As stated earlier, in the terms of religion, belief, ethnicity, culture, economic status, political affiliation, sexuality and ability the present global world is a truly pluralistic. In this pluralistic situation how we look others matters a lot. Each religious community has to face this situation and has to decide how best one could respond to the pluralistic situation like this. As discussed earlier, commonly we find three options for responding to others. These are exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism. In this chapter our prime concern is to discuss and explain the inclusivist attitude of Buddhism or more clearly do Buddhists themselves want to be included or do Buddhists want to include religious belief and practice which are non-Buddhistic. In nutshell we would try to delve into the original Buddhist scriptures to find out inclusivist attitudes of Buddhism.

As the term inclusivism has already been discussed in the previous chapter it hardly needs further explanation here. However, while citing examples of Buddhist inclusivism further clarification, if required, would be given at due places.

It is a well known fact that in comparison to other religious denominations, from the very beginning, Buddhism has been a tolerant religion and has accommodated many ideas which were not known to the Buddhists or explained in the Buddhist scriptures. It is this accommodating attitude which has been severely criticized by some of
the pioneer scholars of Buddhism. M. Monier Williams has said that primitive Buddhism was too “tolerant, liberal, and eclectic” to survive intact. Likewise Sir Charles also wrote that “their courteous acquiescence in other creeds enfeebles...their own,” and that Buddhism is “dangerously tolerant.”¹ However, it is this tolerant and accommodating attitude of Buddhism had helped it in expansion and development throughout the world on the one hand and paved the way to multiply into many forms of Buddhism to the other and as a result today we find several forms of Buddhism.

It has also been discussed earlier that the famous German Indologist Paul Hacker² is one of the earliest scholars who have written on inclusivism in the Indian context. In fact, he is of the view that inclusivism is particularly an Indian form of thought, though in due course of time his claim has been refuted by many scholars. In support of his hypothesis he puts forth several examples from Hinduism and a couple from Buddhism.

**Religious Inclusivism in Theravada Teachings**

First and foremost we would discuss those examples from the Buddhist texts which have been put forth by Hacker in support of his view on Buddhist inclusivism. On the basis of the examples cited from the Pali text he observes that the assertions of these Buddhist texts put forth a different type of inclusivism, ‘one that reflects a superiority-complex and

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is an inclusivism of power or strength’. He argues that the early Buddhist texts interpret some of the prevalent Brahmanical concepts in a new way. For example these texts reconceived tapas (penance or self-mortification) as spiritual striving and no longer as physical or outwardly painful act. Likewise the sacrifices according to the Buddhist texts are to be something non-violent. He further argues that ‘it is quite apparent that the early Buddhists borrowed the prevalent ideas and concepts, and interpreted them as they like and then discard the inessential things and in the process they thereby assert themselves.’

Hacker, in conclusion, says that ‘the most important thing is that with inclusivism the foreign items remain unchanged for the most part, except in the case of the inclusivism of strength, which might be seen as reinterpretation.’

The other notable author who has attempted to discuss the inclusivistic attitude of the Buddhists/Buddhist texts is Kristin Beise Kiblinger. In the following pages an attempt has been made to discuss and elaborate those examples which have been cited by him.

The sayings of Lord Buddha contained in the Mahāparinibbānasutta of the Dīgha Nikāya is often cited as a fine example of Buddhist inclusivism. It says that the Buddha before his parinibbāna has advised his disciples that they should always keep in their mind that any religious system which advocates the efficacy of the Eightfold Path is the only

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useful religious system, which employs that the criterion for assessing others religious belief is the presence of the Eightfold Path in that particular religious belief. This was said by the Lord Buddha while answering a question put forth by Subhadda. He asked the Buddha that “what he should think regarding various religious teachers, all of whom claim to have special insight”. While answering this question Lord Buddha said “In whatever doctrine and discipline, Subhadda, the Noble Eightfold Path is not found, there the Samaṇa (i.e, the Arhat) is not found either... And in whatever doctrine and discipline, Subhadda, the Noble Eightfold Path is found, there is found the Samaṇa also ...”

On the basis of this conversation with Subhadda, it is asserted that a classical Buddhist text records that a founder of a religious belief identifies Buddhist criteria by which others are to be measured. By saying so they want to indicate that the Buddha left open the possibility that Buddhist teachings may exist in other religious denominations or even in alien traditions.

The next in line is the content of the Upāli Sutta of the Majjhima Nikāya. In this sutta it is mentioned that a prominent follower of the Jain tradition named Upāli becomes a follower of the Buddha. When he expresses his wish to change his religious affiliation from Jainism to Buddhism, initially the Buddha hesitates and cautions him because the conversion of a man of his stature would have many repercussions. However, at the end he does accept him as a disciple, but at the same time the Buddha advises

4 However, at the same time the very next line of the text could be quoted as a fine example of religious inclusivism which runs as: Now in this doctrine and discipline (i.e., Buddhism), Subhadda, the noble eightfold path is found, and here alone, Subhadda, is the samana. The systems of others are empty with respect to the perfect knowledge of samana-s. And in this one, Subhadda, may the bhikkhu-s live rightly, so that the world is not empty of Arhat-s. (Muller, F. Max, ed., Buddhist Suttas, vol. XI, Sacred Books of the East Series, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1968, pp., 106-7).
him not to withdraw his patronage to the followers of the Jain tradition. This particular suggestion of Lord Buddha increased the respect of Upāli to him. Whatever be the reason/reasons for this suggestion to Upāli it is quite apparent that it portrays the attitude of Lord Buddha himself to the contemporary religious teachers or religious denominations. In due course of time it helped him to gain many followers for him.

