CHAPTER II

GENESIS OF THE BUDDHA: THE VEDIC CONTEXT

Pre Historic India

Indian culture, the Saraswata Sindhu Civilization existed in a period which we do not know for sure. More than 3000 settlement had been identified at either side of the now-dried up river Saraswati out of which only very few have been excavated. The Vedic literature is full of references to the mighty river Saraswati but Sindhu is less referred to. One hypothesis speaks of Saraswata settlements extending up to the southern banks of river Sindhu and to the south perhaps, up to the ocean itself. This explains why settlements are not found to the north of Sindhu.

We do not know the exact period of the Vedas. We can say one thing: the Vedas are the result of a great civilization. In other words, there existed a powerful civilization which was consistent and continues to the point of the birth of Vedas. It becomes more difficult to judge the span of a civilization, which could be rich enough to produce such great works of Metaphysics.

However there is no dispute to the fact of the greatness of Vedic culture, Vedic civilization and of the richness of the Upanishads. This civilization flourished, it had many centers of living, many thousands of settlements, townships and people from
all civilized world came there to learn. Slowly many things became unhealthy and thus began the period of downfall. Varnashrama Dharma became Caste, Scholarships became limited to a very few selected ones; spurious authorities as well as falls custodians became active. Sanskrit became the property of some.

At this point, the Vedic culture clearly needed reformers. Bhagavad-Gita speaks about the dynamism of India. It says that whenever Bharatavarsha finds adharma developing beyond a point there come avatars to make required corrections.

“Yada yada hi dharmasya
Glanir bgavati bharata
Abhyuthanamadharmasya
Tadatmanam srujamyaham
Paritranaya sadhoonam
Vinasaya cha dushkritam
Dharmasamsthapanarthaya
Sambhavami yuge yuge”

The Genesis of the Buddha is nothing but this. Buddha faced a society that needed redemption. He spoke to common people through the common people’s language, Pali, as well as prakrut: The authorities were becoming powerful using the authority of the Vedas, so the Buddha refused the authority of the Vedas. He did not
prescribe complicated rituals and rites. He spoke about simple thing in simple manner to impart peace to everyone. Buddhism began as a cult of the Bhikkus (Bhikshus) who were ascetics and people with hardly any material needs. The detachment, Buddha was teaching, could part people at transcendental level.

During the course of time, some of Buddha's followers felt the need of bringing common people other than the ascetics also into their fold. They further liberalized Buddhism to fit into the need of all people and thus began the Mahayana tradition. The Mahayanins called original Buddhists Hinayanist, mean people of lesser vehicle. But the original Buddhists called themselves Theravadians or Sthiravada people. Subsequently many people went around the world spreading the preaching of Buddha and at each place further recreating Buddha through great sages of those lands.

SOME HISTORIC MISCONCEPTIONS

Historians misunderstood many things about the Vedic civilization. On the one hand some of them were simple misunderstandings based on speculations. But some others were deliberate creations of the falsehood with definite intentions and purposes. The story of an Aryan Invasion Theory is one such deliberate falsehood created by Max Muller, to fulfill the intention of Mc Cauley to prolong British colonial domination over India. This Aryan Invasion Theory became so wide spread that it still remains as something real. Some people like Piggot wanted to see the Aryan theory as positive and say that, “The arrival of barbarians into a
The remnants of the Indus civilization have been found over a large area extending from Rupur, at the foot of the Simla Hills to Sutkagendor, near the coast of the Arabian sea, 200 miles west Karachi. Excavations at Rangpur district, Thalawar, Saurashtra have left no doubt of their association with the Harappan tradition. Thus the Indus Civilization can claim a larger area than any other of the known pre-classical civilizations.

They also used Western categories and Epistemology in evaluating Indian situation. This had done definite harm. Some of them were inclined to picture her Pre-Aryan inhabitants as dark and savage, very much like 'demons'. In the description of demons they readily described their own picture of the Pre-Aryan aborigines of India. The description of Indus civilization as Dravidian as is sometimes done. In establishing a connection between Vedic and present time India, some of them say that it is undeniable that some of the most important elements of the religious life of latter day India go back to the Indus civilization. Among these may be mentioned the worship of a proto-type of Siva, who is represented as Pasupati, Yogi and perhaps Nataraja; of the mother goddess of the Pipal tree and of the bull and some other animals associated with Gods. Phallic worship and the great sanctity that has ever been attached to water in India may also go back to the Indus civilization. Most important, the definite occurrence of a cross-legged posture with the out-stretched palms placed on the knees and the probable occurrence of what looks rememberably like the...
Sambhavi mudra seem to suggest that the beginning of yogic practice in India may also belong to the Indus civilization⁹

There are many levels in approaching the supernatural in Indian tradition. Moksha, liberation or transcendence is the desideratum for man, and in the Indian tradition, there are many ways to Moksha or many teachings of transcendence varying from the simplest Bhaktimarga to the most philosophical Jnanamarga. These methodologies are made keeping in view of different requirements of different people. Many scholars who looked at India did not understand this cultural and spiritual dynamism of Indian tradition. Let us see how different scholars understood these phenomena. The worship of gods in a personal or iconic form, as a kind of puja has been traced back in India to Pre-Aryan sources¹⁰ which ought to include the Indus civilization too. In the light of this Pre-Vedic background it is clear that cultural development in the Vedic age must be understood as a growing fusion of Aryan and Non-Aryan elements, which produced towards the close of the period a veritable revolution in religious ideas. In the later Vedic period, the sense of racial separation and color prejudice tend to disappear. The very collection and classification of the Vedas is now attributed Vyasa in whom the presence of Non-Aryan blood is beyond all doubts.¹¹ With Buddhism and Jainism, the two heterodox systems against the Vedic orthodoxy, many things got juxtaposed. Rishis got juxtaposed with Munis, Brahmanas got juxtaposed with Sramanas. More information about these Muni-Sramanas is to be had from early Jaina and Buddhist literature. Here they are placed by the side of the
Brahmana but distinguished from them. The Brahmanas are here depicted as treating the Smarnas with scant courtesy calling them ‘M undakas’ and ‘Vasalas’. As late as the 4th century BC, the Greeks noted the distinction between Brahmana and Sramana whom still later Patanjali described them as eternal opponents. 12

