



Buddhism and World Peace

Dr. Ch. Vijaya Kumar,
HOD, P.G. Dept. of History, Andhra Christian College, Guntur.

Abstract : *After the Kalinga War (261 B.C.) Emperor Asoka was greatly influenced by Buddhism. His Rock Edict II records how he sent forth missionaries to 'the limits of the distant countries to propagate Buddhism in the third century B.C. itself. Thus, the Buddhist monks came into contact with the elements of Greco-Roman culture. Buddha sensed the spiritual capacity. Buddhism was introduced in Tibet in the 7th century A.D. by the wives – one a Chinese and the other a Nepalese – of the first great Tibetan ruler Songsten Gampo, who established a united Tibet*

Key words: *Buddha , civilisation , Roman culture,*

Analysis

Siddhartha or the Buddha, founder of Buddhism, was born in 567 B.C. to Suddhodhana and Maya Devi of Kapilavastu. His life and teachings were to have a profound influence throughout Asia and beyond¹. Buddhism, the world's oldest missionary religion, was born out of Hinduism. As a condition of peace and a state of mind, it is purified from all feelings of antagonism. It lays emphasis on non-violence, charity, morality, patience and forgiveness. In no way it tolerates gaudy superstitions but considers reason as the determining criterion for belief. As a religion of kindness, humanity and equality, it is primarily a system of morality, not a religion of observances and sacrifices. Thus, it extolls the necessity of leading good life. Being a religious expression of culture and civilisation that flourished in India some 2500 years ago, Buddhism is an aspect of Indian social phenomena. Buddha's teachings centered round a totality of conditions, beliefs and rituals that existed at that time. Commit no wrong, but good deeds do and let thy heart be pure, are the quintessence of Buddhism². The noble Eightfold path

preached by this faith is essentially pragmatic. This prophet of the East sets forth his disciples to the neighboring countries with these words: 'Go ye now, and preach the most excellent law to all nations'³. Thus, Buddhism has, from the beginning, been a missionary religion and a great force for peace in the world.

Shortly, after the Kalinga War (261 B.C.) Emperor Asoka was greatly influenced by Buddhism. His Rock Edict II records how he sent forth missionaries to 'the limits of the distant countries to propagate Buddhism in the third century B.C. itself. Thus, the Buddhist monks came into contact with the elements of Greco-Roman culture. Buddha sensed the spiritual capacity⁴. Rock Edict II States: 'His sacred Majesty both here (in his dominions) and among all the frontier peoples even to the extent of six hundred yojanas were the Yavana King Antiochus (261 – 247 B.C.) by name and beyond that Antiochus, the four kings named Ptolemy (285 – 247 B.C.t) Antigono's (278 - 239 B.C.) Magas (300 - 258 B.C.) and Alexander (272 – 258 B.C.)⁵. Buddhist thought left its marks undeniably upon some phases of the western thought⁶.



The Nagas, the Satavahanas etc., propagated Buddhism far and wide. Through the political influence of the Kushans, Buddhism became almost the universal religion of the nomadic people that settled in the vast region between the shores of the Caspian Sea and the Great Wall of China. Difficult it is to exaggerate the influence which Buddhism and Indian culture exerted upon the ancient civilization of China. Bands of the Chinese Buddhist pilgrims like Fa-Hien and Hiuen Tsang undertook the journey to India, the holy land of their faith to study, at first hand, the religious beliefs and practices of the Indian Buddhists and to collect some Buddhist books, relics and images. Hundreds and thousands of the Buddhist books were carried away from India to China and there they were translated into Chinese. For this purpose not only did the Chinese learn Sanskrit and Pali but they also invited the Indian pandits (scholars) to China to collaborate with them in the arduous task of translating the sacred scriptures of Buddhism. In turn, it fostered assimilation of culture which led to international understanding and world peace.

According to tradition, Buddhism was introduced in Tibet in the 7th century A.D. by the wives – one a Chinese and the other a Nepalese – of the first great Tibetan ruler Songsten Gampo, who established a united Tibet.⁷ The Tibetan Buddhists came to India in large numbers and the geographical proximity helped them to have close contacts with the home land of Buddhism. Their monks studied at the Indian universities like Nalanda and Vikramasila in the 11th century A.D. and many Indian Buddhist monks, in turn, visited Tibet. Hundreds of the sacred texts of Buddhism were

translated into Tibetan of which Tajure and Kanjure were some of the famous collections. It has been a living faith in all these countries and has moulded their civilizations during the last 1500 years. Themselves, being the devoted worshippers of Buddhism, the kings of the 12th and 13th Centuries A.D. sent many Indian teachers to Tibet where they strengthened Buddhism. Collectively speaking, Buddhism was expanding in influence in the neighbouring lands of Tibet. Burma, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, China and Japan.