One of the most often quoted passages is passages from the Kālāma Sutta of the Aṅguttaranikāya, (Tika-Nipāta, Mahāvagga). It could also be quoted here as an example of religious inclusivism. In this famous sutta, the Kālāma clan of a village Kesaputta had heard the differing views of numerous religious teachers, each of whom disparaged the others’ teachings, claiming superiority for his own, causing confusion and doubt among the Kalama people. On Lord Buddha’s arrival to Kesaputta the Kālāma people approached Lord Buddha and they ask for his advice on the conflicting teachings of various religious leaders. Kalama people said to him that many wandering holy men and ascetics pass through, expounding their teachings and criticizing the teachings of others. So whose teachings should they follow? On this the Buddha advises the people in the following way:

- Do not go upon what has been **acquired by repeated hearing**,  
- nor upon **tradition or hearsay**,  
- nor upon **rumor**,  
- nor upon **what is in a scripture**,  
- nor upon **surmise**,
nor upon an axiom,

nor upon specious reasoning,

nor upon a bias towards a notion that has been pondered over,

nor upon another's seeming ability,

nor upon the consideration, "The monk is our teacher."

Kālāma-s, when you yourselves know: "These things are good; these things are not blamable; these things are praised by the wise; undertaken and observed, these things lead to benefit and happiness," enter on and abide in them.\(^5\)

On this story Kiblinger has made remarkable observance which is quoted here verbatim. According to him ‘this story is usually read by supporters of inclusivism to be recommending open-minded (or, to stretch it, even optimistic) exploration of alien systems alongside Buddhism.’ Second, inclusivists read the text to be stressing individualism and pragmatism in deciding the worth of others’ teachings, again suggesting that differences in capabilities and needs may justify the practice of various faiths, at least temporarily, and that other traditions may share some lower-level benefits with Buddhism. Most agree, however, that the Buddha is meant to be seen as confident that Buddhism in the end will appear most conducive to well-being, especially when one’s judgment is highly developed.’\(^6\)

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The famous Indian legend of the blind men and the elephant, however, uniquely not Buddhist, could also be taken as an example of religious inclusivism. It will not be out of place if we quote in verbatim the English translation of the Tittha Sutta\(^7\) of the \textit{Udāna} VI.4.

“I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was staying near Sāvatthi, in Jeta's Grove, Aṅkhoṅaphīkha's monastery. Now at that time there were many priests, contemplatives, and wanderers of various sects living around Sāvatthi with differing views, differing opinions, differing beliefs, dependent for support on their differing views. Some of the priests and contemplatives held this view, this doctrine: "The cosmos is eternal. Only this is true; anything otherwise is worthless."

Some of the priests and contemplatives held this view, this doctrine: "The cosmos is not eternal"..."The cosmos is finite"..."The cosmos is infinite"..."The soul and the body are the same"..."The soul is one thing and the body another"..."After death a Tathāgata exists"..."After death a Tathāgata does not exist"..."After death a Tathāgata both does and does not exist"..."After death a Tathāgata neither does nor does not exist. Only this is true; anything otherwise is worthless."

And they lived arguing, quarreling, and disputing, wounding one another with weapons of the mouth, saying, "The Dhamma is like this, it is not like that. The Dhamma is not like that, it is like this."

\(^7\) Retrieved from http://www.vipassana.com/canon/khuddaka/udana/ud6-4.php
Then in the early morning, a large number of monks, having put on their robes and carrying their bowls and outer robes, went into Sāvatthi for alms. Having gone for alms in Sāvatthi, after the meal, returning from their alms round, they went to the Blessed One and, on arrival, having bowed down to him, sat to one side. As they were sitting there, they said to the Blessed One: "Lord, there are many priests, contemplatives, and wanderers of various sects living around Sāvatthi with differing views, differing opinions, differing beliefs, dependent for support on their differing views...and they live arguing, quarreling, and disputing, wounding one another with weapons of the mouth, saying, 'The Dhamma is like this, it's not like that. The Dhamma is not like that, it is like this.'"

"Monks, the wanderers of other sects are blind and eyeless. They don't know what is beneficial and what is harmful. They don't know what is the Dhamma and what is non-Dhamma. Not knowing what is beneficial and what is harmful, not knowing what is Dhamma and what is non-Dhamma, they live arguing, quarreling, and disputing, wounding one another with weapons of the mouth, saying, 'The Dhamma is like this, it is not like that. The Dhamma is not like that, it's like this.'"

"Once, in this same Sāvatthi, there was a certain king who said to a certain man, 'Gather together all the people in Sāvatthi who have been blind from birth.'"

"'As you say, your majesty,' the man replied and, rounding up all the people in Sāvatthi who had been blind from birth, he went to
the king and on arrival said, 'Your majesty, the people in Sāvatthi who have been blind from birth have been gathered together.'

"Very well then, show the blind people an elephant."