Practically all the Sramana sects held towards the world an attitude of ascetic pessimism, disbelieved in a personal cause or creator of the Universe, accepted a plurality of souls and an ultimate distinction between the soul and the matter regarded the world of common sense as real and as dues to one or more real factors at least partly independent of the soul and consequently regarded as indispensable for salvation some form of strenuous practical discipline aiming at effecting a real alteration in the situation of things. The essential basis of this world view seems to have been the idea of Samsara of Karman and trans-migration. This comes out clearest from a consideration of the earliest faith of the Jains-one of the oldest surviving sects of Munis. In the Vedic period, there existed two distinct religions and cultural traditions- the strictly orthodox and Aryan tradition of the Brahmanas and on the fringe of their society, the struggling culture of the Munis and Sramanas, most probably going back to Pre-Vedic and Pre-Aryan origins. Towards the close of the Vedic period, the two streams tended to mingle and the result was that great religious ferment from which Buddhism originated. Sankaracharya has observed that the Vedic religion is two fold Pravritti Dharma and Nivritti Dharma. 13
The fact of the matter is that the orthodox Aryan Vedic tradition was in the beginning essentially Pravritti dharma but later on partly through inner evolution and more through the influence of the Muni Sramanas, it developed Nivritti dharma as a tendency within its fold. We propose to review the development of Vedic religion from this stand point and analyze the factual revolution which occurred within it in the later Vedic age and led to important consequences for the subsequent development of Indian religion and thought. The early Vedic Aryans led a life of mixed pastoral and agricultural economy. The growth of the importance of agriculture was soon reflected in the sanctity which came to be attached to the law was declared ‘aghnya’ 14 Society was organized in villages or ‘gramas’ and tribes or ‘janas’ ruled by kings with the assistance of the assemblies called ‘sabhas’ and ‘samitis’. The first territorial States or ‘janapadas’ came into existence by the settling down of the tribes side by side. With this economic and political development, there was a growing division of labor in society. The values of the priests were the two classes that first distinguished themselves from the mass of the people called ‘Visah’. In the latter Vedic period, a fourth class, the ‘Sudras’ comes into view. The predominance of the Non-Aryan element in their composition can hardly be doubted. Economically, they were the most primitive class and yet their recognition as a distinct caste is seen to come last in the evolution of Vedic social order. This suggests that their emergence represents, not a growing division of labor which led to the rise of a yet newer and more specialized functional class, but the entrance into the fold of Vedic society of a new people or community.15
In the older period, miscegenation had been free but by new social organization was tending to become rigid and so with former lines of social discrimination, that part of the community which was predominantly in its cultural traits, tended now to be segregated, and served as the general receptacle for any new non-Aryan tribes which is the course of the expansion and settlement of the Aryans, might be socially amalgamated with them. This would also elucidate the otherwise inexplicably low status which is assigned to the Sudras.\textsuperscript{16} The feeling of cultural difference is sufficient to account for the peculiar rules governing the status of the Sudras. Further the yogic idea of invisible influence emanating from every person and tending to uplift or corrupt others according to the character of their sources, implies that to every cultural community corresponds a definite spiritual environment which is not the less real for its intangibility. The naturally put the premium on the primitive and tribal taboos relating to food, physical contact etc. Between persons belong to widely different cultural groups.\textsuperscript{17}

The evolution of caste thus implies that Vedic society became gradually more complex and composite. It remained however almost wholly rural, and even towards the close of the period, had not advanced much beyond the tribe stage, we have to note that it was first and expanding pioneering society exhibiting some of the characteristics of a frontier civilization -its sense of insecurity and robust optimism, its premium on success and its reliance on religion as menas unto that.\textsuperscript{18} Under such circumstances, priests and warrior kings were naturally in for and led society. Towards the close the
period however pioneering become a difficult task involving advance in to more inaccessible religion of the north east and those beyond in the Vindhya. This period of decelerated pioneering was bound to witness a change in social perspective, the beginning of doubt about the bounty of nature and its Gods, of pessimistic reflection. In these changing circumstances the more thoughtful naturally felt the force of that pessimistic attitude which as already indicates was held and preached by the Muni-Sramans.

Thus just as Vedic society became increasingly mixed racially and culturally and changing from a vigorous colonizing and pioneering stage came to have the aspect of complex society with and old tradition where men were beginning to doubt old ways and reflect over the meaning of life and seek new ways, Vedic religion evolved pari passu from the pre-eminence of gods and happy cooperation of gods and men thought sacrifice to a veritable “Gotterdammerung” and the jettisoning of Rite in favor of right and Gnosis. Vedic religion advance from pursuing the word to transcending it, From propitiating gods to seek word to transcending it from propitiating gods seeking the self. But this change was only beginning yet and affected only a few thoughtful persons. It came principally thought the influence of the MUNIS, although changed material circumstance and the inner dialectic of thought prepared the way for it.

Our knowledge is consequence fullest about the belief of the priestly class. The core of the priestly religion consisted in belief in many gods and a few goddesses who were worshipped, primarily
for secular welfare, by means of prayer and food-offering. Many of these gods represented the phenomena of nature. The Degree of their anthropomorphization varied and they did not possess in general sharply defined individuals. This has misled some scholar to recognize here a monotheism, and other to advance the hypothesis of Henotheism or Pantheism. Polytheism, in fact describes the situation correctly; only it has to be remembered that Vedic gods are not exclusive like the Baals, or defined invidious as in the Olympian parthenon. Their also were Sondergotter and later some abstract deities Pari passu animistic beliefs held away as ever. The character of the people is reflected in the tone of their great gods and for the earlier period, in no case better than in that of Indra who is the victorious warriors, the jovial and human god, a great drinker and a mighty eater. He is the most individuals and anthropomorphic of the Rgvedic pantheon with the largest almost of mythology to is share. He is generally to have been god of thunderstorm.

