself in the form a word. It imparts divinity to everything it touches. So when it is joined with another word as prefix, the word becomes divine in nature and when it is uttered it creates certain vibrations which have the ability to transform the consciousness. Therefore in Hinduism all chanting is preceded by the use of this sacred syllable “AUM.

**Historical Significance of Puja in Hinduism :**

The puja ceremony in its present form was not practiced by the ancient Indians during the Vedic period. The Vedic Indians followed distinct ways of worshipping gods, which involved both physical and ritual sacrifices accompanied by invocation of several deities through chanting of mantras and magical incantations and offering of various material and mysterious substances for their consumption. Agni, the elemental god of fire was the principal deity in most of the Vedic rituals as he was supposed to be the mediator and divine messenger between gods and men. The Vedic people worshipped the elements of nature in a very systematic manner by building altars in perfect geometric patterns using bricks, whose construction often proceeded in phases over long periods of time, depending upon the financial situation of those who participated in it and the availability of those who managed it. Their methods of worship were in tune with the Vedic ideals reflected in the religious texts of the time such as the Vedas. According to them ritual was a creative process. Everything, our health, happiness, peace, prosperity, progeny, victory and fulfillment emerged out of it and depended upon it. It is by performing rituals men earned the merit to enter the
heavenly world. It is by performing rituals men secured the power and the blessings of gods to protect themselves from evil, harm, retribution, disease, pestilence and natural calamities. As is evident from the Purushasukta, they also believed that creation itself was a product of ritual only. The worlds emerged out of a grand ritual performed by Prajapathi in which He Himself was both the priest and the sacrificial substance.

We are not sure what methods of worship were followed by people outside the Vedic fold or by the people of Indus valley civilization, who thrived in India prior to the Vedic Indians and established a great civilization of their own and whose impact on the subsequent developments in Hinduism is yet to be fully appreciated due to the constraints in deciphering their language. The available evidence suggests that, probably they organized themselves into city states and lived in walled cities which were marked by exceptionally advanced urban planning and civic amenities. Although they were primarily urban communities who practiced agriculture and engaged in trade and commerce with people of distant lands, as far as Sumeria and Israel, they also practiced some rituals and sacrificial ceremonies both individually and collectively as the means of worship to invoke deities such as the Mother Goddess often symbolized by a tree, a Father God represented in some Indus seals as the Bull, a snake or a seated yogi, besides worshipping elements such as water and fire. The statuettes and symbols unearthed during the excavations at Indus valley sites suggest that they probably practiced ritual baths of purification and worshipped images and symbols in walled enclosures. While we are not sure how it happened, some of their beliefs and practices were integrated into Hinduism subsequently, such as the concept of kovilams or sacred ponds which are found in close proximity to Hindu temples, where people take ritual baths before entering them, and the worship of Mother Goddess and Father God as the progenitors of the entire creation.

It is difficult to say when and how exactly the puja ceremony of the present form evolved. We have reasons to believe that some kind of puja ceremony, akin to the current one in some aspects, existed during the epic period. In both the major epics of Hinduism, namely the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, we find
instances where the main characters performed ritual worship of gods akin to the puja ceremony with flowers and offerings. The epics suggest the extent of devotional theism prevalent in ancient India and how people related themselves with their personal gods through religious fervor and expressed it in the form of religious acts like worship or puja. Although the gods lived in a different world of their own, they were neither insensitive nor indifferent to the calls of their devotees. The incarnation of Lord Vishnu as Rama and Krishna is the most notable example of such responsiveness.

From a historical perspective, some elements of puja worship seem to have come to us from sources other than Indian. According to one theory, the puja ceremony was introduced in India by the foreigners such as the Greeks or the Bactrians or the Kushanas who established their domains in the Indian subcontinent. They worshipped their own gods and some Indian gods such as Skanda, Siva and Vishnu. Alternatively it might have also come to us from the merchant caravans that came across the borders by land or by sea during the post Mauryan era. There is also an argument that the idea of ritual offering of flowers, incense and other substances as an act of worship to the images of deities came to Hinduism from distant cultures that existed outside the Indian subcontinent or on its fringes.

There is also a possibility that puja was originally practiced by some tribal groups, who existed outside the pale of the Vedic society and was incorporated subsequently into the Vedic religion when they were brought into the Vedic fold. The growing popularity of bhakti movement, which tried to transcend the caste and tribal divisions of society, probably facilitated such integration. The Dravidians who migrated to the south from the northwestern parts of the Indian subcontinent some time during the later part of the Indus period, could also have brought puja into the Vedic fold through devotional Saivism and Vaishnavism. While we have reasons to believe in the indigenous development of puja ceremony, some elements of foreign influence in its evolution cannot be entirely ruled out.