"As you say, your majesty,' the man replied and he showed the blind people an elephant. To some of the blind people he showed the head of the elephant, saying, 'This, blind people, is what an elephant is like.' To some of them he showed an ear of the elephant, saying, 'This, blind people, is what an elephant is like.' To some of them he showed a tusk...the trunk...the body...a foot...the hindquarters...the tail...the tuft at the end of the tail, saying, 'This, blind people, is what an elephant is like.'

"Then, having shown the blind people the elephant, the man went to the king and on arrival said, 'Your majesty, the blind people have seen the elephant. May your majesty do what you think it is now time to do.'

"Then the king went to the blind people and on arrival asked them, 'Blind people, have you seen the elephant?'

"'Yes, your majesty. We have seen the elephant.'

"'Now tell me, blind people, what the elephant is like.'

"The blind people who had been shown the head of the elephant replied, 'The elephant, your majesty, is just like a water jar.'
"Those who had been shown the ear of the elephant replied, 'The elephant, your majesty, is just like a winnowing basket.'

"Those who had been shown the tusk of the elephant replied, 'The elephant, your majesty, is just like an iron rod.'

"Those who had been shown the trunk of the elephant replied, 'The elephant, your majesty, is just like the pole of a plow.'

"Those who had been shown the body of the elephant replied, 'The elephant, your majesty, is just like a granary.'

"Those who had been shown the foot of the elephant replied, 'The elephant, your majesty, is just like a post.'

"Those who had been shown the hindquarters of the elephant replied, 'The elephant, your majesty, is just like a mortar.'

"Those who had been shown the tail of the elephant replied, 'The elephant, your majesty, is just like a pestle.'

"Those who had been shown the tuft at the end of the tail of the elephant replied, 'The elephant, your majesty, is just like a broom.'

"Saying, 'The elephant is like this, it is not like that. The elephant is not like that, it is like this,' they struck one another with their fists. That gratified the king.

"In the same way, monks, the wanderers of other sects are blind and eyeless. They don't know what is beneficial and what is harmful. They do not know what is the Dhamma and what is non-
Dhamma. Not knowing what is beneficial and what is harmful, not knowing what is Dhamma and what is non-Dhamma, they live arguing, quarreling, and disputing, wounding one another with weapons of the mouth, saying, 'The Dhamma is like this, it is not like that. The Dhamma is not like that, it is like this.'"

Then, on realizing the significance of that, the Blessed One on that occasion exclaimed:

Some of these so-called priests & contemplatives are attached. They quarrel and fight - people seeing one side.

As per the inclusivist point of view the blind men in this story represent religious others. They have been depicted as sharing their different experience of the elephant, at the same time it is implied that the Buddha, who is not blind like religious others, has seen the whole. If it depicts so then it is not fair depiction of other religious teachers. Yet at the same time this analogy does accept the partial (limited) truth of others’ religious viewpoints like the blind men who are depicting the elephant partially. Thus this story provides space to harmonize other views with Buddhism under a model of partial versus complete truth.

While describing Buddhist inclusivism towards Vedic religion, Kiblinger⁸ is of the opinion that those portions of the early Buddhist texts which contain Buddhist inclusivistic strategies could be categorized as subordination, re-interpretation, and new application.

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A fine example of Buddhist inclusivism of subordination is seen in the last portion of the Kevaḍḍha Sutta/Kevaṭṭa Sutta of the Dīgha Nikāya in which the Vedic God Brahmā has been put in clear cut subordination of Lord Buddha. Though the text accepts Brahmā very high being yet he has been described as inferior to the Buddha in several ways, for example he remains bound by karma, is no longer seen as immortal or able to bring about salvation, and is tainted by ignorance. The English translation of that particular portion of the text⁹ is following:

"Once, Kevaṭṭa, this train of thought arose in the awareness of a certain monk in this very community of monks: 'Where do these four great elements — the earth property, the liquid property, the fire property, and the wind property — cease without remainder?' Then he attained to such a state of concentration that the way leading to the gods appeared in his centered mind. So he approached the gods of the retinue of the Four Great Kings and, on arrival, asked them, 'Friends, where do these four great elements — the earth property, the liquid property, the fire property, and the wind property — cease without remainder?'

"When this was said, the gods of the retinue of the Four Great Kings said to the monk, 'We also don't know where the four great elements... cease without remainder. But there are the Four Great Kings who are higher and more sublime than we. They

should know where the four great elements... cease without remainder.'

"So the monk approached the Four Great Kings and, on arrival, asked them, 'Friends, where do these four great elements... cease without remainder?'

"When this was said, the Four Great Kings said to the monk, 'We also don't know where the four great elements... cease without remainder. But there are the gods of the Thirty-three who are higher and more sublime than we. They should know...'

"So the monk approached the gods of the Thirty-three and, on arrival, asked them, 'Friends, where do these four great elements... cease without remainder?'

"When this was said, the gods of the Thirty-three said to the monk, 'We also don't know where the four great elements... cease without remainder. But there is Sakka, the ruler of the gods, who is higher and more sublime than we. He should know...'

"So the monk approached Sakka, the ruler of the gods, and, on arrival, asked him, 'Friend, where do these four great elements... cease without remainder?'

"When this was said, Sakka, the ruler of the gods, said to the monk, 'I also don't know where the four great elements... cease without remainder. But there are the Yama gods who are higher and more sublime than I. They should know...'...
"The Yama gods said, 'We also don't know... But there is the god named Suyama... He should know...'