The connection of Indra with war and might is plain and “Indriya” was even in early Buddhist texts synonymous with “Baal”. The transmutation of Indra in to a rain-god appears to have been the result of two facts: Lightning-Vajra-was a symbol of strength and the storm gods—Rudra, Maruts, Apam, and Napat—were considered on that account mighty. Indra clearly being the mighty par excellence must possess the Vajra. Further as the need of war god became less prominently felt, the other aspects of the war-god Indra—were more attended to., Surya Agni and Brhaspati were other prominent goods of this period. The first two probably go back to Indo European
times. Agni is closely connected with the home, with the ancestors and with sacrifice. He is the priest among gods, and carried the righteous dead to their after life abode in heaven. Brhaspati is the god representing the power of prayer and such as very important from the priestly stand point. The ethical sublimity and the almost monotheistic tone of the hymns addressed to Varuna have justly attracted the attention of scholars. The nature of these gods has not been, however satisfactorily explained. Some have proposed to seen in him the moon while the more generally accepted opinion regards him to have been the sky god. Varuna in fact is of the same from as regvedic Dharuna, Aruna etc., and appears to have been a purely Indian word. Similarity of characteristics is, further, no sufficient ground for connecting Varuna with Ahur Mazda.

The sun god has ever been the guardian of morals and since night and darkness have an obvious association with sin and crime, what would be more natural than to expect. Varuna –the sun during the night to be the chiepest of the gods of righteousness? The connection of Varuna with water also become here by transparent, for the sun set in the west and the Aryans first knew the ocean to have been in the west. This also explains how the “Varuni dik” came to mean the west in later Literature.

Vishnu is another solar deity who becomes prominent towards the close of Rg. Vedic age and in the Brahnmanas, The increase in the important solar deities in fact suggests that growth moral consciousness represented a market trends in the evolution of early Vedic religion. Another trend was the growth of abstract
deities. Two classes can be distinguished with in these: of those gods who are simply the personifications of abstract ideas and those whose names denote primarily either an agent or designate some attribute. Of these the member of the first class at least on the whole very late. The origin of aditi is stills obscure, but the hypothesis of MacDonnell that it lays in the hypostatization of Aditi from such expression as ‘Aditeh putrah’ appears to be plausible. The Goodness has no definite physical features; she is imported to grand freedom from guilt or sin and lent herself quite easily to mystical identifications.

Visvakarman is a seer, a priest, our father. He is the highest apparition (parama srushta) the dhatr and the Vidhatr. Siddhartha seems to have represented the one god whose conception was than being in his architectonic aspect. The gods are often conceived architectonically. They partake in the fashioning of the universe after the manner of the carpenter. At death the body is doubtless destroyed but apparently not in any final manner: the righteous dead, with the assistance of Agni, Pusan and Savitr go to the heaven of Yama. There with a perfected body they enjoy a very secularly imagined blessed existence in the company of the Fathers and the gods. The wicked are either destroyed at death, or, what is perhaps more likely, fall in the subterranean abyss of darkness. The soul is the breath-prana, atman, or life-Asu, or mind-manas. Personal identity is apparently preserved in afterlife. On the conceptions about righteousness, the information is meager. But to the most
advanced ethical speculation of the times the ideas of truth and order seem to have appeared basic morality.

The ritual was originally a simple affair. It consisted of the addressing of hymns of prayer by a priest to a deity accompanied by the offering of food to him. But in the course of time complexity sets in. Many varieties of sacrifices were invented, and the services of several priests became necessary. Details increased and the procedure tended to be rigid. The development benefited the priests directly and so we notice that the chief lines of evolution during the middle Vedic period are growth of ritualistic practice and associated mythology. Incidentally the beginning of serval sciences was laid and the Brahmanas became a very self-Conscious and proud caste.

Anthropologists have interpreted the essential nature of sacrifice diversely-as ancestor worship, as gift offering as a fertility rite, as communion with deity etc. It seems possible to bring together some evidence in support of each of these from the Brahmanas, which show the sacrifice in a very complex stage of evolution. Originally distinct strands have become by now intricately involved, and a simple and categorical answer about the nature of middle Vedic sacrifice is apt to be one-sided and misleading. Towards the end of the middle Vedic period, the construction of elaborate “citis” as part of some soma sacrifices seems to have come into prominence.

The nature and purpose of Agnihotra are much debated within the Brahmanas. It is clearly recognized to have been at least partly
intended as an aid to the rising sun. It led to freedom from sin. And was veritable ship to heaven. Agnihotra has here become an immanent objective principle which is to be philosophically comprehended. The New moon and full moon sacrifices have been recognized as the prakrti of all other Istitis. Agni and Indra are the central deities in the former while Agni and Soma are the main deities in the latter.

The animal sacrifice though an integral part of soma sacrifice may be performed independently also. The consumption of the Ida was doubtless important but there is no question of the death and eating of a divinity. The cruelty involved in the killing of the animals becomes noticed and the priests sought to mitigate it by mystical and quasi magical operations. The Sutramani thought classed as a Haviryajan in sutras is perhaps more akin to the soma sacrifices. It involves the offering of animals and sura. Hillebrandt regards it as a remodeled non Brahmanical rite which is criticized by Keith as insufficiently evidenced. In the case of offering to the dead the similarity between the domestic and the srauta ritual is marked. Another fact clearly indicated is a different of attitude towards the dead and gods. The soma sacrifices are chiefly remarkable for their complex which reached enormous proportions in such sacrifices as Vajapeya, Rajasuya, ad Asvamedha appears to have been originally a Ksatriya rite for the sake of victory in war. Isuprasana Ajidhavana, Dundubhivanda and Madhu grahassamarpana are perhaps the nuclear elements. Features like the Yuparohana appear to be later addition. The horse sacrifice
show clear traces of solar and fertility rites, its lighted have originally celebrated the advent of the spring sun the causes of fertility.