The emergence of Bhakti movement or the devotional expression of unconditional love and reverence to God definitely contributed to the emergence
of puja as as a popular form of religious worship among the Indian masses. In the south, the followers of Saivism worked hard to counter the growing influence of Buddhism and Jainism among the people by introducing personal forms of divine worship which involved the public use of devotional singing, chanting and art forms like dance and drama. The most pious among them were known as Nayanars, who travelled from village to village spreading the message of Siva and encouraging people to worship Him directly without the need for elaborate rituals or the intervention of the priests who were particularly reluctant to work across caste lines. Their selfless work and teachings made puja a part of Hindu religious activity among the the rural people. Legendary devotees of Siva like Kannappa acquired fame for their acts of worship and devotional attitude. In case of Vaishnavism, the Alvars did a tremendous work to popularize devotional worship of Vishnu.

Another important factor in the development of devotional worship in India was the rise of Vaishnavism and the emergence of religious texts like the Puranas and the Bhagavadgita. By presenting the divine mysteries and activities of various gods in a narrative form, the Puranas captured the attention of the masses and made them aware of the finer aspects of religious practice. They emphasized the importance of adherence to dharma and personal allegiance to God in seeking salvation. The Bhagavadgita, a notable Vaishnava scripture, is principally a book of devotional worship, which reminds men of their true nature and the need for leading a divine centered life to achieve liberation from the cycle of births and deaths. It stated bhaktimarg or the path of devotion as the best means to transcend oneself and overcome the problems of desire ridden karmic acts, without the need to undergo the hardships of ascetic life. It vouched for the faith and attitude behind our offerings being more important for salvation rather than the offering itself, preferring simple forms of direct worship to elaborate rituals, which characterized the Vedic religion of the times.

Puja as a special religious ceremony became very popular during the post Mauryan period. The construction of temples all over the subcontinent and the
daily worship of deities installed in them by communities of priests following elaborate procedures to appease them contributed to the growing popularity of puja as simple form of divine worship in Hinduism. The temples made the puja form of worship an important and integral theistic practice of Hinduism. While the methods of worship grew along independent lines in the individual households, depending upon their caste backgrounds, with or without the use of Sanskrit mantras, in the temples the puja ceremony acquired a more elaborate structure, becoming a separate ritual by itself. With the use of more formal mantras or sacred chants in the invocations and supplications of the deities installed in the temples, necessitating the mediation of priests, it also became distinctly Vedic in character and an integral aspect of temple traditions.

The Guptas built many temples in northern India during their long rule and encouraged the worship of Vishnu and Siva. The Barashivas who ruled large parts of Northern and Central India before them were great followers of Siva. Besides, Vishnu and Siva people worshipped snakes, trees, water spirits and other deities. The practice of puja continued to flourish during the subsequent periods and became the main form of Hindu worship by the time Sri Adi Shankara emerged on the scene. During the latter and post Gupta periods, the puja ceremony must have influenced, and must have also been influenced in return, by the emergence of Tantricism as a major religious movement both in Hinduism and Buddhism.

Whatever may be the truths underlying its origin and development, the significance of puja lies in the fact that it brought Hinduism closer to the masses by separating religion from the suffocating grip of the priesthood. It delinked the act of religious worship from the meddling control of the Vedic priests who made religious worship as the means of seeking material comforts rather than spiritual solace. The puja ceremony brought the worshippers face to face with God, in a very personal and touching way and made the act of worship a purely personal and emotional affair. In short it undermined the influence of the priests in the religious life of the Hindus and helped the religion survive the growing influence of Buddhism and Jainism!
It is not true that the puja ceremonies did away with the involvement of priests altogether in the religious affairs of the Hindus. The priest still maintained their exclusive control on the more complex forms of rituals and the pujas performed in the temples by virtue of their caste privileges and their knowledge of the sacred scriptures. But it did reduce their importance in the worship of God by common people and opened the doors of Hinduism to those who remained on the fringes of society and were ignored by the higher castes.

Today puja is the most common form of divine worship in Hinduism. It is the most popular medium through which every Hindu worshipper communicates with his or her personal god or goddess. Since the tradition of puja gathered strength for its purity and simplicity, it is better suited for the modern life where people have no time or inclination to perform or participate in more elaborate sacrificial ceremonies and rituals on day to day basis. As the limitations of time and resources would continue to exert their influence upon our lives and activities, the tradition of puja is certain to evolve into more definitive and personal ways in the future.