"Suyama said, 'I also don't know... But there is the god named Santusita... He should know...'

"Santusita said, 'I also don't know... But there are the Nimmānarati gods... They should know...'

"The Nimmānarati gods said, 'We also don't know... But there is the god named Sunimmita... He should know...'

"Sunimmita said, 'I also don't know... But there are the Paranimmitavasavatti gods... They should know...'

"The Paranimmitavasavatti gods said, 'We also don't know... But there is the god named Paranimmitavasavatti... He should know...'

"So the monk approached the god Vasavatti and, on arrival, asked him, 'Friend, where do these four great elements... cease without remainder?'

"When this was said, the god Vasavatti said to the monk, 'I also don't know where the four great elements... cease without remainder. But there are the gods of the retinue of Brahma who are higher and more sublime than I. They should know where the four great elements... cease without remainder'...
"Then the monk attained to such a state of concentration that the way leading to the gods of the retinue of Brahmā appeared in his centered mind. So he approached the gods of the retinue of Brahmā and, on arrival, asked them, 'Friends, where do these four great elements — the earth property, the liquid property, the fire property, and the wind property — cease without remainder?'

"When this was said, the gods of the retinue of Brahmā said to the monk, 'We also don't know where the four great elements... cease without remainder. But there is Brahmā, the Great Brahma, the Conqueror, the Unconquered, the All-Seeing, All-Powerful, the Sovereign Lord, the Maker, Creator, Chief, Appointer and Ruler, Father of All That Have Been and Shall Be. He is higher and more sublime than we. He should know where the four great elements... cease without remainder.'

"'But where, friends, is the Great Brahmā now?'

"'Monk, we also don't know where Brahmā is or in what way Brahmā is. But when signs appear, light shines forth, and a radiance appears, Brahmā will appear. For these are the portents of Brahmā's appearance: light shines forth and a radiance appears.'

"Then it was not long before Brahmā appeared.

"So the monk approached the Great Brahmā and, on arrival, said, 'Friend, where do these four great elements — the earth property, the liquid property, the fire property, and the wind property — cease without remainder?'}
"When this was said, the Great Brahmā said to the monk, 'I, monk, am Brahmā, the Great Brahmā, the Conqueror, the Unconquered, the All-Seeing, All-Powerful, the Sovereign Lord, the Maker, Creator, Chief, Appointer and Ruler, Father of All That Have Been and Shall Be.'

A second time, the monk said to the Great Brahmā, 'Friend, I didn't ask you if you were Brahmā, the Great Brahmā, the Conqueror, the Unconquered, the All-Seeing, All-Powerful, the Sovereign Lord, the Maker, Creator, Chief, Appointer and Ruler, Father of All That Have Been and Shall Be. I asked you where these four great elements — the earth property, the liquid property, the fire property, and the wind property — cease without remainder.'

"A second time, the Great Brahmā said to the monk, 'I, monk, am Brahmā, the Great Brahmā, the Conqueror, the Unconquered, the All-Seeing, All-Powerful, the Sovereign Lord, the Maker, Creator, Chief, Appointer and Ruler, Father of All That Have Been and Shall Be.'

"A third time, the monk said to the Great Brahmā, 'Friend, I didn't ask you if you were Brahmā, the Great Brahmā, the Conqueror, the Unconquered, the All-Seeing, All-Powerful, the Sovereign Lord, the Maker, Creator, Chief, Appointer and Ruler, Father of All That Have Been and Shall Be. I asked you where these four great elements — the earth property, the liquid property,
the fire property, and the wind property — cease without remainder.'

"Then the Great Brahmā, taking the monk by the arm and leading him off to one side, said to him, 'These gods of the retinue of Brahmā believe, "There is nothing that the Great Brahmā does not know. There is nothing that the Great Brahmā does not see. There is nothing of which the Great Brahmā is unaware. There is nothing that the Great Brahmā has not realized." That is why I did not say in their presence that I, too, don't know where the four great elements... cease without remainder. So you have acted wrongly, acted incorrectly, in bypassing the Blessed One in search of an answer to this question elsewhere. Go right back to the Blessed One and, on arrival, ask him this question. However, he answers it, you should take it to heart.'

"Then — just as a strong man might extend his flexed arm or flex his extended arm — the monk disappeared from the Brahmā world and immediately appeared in front of me. Having bowed down to me, he sat to one side. As he was sitting there he said to me, 'Lord, where do these four great elements — the earth property, the liquid property, the fire property, and the wind property — cease without remainder?'

"When this was said, I said to him, 'Once, monk, some seafaring merchants took a shore-sighting bird and set sail in their ship. When they could not see the shore, they released the shore-sighting bird. It flew to the east, south, west, north, straight up, and
to all the intermediate points of the compass. If it saw the shore in any direction, it flew there. If it did not see the shore in any direction, it returned right back to the ship. In the same way, monk, having gone as far as the Brahmā world in search of an answer to your question, you have come right back to my presence.

"Your question should not be phrased in this way: Where do these four great elements — the earth property, the liquid property, the fire property, and the wind property — cease without remainder? Instead, it should be phrased like this:

Where do water, earth, fire, and wind have no footing? Where are long and short, coarse and fine, fair and foul, name and form brought to an end?