The chief set idea which the priests' repeatedly stress is that of the majesty of sacrifice. Sacrifice is indeed identified with Vishnu and with Prajapati. It is the nave of the universe. It is essential for creation and on it the gods depend. It is almost lauded in to super-divine cosmic principle. Its potency is incalculable and thought its help in the sacrificed was assured not only a celestial after life but safety, longevity, progeny, prosperity and fame in this life.

The fundamentally secular character of the values of the early Vedic age remains intact. One thought this world fair, and wished the next to be fairer. Kama, Bhoga, and Bhuti-these expressed values. Life it was felt had much to offer that was dear, and so one imaged even celestial existence after same manner. It was however now realized that abstinence and chastity was essential for spiritual vigor. The touch of death polluted. Sin is darkness, death. It is sometimes described as if quasi-physical for a person. It could be inflicted on another. But it was realized to be connected with deliberate violation. One may be sinful at heart confession and dependence did well. Truth was a great virtue untruth was a greatest sin. Gods were distinguished by truth and it was perceived how difficult the ideal was for morals. Eyes were regarded the great sources for the knowledge of truth although it was frequency emphasized that the gods love what is hidden. The theory of four obligations had been formulated.
It appears that alongside the growth of the practice of Agnicayana there was a great vogue of symbolic interpretation. This was in fact the only way left to the priest along whom they could offer an at least seemingly rational explanation of the ritual. It proved however to be a suicidal step for if there was really symbolical was not know of greater account than outward acts. If one grasped the ideas behind a sacrificial act where was the necessity of actually performing that act? The Upanishad tends towards pantheistic speculation and preference for knowledge ritual action, thus, have fairly commenced in the last period of the middle Vedic age. Some scholars have seen in the eschatological speculations of this epoch the origin of the doctrine of transmigration as well. This has been questioned and it appears rightly. A Careful examination of all the passage occurring in these work and bearing of after life reveals the following general state of belief: Future existence at lest of a blessed characters assured to a man only through the correct performance of sacrifice. The sacrificer is reborn after death from the fair in to the midst gods enjoy an immortal existence imagined after the manner of the life here. So far there is hardly any improvement over the belief of the previous age. However there function previously preformed by ideas of righteousness and divine favors are now practically replaced by that of the magical potency of the correctly performed sacrifice. Ethical considerations enter but sparingly in the attainment and constitution of future existence. Imperfections in sacrifice, on the other hand lead to defects yonder, so much so that by disturbing the sacrifice of another one may imperil his future life. At places sin is declared an
obstacle to heaven but the defect could be remedied through sacrificial agency. Some time it is felt that the quality of sacrifice different afterlife.

Thus one may gain to me word of a communion with a particular god and not another and though immortality is generally assured it is sometimes feared that only the heaven belong of within the sun to be attained through special ritual knowledge may be really free from time and death sometimes the deficiency of food is feared in another word the remedy being again of a ritualistic nature. Rarely the tone is skeptical-immortality belonging to gods alone; man can at best only hope for along for a long life. In this word, or who knows whether an after-life at all exists? It is best, therefore not to hurry away from this world.

To see the origins of the doctrine of transmigration in this Gedankenkreis has sight plausibility. That doctrine in need has ever been closely and essentially bound up with number of other ideas with out which it would be impossible. These are the idea of the soul as something distinct from the body immortal and pure by nature the idea of Karman as a more or less foreign and factor which nevertheless entails a strike subjection to the law of moral causality and finally the idea that all worldly joys are worthless when the Upanishads present us that joy are worthless. When the Upanishads present us with the first undoubted instance of the doctrine of Samsara, they do it in this developed form. Transmigration is unthinkable apart from belief in an innately immaculate and immortal conscious principle, recognition of the law of karman and a
deep-seated urge for Mukti. Even the gods had a definite origin in birth and acquired their immortality through sacrifice. Further they are ever dependent on food supplies from this world. As to men, they survive death not by virtue of anything inherent in them but solely by virtue of being reborn from the sacrificial fire. There is no reason whatever for death taken in itself, not being final. Besides, it seems to be implied that in some mysterious faction it was this body that was “put together” (sandhatte) through the agency of sacrificial fire in the future existence. The idea of the essentially divine and immoral human soul appears to have been as foreign to the thought of the Brahmanas as to that of pre-Orphic Greece. In either case it seems to have entered as part of the doctrine of Samsara. The conception immortality, Amrtatva, is just that of endless duration in a changeful world of sensuous enjoyment, which is nearer the conception of Samsara than of Moksha.

It is impossible to see a linear and simple evolution from the Brahmanic views regarding after-life to the theory of transmigration found at places in the Upanishads. The Brahmanas with their ideas of death and rebirth, their fervent quest for immortality coupled with the incipient fear of dying again or suffering through hunger in a world won by sacrifice, and the hope of a timeless world beyond the sun had induced no doubt certain receptivity in the Vedic mind for the doctrine of Samsara. The sources of this doctrine must have been the Munis and sramanas, already alluded to, who harked back to pre-Vedic times.\textsuperscript{21}
The interaction between Vedic and non-Vedic thought seems to commence definitely in the period of the Upanishads. While the Brahmanas witnessed the growth of Brahmavidya as the 'science of sacrifice', the Upanisads witness its growth as 'the science of self'. There is a steady development of idealistic and monistic lines of speculation. Organically connected is the dominant Upanishadic view about the path to salvation. It is only the clear knowledge of reality that can emancipate the soul. Clear knowledge may, of course, require repeated consideration or contemplation primarily of an intellectual character, but it is knowledge that is emphasized as the means to the summon bonum, not action- a position which may be contrasted with that of early Jainism. Sankara, the great Vedantic commentator, has clearly explained the distinction between Jnana and Kriya and declared that the former alone can lead to moksha. So far the Upanishadic doctrines are in the main continuation and development of Middle Vedic thought. But when we suddenly come across at places in the Upanisads with belief in transmigration and an ascetic vote-face in fundamental values, it is plain that we have to do with Sramana influence, of which the general character has already been indicated.