5.6.2. Rituals and Ceremonies in Buddhism

Buddhism also played an important role in the development of puja and its procedural aspects. The Buddha did not encourage rituals. In fact, he was against all forms of ritualistic worship as he found them to be ineffective in mitigating human suffering. Instead, he preferred monastic life for the preservation of dharma and sangha and for practicing his teachings to overcome desires. He laid more emphasis on character building and ethical living according to the principles of the Eightfold path in the salvation of man rather than performing elaborate rituals and making sacrificial offerings. However a few centuries after His nirvana, Buddhism saw the emergence of Mahayana Buddhism as a reaction among some of its followers against its lack of personal allegiance to the Buddha and its unrelenting emphasis on self-denial and monasticism. It advocated devotional worship to the Buddha as an important aspect of spiritual practice, without compromising its emphasis on the ideals of monkhood and monastic life.
Followers of this path incorporated several elements of the puja ceremony in their worship of the Buddha. Unlike Buddhism, Jainism encouraged the personal worship of the Thirthankaras and Arhats from the beginning. It believed that acts of worship were beneficial to the mankind as they were acts of good karma, which resulted in the karmic cleansing of the worshippers. In several respects its methods of worship were similar to those of Hinduism. It was not uncommon to find Hindu priests serving in the Jain temples. It is very likely that both Jainism and Hinduism influenced each other in their methods of worship.

The deities most frequently mentioned in Buddhist works are Indra, generally under the name of Sakka (Sakra) and Brahma. The former is no longer the demon-slaying soma-drinking deity of the Vedas, but the heavenly counterpart of a pious Buddhist king. He frequently appears in the Jataka stories as the protector of true religion and virtue, and when a good man is in trouble; his throne grows hot and attracts his attention. His transformation is analogous to the process by which heathen deities.

The earlier forms of Buddhist ceremonial are of the synagogue type (though in no way derived from Jewish sources) for, though there is no prayer, they consist chiefly of confession, preaching and reading the scriptures. But this puritanical severity could not be popular and the veneration of images and relics was soon added to the ritual. The former was adopted by Buddhism earlier than by the Brahmans. The latter, though a conspicuous feature of Buddhism in all lands, is almost unknown to Hinduism. In their later developments Buddhist and Christian ceremonies show an extraordinary resemblance due in my opinion chiefly to convergence, though I do not entirely exclude mutual influence. Both Buddhism and Roman Catholicism accepted pagan ritual with some reservations and refinements. The worship has for its object an image or a shrine containing a relic which is placed in a conspicuous position at the end of the hall of worship. Animal sacrifices are rejected but offerings of flowers, lights and incense are permitted, as well as the singing of hymns. It is not altogether strange if Buddhist and Catholic rituals starting from the same elements ended by producing similar
scenic effects. Yet though the scenic effect may be similar, there is often a
difference in the nature of the rite. Direct invocations are not wanting in Tibetan
and Far Eastern Buddhism but many services consist not of prayers but of the
recitation of scripture by which merit is acquired. This merit is then formally
transferred by the officiants to some special object, such as the peace of the dead
or the prosperity of a living supplicant.

The later phases of both Hinduism and Buddhism are permeated by what is
called Tantrism, that is to say the endeavour to attain spiritual ends by ritual acts
such as gestures and the repetition of formulae. These expedients are dangerous
and may become puerile, but those who ridicule them often forget that they may
be termed sacramental with as much propriety as magical and are in fact based on
the same theory as the sacraments of the Catholic Church.

The Buddhist temples of the Far East are in original intention copies of
Indian edifices and in the larger establishments there is a daily routine of services
performed by resident monks. But the management of religious foundations in
these countries has been much influenced by old pagan usages as to temples and
worship which show an interesting resemblance to the customs of classical
antiquity but have little in common with Buddhist ideas.

Hsing concludes that Buddhist ritual and teachings have been restructured
by the more important monks who came to Taiwan after 1945 and that the clergy
of different sects of Buddhism have no prejudice among themselves, then
contributing religious tolerance in Taiwan.

Even though there had been exchanges between Buddhism and
indigenous religious and philosophies before the sing dynasty from the 10th
century onwards, the appropriation of ideas and rituals between other religious
and Buddhism accelerated dramatically shaping folk or popular religion as
practiced today. During this period, religions Taoism appropriated Buddhist
deities and rituals and vice-versa, so that many of the deities worshiped in Taiwan
today belong to both religious pantheons.
5.8. Some Important Comparisons of Hinduism and Buddhism:

Differences can often be readily apparent, while similarities are often hidden. An examination of both follows (with non-comprehensive lists) that helps to illuminate both similarities and differences between Hinduism and Buddhism.