"And the answer to that is:

Consciousness without feature, without end, luminous all around: Here water, earth, fire, and wind have no footing. Here long & short coarse and fine fair and foul name and form are all brought to an end. With the cessation of [the activity of] consciousness each is here brought to an end."

That is what the Blessed One said. Gratified, Kevaṭṭa the householder delighted in the Blessed One's words.”

In nutshell the Kevaṭṭha Sutta depicts the story of the Brahmā’s subordination to the Buddha and the conclusion which the Inclusivists
will draw is that the Brahmā can still be highly esteemed, but that the Buddha is far superior.

Now let us take another example which shows the evidence of inclusivism towards Vedic sacrifice. In such cases, as found in the early Buddhist literature, however, we find the techniques of significant re-interpretation and new application and not at all subordination. The Kuṭadanta Sutta of the Dīgha Nikāya which discusses the minute details of a bloodless sacrifice we find that on the eve of offering a great sacrificial feast, a Brāhmaṇa named Kuṭadanta visits the Buddha for advice on every detail of his planned sacrifice to be done properly so that he would accrue as much merit as possible. While suggesting Kuṭadanta the Buddha re-interpreted the very notion of the Brāhmanic sacrifice. Giving the example of a former King Mahāvijita, who also made a great sacrificial offering, he correlated the prevalent three modes of Vedic sacrifice to the three states of mind. The sixteen conditions i.e., requirements concerning the altar, the priest’s clothes, etc. are re-conceived as the cooperation of the four classes of people – the noblemen (Ksatriya-s), the ministers and officials, the rich Brāhmins, and the householders); as the eight qualities to be possessed by the king who would make the offerings – being well-born, handsome, wealthy, powerful, generous, learned, articulate, and intelligent; and as the four qualities of the Brāhmin royal adviser who would conduct the ceremonies – being well-born, learned, virtuous, and intelligent. Furthermore, the killing of animals is replaced with offerings of milk, butter, and honey. Lord Buddha further advised the king that the sacrifice offered by the king in such a manner will be a great success, with no loss of life, no
hardship on the people, no one impressed into service and every one willingly co-operating in the great feast.

However, even such re-fashioned Vedic sacrifice is put at the bottom of a hierarchical list of Buddhist practices as some of the rituals further explained by the Buddha have been construed as types of higher ‘sacrifice’.

Answering the question ‘if there was any sacrifice which could be made with less trouble and exertion, yet producing more fruitful result’ by the Brāhmin Kuṭadanta the Buddha told him that “building a Vihāra for the Order is a better kind of sacrifice; even better is taking refuge in the Buddha, Saṅgha, and Dharma with a trusting heart; even better is taking the precepts, and so on; the list continues all the way up the ladder to the attainment of Arhatship”10.

Another kind of inclusivism has been illustrated by James Egge11 while discussing the practice of almsgiving by the Buddhists as explained in the early Buddhist literature. In this case it appears to him that while discussing the almsgiving not much re-fashioning Vedic sacrifice has been done, yet the notion of almsgiving has been borrowed from the Vedic religion. He further explains that the ‘Buddhists appropriated Vedic forms, Egge explains, when they understood the Buddha or Buddhist monastic, rather than the sacred fire and Vedic deity, to be the recipient of offerings. This new use for the older paradigm was possible

because the dakshina, or gift to the priest that accompanies a Vedic sacrifice, was seen as an independent sacrifice. At the same time, however, distance was placed between Vedic and Buddhist practices because of the shift to sacrificial rituals that did not involve killing and because the recipients of Buddhist ‘sacrifices’ were deemed superior.’

Last but the least another example of Buddhist inclusivism is again quoted from the Dīgha Nikāya, i.e., the Aggaññasutta, the 27th sutta. The content of the sutta is related to the story of two Brāhmīns, Bhāradvāja and Vāsetṭha, who left their family and cast to become monks. On becoming the followers of the Buddha the two Brahmins are insulted and maligned by their own caste for their act. When the Buddha was reported about the matter he explained that caste and lineage can not be compared to the practice of morality and accomplishment in the Dhamma, as anyone from the four castes can become a monk and reached the state of Arahata. Consequently the Buddha explains about the evolution of the earth and the birth of social order and its structure, including the castes. The Buddha in his discourse emphasizes the message of universality in the Dhamma and how the Dhamma is the superior to all things.

Here the inclusivists focus on the Buddha’s explanation of a true Brāhmaṇa and the Varṇa system. As per the description Brahmin is said to be not someone born into a certain superior class (Varṇa), but rather someone who is superior ethically. Herein we find the re-interpretation of the original Vedic concept before it became corrupt in due course of time. In other words, at one place the Buddhists are rejecting the prevalent Vedic beliefs and practices, yet at another place they are re-conceiving
something from the Vedic or the others and change or re-conceive it in accordance to the Buddhist thinking and thus making them acceptable. The Buddha in this sutta justifies this act with the assertion that originally such understanding represents the intention of pure Vedic teachings. The explanations other than this put forth by the others are not true to their own ancient scriptures and cosmogonies.

In this sutta it has been stated that the other Brāhmins thinks that the Brāhmin caste is the best, as the Brāhmins are of high social status, pure-bred, have radiant complexion, born from the mouth of God Brahma.