Sacrifice was the very principle of life of death and the stages beyond death. So that the proper comprehension of its mysteries and the connected upasanas legitimately is expected to lead one to perfect peace, even eternity. The position of the gods altered completely and tended to become no more than the souls born in a certain station and subject to the domination of Karman. Some of
them were even conceived to be executive functionaries towards the
operation of the laws of Karman and the god is called at one place
‘karmadhyaksha’. The opposition of Karman and the divine freedom of
grace were, however, revived at the higher level when the
conception of a supreme deity became important. The line of
solution which the freedom of human will and say that the ultimate
source of all karman is god.24 The conception of Amratva tended to
change from that of perpetual afterlife i.e. an unending continuation
of this life, to that of eternal being or the absolute transcendence of
empirical existence. It is a great spiritualization of values that takes
place, and it proceeds from the understanding that the fundamental
need of man is not a utopian rearrangement of this world, not a
heaven however fine but a transcendence of it, that infinity and
eternity which alone can satisfy the precise negation of this world.
To obtain immortality one has only to know the self, to turn back
from the world.25 This attitude is only partially expressed in the
Upanishads. It is Buddhism and; later Advaita Vedanta that were to
express it most eloquently.

The age of migrations and settlements was over, and the
traditional element had attained profoundness over the tribal in the
organization of the state. India was divided into a number of
janapadas which included monarchies as well as republics.26 As in the
period of the contending states in China, a trial of strength was
taking place between the monarchies and what is more between the
monarchial and the non-monarchial forms of Government. The
Brahmanas advocated the ideal of the “Universal Ruler”, which is
reflected in the ritual of some of the sacrifices. The Jainas protested against political violence, while the Buddhists formulated later the ideal of the “Universal Moral Ruler”, which the most famous monarch of ancient India tried to put into practice. The ruling class was comprised by the Kshatriyas and their people, some of whom had nothing except their heredity to proclaim their aristocratic status in society. The Kshatriyas appear in this age as much the leaders of intellectual life as the Brahmanas. The Upanishads already mention royal philosophers, like Pravahana Jaivali of Pabcala, Aswapati of Kekaya, Ajatasatru of Kasi, and Janaka of Videha.

The growth of towns and commerce and the organization of trade craft into guilds make the social landscape of this age quite distinct from that of Kosala, and Ghosaka of the 16th century. A similar correlation has been proposed for Jainism and Buddhism too, but the suggestion remains merely speculative. Nevertheless, it is well to remember that unlike Protestantism the Jaina and the Buddhist movements were ascetic and monastic in character, without any tendency towards secularization. Besides, Jainism and Buddhism can hardly be looked upon as reforming movements. And finally, it is difficult to be certain that money economy and capitalism had actually developed to such an extent in the age of Buddha as to justify the general and speculative reasoning indicated above.

Right though these narrations of the Western scholars, we experience some of the following: First of all, let us give them full
credit to their laborious efforts in understanding the Vedic texts. There is no doubt at all that they had strained, taxed and pained themselves in gathering much information from the Vedic texts. Then they codified it, edited them and ultimately put them on record.

But then they also committed serious mistakes. First of all they were equipped with Western epistemology which is diagonally opposed to an Indian knowledge system. They were using categories and concepts of the West, which again is entirely different from Indian categories and concepts. Indian tradition is uniquely distinct and is to be treated as autonomous. In order to highlight the distinctive autonomy of what is Indian let us draw a parallelism of this autonomy with a literary creation. Let us take the example of Abhijnana Sakundalam of Kalidasa. This can be analysed by a historian, a linguist, a critic within the literary field, a sociologist, a political scientist and an economist. But it is important for us to understand that none of them can grasp the exquisite beauty, the grandeur and the originality of the Sakundalam as a literary creation merely by analyzing the style and diction of the fourth century Sanskrit, the literary genres employed and the selections and the arrangements of words therein; much less does the social scientists grasp them by analyzing merely the social, the political and the economic conditions of the times of Chandragupta II under which this unique work of literature work was produced. No doubt, the literary work is everything that the critic, the historian, the linguist and the social scientist have got to say about but it is in its essence,
i.e. as a distinctively literary work, more and other than all that they say either severally or/and collectively. It is what the poetic genious of Kalidasa has produced it to be on the scale of his immortal poetic spirit. The poetic spirit of Kalidasa is immortalized because over the centuries, the work has been capable of rousing the universally present but mostly latent pathos and passions of the human spirit; there is something in it that is essentially human. The work has in it a secret literary massage of its own that gradually unravels itself to a sympathetic reader.

The case of Vedic Indian culture is also no equivalent. The entire Vedic culture carries a secret message to any one who seriously ventures into it. This is the spirit of Indian culture as well as spirituality; that cannot be understood by efforts from without. From within knowing it is experiential or anubhava and undemonstrable.

When we look at all the efforts of scholars both Indian and foreign using Western categories and Western approaches we can see reductionisms of varying degrees. Sakuntalam could also be reduced in the same manner differently by different people. All the narrations stated above make many such reductionisms. Let me sketchly mention few select ones.