**Similarities:**
1. Both originated and evolved on the Indian subcontinent.
2. Both emphasize the illusory nature of the world and the role of kárma in the cycle of births and deaths.
3. Both acknowledge the role of desire in human suffering. Buddha believed that removing desire would result in the ending of suffering. Some Hindu beliefs maintain that actions motivated by desire (i.e., with the end result in mind) cause suffering, and doing actions without focusing on the end result will help to ease suffering.
4. Both emphasize compassion and non-violence towards all living beings.
5. Both believe in the existence of higher and lower worlds of existence.
6. Both believe in the existence of deities on different planes.
7. Both believe in the value of certain spiritual practices including deep concentration and meditation.
8. Both believe that a renunciation of worldly life (with its many sufferings) is a precondition to enter the spiritual life.
9. Both have their own versions of rituals and practices that aid in the attainment of inner peace.

**Differences:**
1. Hinduism was not founded by any particular individual. Buddhism was founded by the Buddha (Siddhārtha Gautama).
2. Hindus believe in the efficacy and supremacy of the Vedas. Buddhists don’t follow the Vedas or any other Hindu scripture.
3. Buddhists don’t profess a belief in a supreme God, nor of individual souls. Hindus believe in the individual soul (Ātman) and also in a supreme being (Brāhman).

4. Hindus accept Buddha as an incarnation of Vishnu. Buddhists do not believe that any of the Hindu gods are equivalent or superior to the Buddha.

5. Buddhists consider ending human suffering as their chief aim in life. The Hindus consider that there are four chief aims in life: dhárma (religious duty), artha (material possessions and the power associated with them), kāma (passions and pleasures), and mokṣa (salvation, release and liberation).

6. Hindus believe in the four stages of life (student, householder, forest dweller, ascetic), and believe that it is only when one becomes as a forest dweller (i.e., withdrawing from society to begin a process of inner reflection) that one is open to the spiritual path. In Buddhism, anyone can join at any time in their life depending on their desire for a spiritual life.

7. Buddhists organize themselves into a monastic order. Hindus have no official and consistent ordering system; it is a religion of the individual.

8. Buddhists believe in the concept of Bodhisattvas (viz., that some are destined to become enlightened). Hindus don’t believe in it.

**Two Fundamental Differences:**

There are two major characteristics of Buddhism that distinguish it from Hinduism. First, the religion of Buddhism does not agree with the Hindu conception of the eternal self (i.e., Ātman), and secondly, Buddhism does not agree with the Hindu idea of eternity in nature (i.e., Brāhman).

Buddha discounted the notion of an independent self because he believed that we are all a part of a larger whole. He held that the view that each individual was separate and autonomous was the cause of all of the suffering of mankind. Thinking that we are all a part of a whole will make us think in terms of the whole, and, that being the case, no one would want to do harm to another because doing so would mean harming oneself. This is the essence of Buddha’s concept of no-self. Every single thing and every single process arises in dependence upon
countless other things and processes. Even our own thoughts don’t just originate in our minds on their own; they arise in our minds because of our previous thoughts and actions. This concept is not unlike the unified field theory of physics where it is hypothesized that nothing exists on its own, and wherein everything is connectedly dependent. It is like a complex web of things and processes reflecting other things and processes. Likewise, every human and every other animate and inanimate object are not independently recognized as a self. Each supposedly independent self is dependent upon and a part of much more, and is “lacking in self-existence” (Houston and Novak 62). What appears to be an independent self, then, is actually part of the comprehensive Self. If there is no independent self, it must be wondered what happens after one reaches enlightenment. Buddha’s belief was that there is no “after enlightenment.” He believed that enlightenment lies beyond any idea of time. Any temporal notions we have about enlightenment come from our limited dualistic understanding. Enlightenment is non-temporal. Anything we can describe (e.g., ecstasy, bliss, epiphany) is temporal and will not last. Enlightenment is different in that there is no “individual you” to experience enlightenment in the first place. “If there is some particular thing you can name, pick up, single out, or point to, it’s not enlightenment; it’s ordinary. It’s not true liberation or freedom of mind” (Hagen 245). Enlightenment is not just a state of mind or a place to be; it simply is.

On the point of Buddhism’s second major distinction from Hinduism, Buddha believed that there was no fixed eternity since everything everywhere was always in flux and changing. Things may appear to be non-changing (e.g., stones), but their rate of change is simply much slower than a flower that changes more rapidly through time. And since everything is always changing, including our own thoughts and bodies, there is no way for us to know if there is a singular and supreme God. Some say that since Buddhism professes no God, then it cannot be a religion. Others say that since Buddhism is obviously a religion, religion therefore does not require God (Smith and Novak 53). Buddha believed that if there is a God, it is beyond our comprehension. Not professing a supreme being is quite different from the atheistic belief that there is no supreme being. Buddha merely chose to focus on what we can know and do, and taught that humans can become awakened and free themselves from misery through enlightenment.