On hearing this, the Buddha exhorts them that if the Brāhmins have born from the mouth of God Brahmā and other castes are born from Brahmā's feet then how the women in the Brāhmin caste become pregnant, giving birth and taking care of their children. But the Brāhmins still speak that they are born from the Mouth of God Brahmā and other castes are born from Brahmā's feet and thus the Brāhmin's are not speaking truthfully.

Then the Buddha elaborates that any of the caste indulged in killing, taking anything which is not given, taking part in sexual misconduct, lying, slandering, speaking harsh words or nonsense, greedy, cruel, and practice wrong beliefs (micchā diṭṭhi); people would still see that they do negative deeds and therefore are not worthy of respect. All of them will reap the fruits of all the above mentioned bad kamma-s, whatever their caste (Brāhmin, Khattiya, Vessa, and Sudda) might be.
In contrast if the people of any caste refrain themselves from all the above mentioned negative deeds will earn respect from the people and they would be profiting from their good and meritorious deeds.

According to the Buddha people from all the four castes can do either bad or good deeds and therefore the wise people will not admit that the Brāhmīns is the best of caste as anyone from the four castes if they leave the worldly life and becomes a monk, and due to their discipline and struggle, he become an arahanta, then he is the best among others based on Truth (Dhamma). Thus the Buddha concludes that it is the Arhat who is really the best or highest. The Arhat is the embodiment of what is meant by ‘brāhmin’.\(^\text{12}\)

It is quite apparent that the re-definition of the meaning of brāhmin is satirical. We all know that the almost all the Buddhist texts are satirical with Brāhmanical terms and are always put fort an acceptable way to understand them which is a form of inclusivism as one has to work hard to put to use the foreign item by re-interpreting it or by telling others what they are supposed to be doing or meaning.

**Religious Inclusivism in Mahayana Teachings**

The famous Mahayana treatise Mahāyānasūtraśālākāra mentions that the Hīnayāna/Srāvakayāna and Pratyekabuddha-yāna traditions teaches that suffering can be eliminated by knowing the true nature of person i.e.,

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non-self in person as well as by purifying beings of afflictive obstructions (Kleṣāvaraṇa) which ultimately lead to Nirvāṇa. Contrary to it the Mahāyānasutrālāṅkāra teaches non-self not only in person, but in phenomena as well. The removal of afflictive hindrances (Kleṣāvarāṇ) is not sufficient in attaining the Buddhahood but it is also the cognitive obstructions (Jñeyāvaraṇa) which helps sentient beings to end the cycle of rebirths and also helps them to attain omniscience and Buddhahood. It is significant to note here that this text mentions three-vehicle theory which helps a Buddhist practitioner to achieve their own final goal. Even the Buddha-s and Bodhisattva-s are understood to follow the teachings of both Hīnayāna and Mahayana vehicles. They never taught that all must use the same, or the higher vehicle. As the teachings of Theravada and Mahayana lead sentient beings to distinct ends i.e., attainment of nirvāṇa and Buddhahood respectively, not necessarily to the same end. Thus, what is apparent from the above discussion that this text accepts three vehicle theory and all of them help in achieving the defined respective goal.

If the three-vehicle theory is being applied to the inter-religious context then it appears that the Buddhists may see the religions other than Buddhism as having final ends distinct from the Buddhist ones. However, the inclusivists may accept the ultimate goal of others to some extant yet the ideal final goal for them would be the Buddhist goal. Thus the three-vehicle theory suggests an alternative to using the common core theory of religions as an approach to inclusivism.
The most popular Mahayana text the Saddharmapuṇḍarikasutram (The Lotus Sutra), in contrast, advocates the Ekāyāna or one-vehicle theory. According to it the Buddhahood is the one and only efficacious ultimate goal and rest are merely provisional. This text teaches that all will eventually attain the supreme Mahayana goal (i.e., Buddhahood) and, ultimately, can do so only through the Bodhisattva-yāna. In this theory even the non-Mahayana paths are included but as the stages which inevitably helps in advancing towards the Mahayana. Thus the multiple ways are merged into a single path along which only the Mahayana vehicle can take one to the ultimate goal.

It is pertinent to note here that according to the Saddharmapuṇḍarikasutra the Mahayana includes the non-Mahayana by using the notion of skillful means (upāyakaushalya), according to which Buddha-s supposedly modify their teachings to suit their audiences’ spiritual levels and stages of development. This creates an apparent plurality of teachings but, when viewed from an advanced perspective, these diverse teachings cooperate in furthering a single message or goal.  

The theory of the two truths - conventional and ultimate is another Mahayana teachings frequently used even by the Theravada Buddhists. For example, in his Christianity and Buddhism, Bhikkhu Buddhadasa14 of Thailand writes, “To put it in conventional language we may say that


Christianity is a religion which relies on external help, whereas Buddhism teaches the way of self-help. Thus there is, ordinarily speaking, no possibility of their going together. But speaking in the language of Dhamma or from the view-point of absolute truth by keeping in mind the truth hidden in between the letters ... there definitely is a possibility of blending. And how? In the language of Dhamma, God and the ‘Law of Karma’ are one and the same thing.”