The concept of Arya is much different from how that has been used. The Rg.Veda uses the concept of Arya to say that ‘Praja Arya Jyothiragrah’ to mean that Aryans are those who search light (Wisdom) and who are lead by light. In the entire Vedic tradition,
the concept of Arya is used as a honourable concept which stands for definite and stipulate qualities. Anyhuman being who possesses these qualities could automatically be termed Arya. But many scholars treat Arya to mean some group of people, race etc. Varnashrama is yet another misconception. Varna is what is earned or acquire. The categorization of society into four Varna of quality is done on the basis of individual abilities and this categorization is done only among the Aryans. Anryans simply become the fifth Varna or panchamas. Gotra cannot be translated into the European notion of tribe. Gotra has a different and wider meaning. Vairagya cannot be understood as pessimism. Gods are deities with functional importance and they have nothing to do with the idea of ultimate reality. Deities cannot be taken for general meanings since they are mostly context bound and specific. It is more ridiculous than reductionists to compare Indian deities with deities like Baal. Often times these reductionism destroys the entire spirit of Vedic culture.

HINDU SOCIETY BEFORE THE BUDDHA

While considering Indian religions, Buddhism occupies a unique place, firstly for throwing its portals open not only to the Indians of all strata of the society, but also to the foreigners like the Indo-Greeks and Indo-Scythians, who settled in India, and secondly, for its propagation in foreign countries. Along with the propagation of the religion were introduced in those countries the Buddhist art and architecture, landscriptures and subsidiary literature in the languages of the countries where the religion made its home. In
short, the cultural heritage of India was shared by most of the Asians through the grace of this religion.

The rise of Buddhism and Jainism was facilitated by the conditions of Hindu society on the eve of Buddha's birth. The Hindu society had lost its former glory and many kinds of abuses and superstitions had crept into it. Brahmanism became reduced into a caste and the Brahmanas had a monopoly in the field of religion and at times they behaved as unscrupulous human beings. They encouraged superstition and tried to extort as much as they could from the people.

The Hindu religion presented a confusing mass of things which was beyond the man in the comprehension of the man of the man in the street. The hymns of the Vedas were too difficult for them to understand and appreciate. Even the Brahmanas found it difficult to interpret them. The deep philosophy of the Upanishads was too difficult for the common man. Even the philosophy of the Sastras and Sutras was not having any effect on the people. In other words, if the masses did not understand Hinduism, they could not be expected to have any love for the same. The Vedic religion, with the lofty ideas and ideals of god, soul, salvation and creation of the world, was merely a rattle which did not satisfy the inner craving of the people. It was felt that there was an urgent necessity of a religion which, though less deep and profound, was understood by the people and could be made by then a part and parcel of their lives.
The lives of the Brahmana priests were not above reproach. They lived the most worldly and corrupt lives. As matter of fact, they were becoming the very embodiment of vices. That was merely a corollary of the enormous wealth possessed by them.

LIFE OF BUDDHA

Gautama Siddhartha or Buddha was the founder of Buddhism. He is also called “the Enlightened One,” “Tathagata” (One who has attained the Truth) and the Sage of the Sakyas. It is to be observed that we do not possess any authentic account of the life of Gautama Buddha but we have to rely upon comparatively later works which appear to have preserved older traditions handed down in some form of ballad poetry. Suddhodana was the name of his father and Mahamaya the name of his mother. According to the Sinhalese tradition, the death of Buddha took place in 543 B.C. and as he died at the age of 80, he must have been born in 623 B.C. This date is stated to be confirmed by the information found in the Hathigumpha inscription of King Kharavela of Kalinga. However, this date conflicts with the ascertained date of Asoka whose consideration took place 218 years after the Nirvana of Buddha. It is known that the consecration of Asoka took place in about 269 BC, but if we accept 543 BC as the date of the Nirvana of Buddha, the date of consecration of Asoka comes to about 325 BC for the birth of Buddha is rejected.

Moreover, it is stated that a dot was put in a record each year after the Nirvana of Buddha and the practice was continued in
caution up to the year 489 A.D. The total number of dots in that year was 975. If we deduct 489 from 975, we get 486 or 487 B.C. as the date of Buddha. If we deduct 218 from 487 we arrive at 269 B.C. which according to the evidence of the Greek writers was the date of the consecration of Asoka. By another calculation, we come to 487 B.C. as the date of the death of Buddha. Chandragupta Maurya must have ascended the throne some time after the death of Alexander and the first partition treaty of Babylon in 323 B.C. We can assume reasonably the accession of Chandragupta Maurya in about 322 B.C. According to the Puranas, Chandragupta reigned for 24 years and his son Bindusara for 25 years under the circumstances, 487 B.C is taken to be the year of death of Buddha and 567 B.C as date of his birth. Seven days after the birth of Buddha, Mahamaya died and the child was nursed by his step-mother and aunt named Mahapajapati Gotami, who gave him milk and fed him from her own breast.

The child called Siddhartha was brought up in great luxury and was married at the age of sixteen. His wife has been called by various names, e.g., Yasodhara, Gopa, Bimba, etc. At the age of 29, a son was born to him and he was given the name of Rahul. Siddhartha felt that “a bond was born to him”.

The Buddhists refer to what are called “Four Great Sins” which profoundly affected the life of the young Siddhartha. It is stated that one evening his charioteer, Chhanna, drove the prince in the city and he came across an old man who had been given up by his people. He saw another man suffering from the agony of disease
and Chhanna told him that was the fate of every human being. Then he saw a dead man surrounded by weeping relatives. The fourth sight was that of a mendicant who had given up the world and was moving about in search of truth.