The most important theory of emptiness (śunyatā) of the Mahayana teaching conveys that ‘all persons and phenomena lack independent and enduring essences’. It points to the relative, conditioned nature of all things. Four-fold negation (catuṣkoṭi vinirmukta) refutes all logically possible views on a topic. For example ‘a’ cannot be ‘b’, nor ‘non-b’, nor ‘both’, nor ‘neither’. In this way, the Mahayana teachings often see emptiness, or śunyatā as an antidote to all positions, so that Buddhism becomes not just one religion among others, but stands above all, transcending religion with a qualitative leap.

So far as the relevance of the theory of emptiness (śunyatā) with regard to the inclusivism is concerned Buddhadasa posits that Buddhists understand there to be a ‘further level of religious life in which religion itself disappears’, a move that places Buddhism not as one religion alongside many, but rather on a level that trumps the others by supposedly leading to the transcendence of all religion. He says, ‘... (T)here is no Buddhism, Christianity, or Islam. Therefore, how can they be the same or conflicting? Thus the phrase “No religion!” ... ’; when one ‘speaks more precisely’, he says, one sees that ‘there is no Buddha, there
is no dhamma, there is no saṅgha!\textsuperscript{15}. Emptiness, in effect, gives Buddhism the status of non-religion — or, better, of meta-religion.

Another fine example of Buddhist inclusivism found in the Yogācāra school of Mahayana Buddhism is the doctrine of the Trikāya (Three Body). According to this doctrine, Buddhahood has three aspects: Nirmana-kāya (transformation body), Sambhoga-kāya (enjoyment body), and the Dharma-kāya (Dharma body). In the light of this Trikāya doctrine D.T. Suzuki has said that non-Buddhist religious teachers may be seen also as transformation bodies appearing in order to suit the needs of a particular culture\textsuperscript{16}.

It is a well known fact that Buddhism spread beyond India and the Asian countries like Tibet, China, Japan, etc. all embraced Buddhism. An attempt has been made to find some example of Buddhist inclusivism in the teachings of Chinese and Tibetan Buddhism in the following pages.

When Buddhism went to China Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism combined into one religious movement especially during the Ming Period (1368–1644). Buddhist leader Han-shan Te-ch’ing (1546–1623) said that the sages of the Three Teachings ‘taught men according to their several capacities: Confucianism represented the human vehicle, Taoism the


heavenly vehicle, and the Bodhisattva the vehicle which transcended them both. Confucianism was suitable for teaching ethics, Taoism for getting men beyond desires, and Buddhism for completing their transformation¹⁷.

Another example of re-interpretation of the indigenous religious practices of the Chinese Buddhism is to include the Confucian virtue of filial piety. Chinese Buddhists have re-interpreted the concept of filial piety according to Buddhism. Although the Buddhists themselves admit that leaving the household life and becoming a monk may appear to be the act which is against the teaching of filial piety, yet they take it as a supreme filial piety (ta-hsiao), because after becoming a monk one can become vehicle for the conversion and salvation of one’s parents and of all other living beings, aiming at universal salvation¹⁸.

In Tibet Buddhists managed to co-exist with and also incorporated some teachings of the indigenous Bon religion. Buddhism helps understand the indigenous people that Bon was practiced for mundane or pragmatic goals, whereas Buddhism aided attainment of final liberation¹⁹. Similarly, in Japanese Buddhist teachings Dual Aspect or Ryobu Shinto (which mixes Shinto with Buddhism, as seen especially in the Shingon school),

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Shinto is assigned worldly duties while Buddhism is assigned responsibility for what is to come after death and longer-term concerns.\footnote{Bunce, William K., Religions in Japan: Buddhism, Shinto, Christianity, Rutland: Charles E. Tuttle Company, VT, 1955, pp. 10–1, 69–70.}

Like wise some of the sayings of His Holiness the Dalai Lama are perfect examples of inclusivistic instances of the Mahayana Buddhism. For example, His Holiness says that, ‘when he ponders over the skillful means aimed toward varying dispositions, he is able to truly appreciate the richness and value of other traditions, because it enables [him] to extend the same principles of diversity to other [non-Buddhist] traditions as well’.\footnote{Dalai Lama, His Holiness The, The Good Heart: A Buddhist Perspective on the Teachings of Jesus, Boston, MA: Wisdom Publications, 1996, p., 72.} In Spiritual Advice for Buddhists and Christians, he further says that ...[G]iven the vast array of humanity - of so many different kinds of people, of so many people with differing mental dispositions - we need a variety of religious traditions and so it is far better to have this variety... [I]t is not a question of which religion is superior as such. The question is, which will better cure a particular person... [F]or certain people a Christian method is much more effective than others. Muslims find their own approach to better suit their lives. So we cannot say, ‘this religion is good, that religion is not good’... So it is on this basis that it is extremely important to appreciate all the different religious traditions of the world...

Another type of inclusivistic move is the common core strategy, or the move to see religions as varying manifestations of a common essence or

\footnote{Dalai Lama, His Holiness The, Spiritual Advice for Buddhists and Christians, New York: Continuum, 1998, pp., 15–8.}
experience. With regard to it Venerable Buddhadasa says that ‘Dhamma, God, and the Tao point to the same truth. Any elements of a particular religion that lie beyond this universal core will be whittled away, in his view, until, in the evolution of religions over time, they disappear completely. The notion of God as a person, for instance, will be lost, gradually changing and evolving into God as Dhamma’.