These experiences had already affected the mind of Siddhartha and when a son was born to him, he decided immediately to renounce the world. He left his wife and child sleeping and went away accompanied by Chhanna, the charioteer. Siddhartha sat under the feet of Alara and Udraka at Rajagriha and learnt from them the art of concentration of mind and “neither-consciousness-nor-non-consciousness’. From there, he went to Uruvela and practiced such great penances that he was reduced to a mere skeleton. In spite of his sufferings, he did not get enlightenment. After that, he tried to get enlightenment by keeping himself away from sensual desires and evil ideas. He also started taking food. One day, he sat under a pipal tree and took the following vow: “I will not leave this place till I attain that peace of mind which I have been trying for all these years.” Many difficulties came in his way. He was both threatened and tempted but he refused to leave the Pipal tree. Ultimately it was under the same Pipal tree that Siddhartha got enlightenment and he came to be known as the Buddha or the “The Enlightened one.” (This happened when Buddha was 35.)

Buddha decided to dedicate the rest of his life to the good of the people. This he did for 45 years. During all these years, Buddha
was always on the move with his followers and admirers. The first sermon was given by him at Sarnath near Banaras. This was called the “Dharma Chakra Pravartana” or “turning of the wheel of law.” Buddha traveled in various parts of the country. He visited his narrative-land also and his son Rahul becomes a monk. He died at the age of 80 and his last words were the following: “Therefore, O Ananda, be ye lamps unto you. Betake yourselves to no external refuge. Hold fast to the Truth as a lamp. Hold fast as a refuge to the Truth. Look not for refuge to any one besides yourselves.”

Buddha taught for 45 years through conversation, lectures and parables. His method of teaching was unique. He walked from town to town, accompanied by his favorite disciples, and followed by as many as 1200 devotees. His favorite Sutra was the “Four Noble Truths” which emphasized the fact that life was full of pain which could be removed only by the removal of all desires. The first truth is the existence of sorrow. The second truth is the cause of sorrow the third truth is the cessation of sorrow. And the fourth truth is that there must be a way to attain bliss and end desires. That was through the noble eight-fold-path namely right views, right intention, right speech, right action, right living, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration. These are elaborately discussed in the next chapter.

According to Buddha, more tears have flowed than all the water that is in the four great oceans. Every pleasure is poisoned by brevity. The basic evil is not of desire but selfish desire, sexual
desire, above all, leads to reproduction which stretches out the chain of life into new sufferings aimlessly. One of his disciples suggested suicide to end troubles but Buddha pointed out that the same was useless as the unpurified soul was bound to be reborn again. The cycle of birth could not be ended that way. He says, “Let a man overcome anger by kindness, evil by good. Victory breeds hatred, for the conquered is unhappy. Never in the world hatred ceases by hatred; hatred ceases by love”.

Buddha’s conception of religion was purely ethical. He did not care for worship or ritual. He put all his emphasis on conduct. A Brahmana proposed to purify himself of his sins by bathing at Ganga and Buddha addressed him thus: “Have thy bath here, even here, O Brahman. Be kind to all beings. If thou speakest not false, if thou killest not life, if thou takest not what is not given to thee, secure in self-denial—what wouldest thou gain by going to Ganga? Any water is Ganga to thee.

Buddha refused to express any opinion as to whether he would had a beginning or will have an end; whether the soul is the same as the body or distinct from it. He regarded those questions as “the jungle, the desert, the puppet-show, the writhing, the entanglement, of speculation” and was not prepared to bother about them. They only resulted in discussions and sorrows and not in wisdom and peace. Buddha’s view was that saintliness and contentment were to be found not in the knowledge of the universe
and God but in selfless and virtuous labor. He humorously said that even God did not know the answer to those questions.

Buddha did not bother about the caste system. He was ready to welcome anybody into the Buddhist Sangha. He gave the following instructions to his disciples: “Go into all lands and preach this gospel. Tell them that the poor and the lowly, the rich and the high, are all one, and that all castes unite in this religion as do the rivers in the sea.”

In Buddha philosophy, there was no place for heaven, purgatory or hell. Buddha did not explain clearly his conception of Nirvana. The Buddhist scriptures used the terms as signifying a state of happiness attainable in this life through the complete elimination of selfish desires, the liberation of the individual from rebirth, the annihilation of the individual consciousness, the union of individual with God and a heaven of happiness after death. In the teachings of Buddha, it seems to mean the extinction of all individual desires and escape from rebirth. The cause and source of Nirvana is the extinction of selfish desires. Nirvana is the painless peace that rewards the moral annihilation of the self. To quote Buddha, “Now, this is the noble truth as to the passing of pain. Verily, it is the passing away so that no passing remains, the giving up, the getting rid of the emancipation from, the harboring no longer of this craving thirst.

Buddha is the teacher of the teachers of many, one who puts righteousness in the forefront of his exhortations to the Brahmana
race. After a few weeks the death of Buddha reported in about 387 B.C. The monks of Visali had adopted certain practices which were contrary to the rules of Vinaya Pitaka. This matter was brought before the Buddhist council, but the Visali monks refused to change their views and consequently a great schism took place within Buddhism. The orthodox came to be known as Mahasamghikas.

The third Buddhist Council was held at Pataliputra in the reign of Asoka. According to the Ceylonese chronicles, the council was held 236 years after the death of Buddha and was presided over by Moggaaliputta Tissa. The council made a new classification of the Buddhist canonical texts by the addition of a third Pitaka called the Abhidhamma Pitaka which contained the philosophical interpretation of the doctrines of the two already existing Pitakas.

The fourth and last Buddhist Council was held in Kashmir or at Jullundur under the leadership of Vasumitra and Asvaghosha during the reign of Kanishka. This council settled certain controversial questions arising out of some difference of opinion between the Sarvastivada teachers of Kashmir and Gandhara. Three large commentaries on the Pitakas known as Vibhashas were also prepared Mahayanism.

In the time of Kanishka, a new school of Buddhism known as Mahayanism came into existence. This has to be distinguished from the old form of Buddhism which was called by the name of Hinayanism. Although the name Mahayanism is found for the first time in the reign of Kanishka, its genesis can be found in teachings of
the Buddha himself. According to Buddha himself, there were three ways or vehicles for attaining Nirvana. There were those who wanted to achieve their own salvation as soon as possible, without caring for others. They could realize that goal by attainment of Arhatship. That vehicle was called Arhat-yana or the vehicle of the Arhats. To the second category belonged those persons who wanted to attain their own salvation but at the same time desired to do some beneficial work for others. They could reach their goal by Pratyaka-Buddhayana. To the second category belonged that person who gave up their own salvation or Nirvana in order to help others and dedicated their lives for that purpose. They belonged to the Buddhayana or the vehicle of Buddha. The followers of Mahayanism were stated to belong to the third category.

Mahayanism differed from Hinayanism in many ways. The Mahayanists introduced a belief in the Boddhisattvas or being “who were in the process of obtaining but had not yet obtained, Buddha hood.” Many Boddhisattvas claimed the faith and allegiance of the devotees. Buddha was deified. Worship of the images of Buddha was started. It was accompanied by elaborate rituals, Charms and formulae. There was no such thing in Hinayanism which was of a very simple nature, where as, Hinayanism is regarded as the salvation of the individual as the goal. Mahayanism had as it the objective the salvation of all beings. While Hinayanism prescribed self culture and good deeds as the only way to salvation, Mahayanism began to put more and more reliance on faith in the devotion to the various Buddha’s and Boddhisattivas. While
Hinayanism used Pali literature, Sanskrit was adopted as the language of Mahayanism. There was also difference between Mahayanism and Hinayanism with regard to metaphysical conceptions, the ultimate goal of religious life, the true nature of Buddha, etc. Nagarjuna, a contemporary of Kanishka, was the great exponent of Mahayanism. It was Mahayanism which spread in Central Asia and other parts of the world. Hinayanism was restricted only to India.

CAUSES OF SPREAD OF BUDDHISM

The religion of the Buddha started in one corner of India and spread not only in India, but also made its way to Ceylon, Burma, Tibet, Java, Sumatra, Borneo, Champa, China, Japan, Siam and Central Asia. This phenomenal growth of Buddhism was due to many causes.

The first important cause was the simplicity of the teachings of Buddha. Buddha's philosophy of life was a simple code of conduct which did not require the employment of priests and expenditure of money. The whole thing was put in such a simple way that even the most dullatreads could understand the same. The followers of Buddha had not to bother themselves with any metaphysical questions. There was nothing to create confusion in their minds. The result was that the people, who were tired of the complicated rituals of the Brahmanas, welcomed Buddhism.
The language used by Buddha was also simple and familiar to the people. He gave his lectures in the Pali language which could be understood by the people. This must have been a great relief to those who found Vedic Sanskrit tedious.

Buddhism does not believe in any caste system. All were welcomed into its fold. They were considered as equal and did not bother about the decent of a person. The Buddhists cared only for his conduct in life. Such a philosophy must have been welcomed by the Sudras and Vaishyas who were tired of supremacy and pride of the Brahmanas. By them Varnashrama Dharma had lost its originality, its intentions and its philosophy and had decade into rigid caste system to untouchability.

The practice of Hinduism had been made very expensive by the Brahmanas. A lot of money was required to be spending on the ever increasing number of rituals to be performed throughout the life of a man. The teachings of Buddha did not involve any expense. A person could be honest and virtuous without spending anything. He could attain Nirvana by regulating his life.

The personality of Buddha was also responsible for the spread of Buddhism. During his life time, Buddha traveled very widely and leaving aside the rainy season, he was all the time on the move. During his tours, he spread his teachings among the people. He possessed a magnetic personality and consequently was able to convert a large number of people. Reference may be made in this connection to Bimbisar and Ajatsatru of Magadha.
The Buddhist Sangha was also responsible for the spread of Buddhism. The monks and the nuns had co-ordinated their efforts for the spread of Buddhism. They had only one object in life and that was the spread of their faith. They worked from morning till night preaching the gospel of Buddha which alone was the object of their life. They had no family troubles. They had no work about finances. They could beg when they felt hungry and devote the rest of their time to their faith. Buddha gave the monks and runs the following advice: “Go ye Bhikshus and wander for the gain of the many, for the welfare of the many, out of the compassion for the world. Let not two of you go to the same way.” Every individual monk was entrusted with particular area and he worked in that area with a missionary zeal to convert the people. In the early stages, the Buddhist monks led a holy life and no wonder people were inspired to follow their example. They had education in their hands. The Buddhist monasteries or Vihars became great centers of education and seekers of learning flocked there and receive instructions at the feet of Bhiksus. One such centre was Nalanda where Hiuen Tsang, the Chinese traveler studied for many years.

Royal patronage under Asoka, Kanishka, and Harsha also helped the spread of Buddhism. It appears that the only object of Asoka’s life was to spread the Law of Piety or Dhamma among not only his own subjects but also in countries outside India. He harnessed all the resources of the state to popularize Buddhism. The whole machinery of the State was employed for that purpose. He went on tours to explain the Dhamma to the people. He also directed
the Yuktas, pradesikas and Dharma-Mahamatras to go on tours and spread the Law of Piety among the people. The principles of his Dhamma were engraved on pillars and rocks. Missionaries were sending to foreign countries. In short, all that was humanly possible was done to spread Buddhism. Kanishka and Harsha also did a lot to propagate Buddhism within their territories.

At the outset, Buddhism had no serious rivals. The two great missionary religions, Christianity and Islam were still to come. The absence of rivals facilitated the task of Buddhism. Another cause of success of Buddhism was its adaptability. The Buddha had himself empowered the Buddhist Councils to take important decisions so far as the minor precepts were concerned. Later on, changes were made in Buddhism to suit the new times and new countries. This is amply proved by the growth of Mahayanism. Thus a Buddhist could believe in the Buddha alone or in Bodhisattvas. He could be an idolater or meat-eater and still continue to be a Buddhist.
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