Buddhadasa’s view is in tune with the common core technique in justifying the religious beliefs of one’s own without peripheralizing others. Buddhadasa writes: ‘... Whether Jesus Christ did or did not sacrifice His life is incidental to natural circumstances, and may have nothing to do with redemption whatsoever. Had he preached in India, especially in an era contemporary with that of the Lord Buddha, He might not have been forced into paying with His life and might have been able to continue preaching’\textsuperscript{23}. Such is a most convenient way to do away with all kinds of huge differences between various religious denominations.

Yet another method exemplified by Buddhadasa is that ‘no one religion — not even Buddhism — is in possession of comprehensive truth, even if all that it teaches is true.’ This statement of Venerable Buddhadasa facilitates some sort of inclusivism, for it leaves room for improvement within the home tradition and also shows openness to adding new truths\textsuperscript{24}.

\textsuperscript{23} Buddhadasa, Bhikkhu, Christianity and Buddhism, Sinclaire Thompson Memorial Lecture, Bangkok: Karn Pim Pranakorn Partnership, 1967, p. 115.

So Carus is of the view that Buddhism do condemn ‘exclusive devotion — even to Buddhism itself’\textsuperscript{25}. Now days in China and Japan, Buddhists often affiliate themselves with more than one religion. Dual or multiple religious allegiances are also the instances of Buddhist inclusivism. As the other tradition(s) are seen to supplement or coincide with Buddhist ends, and also Buddhism is the lens through which the other tradition is read. Inclusivists with dual affiliation are more likely than other inclusivists to keep Buddhism primary at a less conscious and less explicit level.

In conclusion we find that several scholars, like Prebish, Tweed, Rawlinson etc. have remarked that of all of the areas to which Buddhism has spread, American new Buddhism has the highest prevalence of inclusivism yet to be found in any Buddhist region. However, there are some scholars and practitioners who have expressed concern about such development of Buddhism and expressed that the tendency towards inclusivism is not a positive thing and also worrying that Western Buddhists are edging toward an incoherent eclecticism. Charles Prebish has opined that American Buddhists need to be more discriminating in absorbing various approaches. Otherwise, he writes, there will be, despite its initial popularity, an amalgam which is no longer Buddhist nor quite anything else and is ‘the salvation of nobody’\textsuperscript{26}. In similar fashin, Sonam Kazi, a Tibetan Buddhist teacher in the United States, ‘viewed the


American predilection for eclecticism with some disdain’. ‘You only end up’, he said, ‘with a concoction like chop suey’.

Religious Inclusivism in Ashokan Edict

If we talk anything about ancient Indian Buddhism and do not discuss the Mauryan King Asoka, the discussion remains incomplete as the figure of Asoka is unparallel in the history of Buddhism. His selfless efforts to apply the Buddhist teachings for the good governance are the fine example of a king who tried to do justice to his subjects irrespective of their faiths. He was the first king in the history of India who directly interacted with his subjects through engraving his messages on rocks, pillars etc. Two of his Rock Edicts the Seventh and the Twelfth Rock Edicts, express king Asoka’s wish that members of all faiths will live together peacefully in his kingdom, recognizing that many virtues are shared by the various religious traditions, despite their varying forms. Explicitly, he disparages intolerant and exclusivistic attitude of the religions. We quote the English translations of these two rock Edicts.

7th Major Rock Edict

“The Beloved of the Gods, the king Piyadassi, wishes that all sect may dwell in all places, for all seek self-control and purity of mind. But men have varying desires and varying passions. They

will either practise all that is required or else only a part. But even he who is generous, yet has no self control, purity of mind, gratitude, and firm faith, is regarded as mean.”

In this edict Asoka shows his religious tolerance, even he allowed his wives to profess other religion than Buddhism though he embraced Buddhism after the impacts of Kaliṅga’s war and it is said that one of his wives followed the doctrines of Ājivaka-s.

**12th Major Rock Edict**

“The Beloved of the Gods, the king Piyadassi, honours all sects and both ascetics and laymen, with gifts and various forms of recognition. But the Beloved of the Gods do not consider gifts or honour to be as important as the advancement of the essential doctrine of all sects. This progress of the essential doctrine takes many forms, but its basis is the control of one's speech, so as not to extol one's own sect or disparage another's on unsuitable occasions, or at least to do so only mildly on certain occasions. On each occasion one should honour another man's sect, for by doing so one increases the influence of one's own sect and benefits that of the other man; whereby doing otherwise one diminishes the influence of one's own sect and harms the other man's. Again, whosoever honours his own sect or disparages that of another man, wholly out of devotion to his own, with a view to showing it in a favourable light, harms his own sect even more seriously. Therefore, concord is to be commanded, so that men may hear one another’s principles and obey them. This is the desire of the
Beloved of the Gods, that all sects should be well-informed, and should teach that which is good, and that everywhere their adherents should be told, 'The Beloved of the Gods does not consider gifts or honour to be as important as the progress of the essential doctrine of all sects.' Many are concerned with this matter - the officers of Dhamma, the women's officers, the managers of the state farms, and other classes of officers. The result of this is the increased influence of one's own sect and glory to Dhamma.”

This edict is symbol of religious tolerance and a fine guideline for inter-religious dialogue and understanding.