Culture is an act of developing the moral, intellectual and aesthetic nature of man and obviously Buddhism is connected with that type of culture. Asian culture is, as a whole Buddhist culture⁸. It is a well-known fact that culture and civilization flow in the wake of trade and commerce.

The spirit of brotherly love is the most important factor in Buddhism's final solution to the world problems. It assimilates the religious experiences of other nations. 'Recompense injury with goodness and hatred does not cease by hatred, hatred ceases by love' is the lofty moral thought of Buddhism that spread to China, Japan etc.⁹. It is a religious deliverance from evil by the eradication to all selfishness with its vanity, lust and hatred and to take refuge in an all-embracing love. Buddha taught his disciples the path of salvation and inculcated an unbounded love for all mankind, including one's won enemies. It is quite natural that his followers are anxious to extend the blessings of salvation to all humanity.

The Master's principle is all-comprehensive compassion to save the



entire world. When two kings were on the verge of war for the possession of a certain embodiment, Buddha pacified them by saying that the lives of men and the kings had more intrinsic value than a mound of earth¹⁰. Then the wrath of the two kings, abated and they came to a peaceful agreement because, the loving admonition of Buddha 'opened their eyes, bestowed understanding on them and led them to peace of mind'. What is more natural to a true hearted Buddhist than to make the blessings of Buddha's religion accessible to the multitudes:

Maitri (love), thought a neutral force, is the most powerful force in the world. If peace or love is not universal, it cannot be called peace at all. Buddhist maitri and goodwill towards all, should form the ultimate spiritual basis of her policy of dynamic neutrality in world affairs. The greatest of all victories is the key to peace.¹¹ Before the introduction of Buddhism, Tibet was the greatest military power in Asia. Burma, Siam and Cambodia were originally war-like, aggressive and diplomatic. The Mongol hordes overran the whole of Central Asia. China exhibited considerable military activity while Japan showed martial spirit. Except India, almost all the nations of Asia were originally no less purgation's and predatory. Their subsequent peacefulness is due very largely to the influence of the teachings of Buddhism. It has been in the past, is at present, and will continue to be in the future, a factor contributing to the establishment of universal peace. A third of the modern world is a Buddhist and this is no small achievement for Buddhism.

Buddhism made kingship and office, not a divine Institution. It

condemned slavery in the ancient world and waged a relentless war on caste system in India and strived for the equality of man¹². It changed the most barbarious invaders of central Asia into a most kind-hearted people with a sacred passion for universal benevolence and charity¹³. Being philosophical, it is a vehicle of salvation of mankind. It could conquer almost half of the world. It does not recognize the institution of private property but upholds the idea of universal brotherhood. Buddhism is at once, the most intensely missionary religion in the world and the most tolerant. His message was one of universal benevolence or of love for all¹⁴. It exalts individualism and the principle of toleration and denounces the forces of anarchy and pluralism. Monarchy, all through the regions Buddhism travelled, was tempered by its humanitarian ideals. It exhorted the rulers to be just, upright and honest¹⁵. The Buddhist sovereigns always summoned councils before taking any decisions.

Conclusion

Any religion is dead which does not missionaries and missionarising is a sure symptom of the life that is in religion. Buddhism or Dharma is a means to enlightenment¹⁶. Although Buddhism was predominating in many Asian countries, there was no record of any persecution by the Buddhists. They waged no religious wars. They were generally noted for their liberality towards other religions as tolerance has been its outstanding character from its inception. It implies peace, not as a condition of unstable political equilibrium but rather, a store of mind, purified from all feelings of antagonism and thoroughly permeated by impersonal



and universal maitri (love)¹⁷. Love, in the sense of maitri is the most powerful force in the world, but it is a neutral force. However, it exercised a profound civilising influence on the lives of the people, offered consolation to the oppressed and in the end built a bridge between the conquerors and their subjects¹⁸. The principle of non-violence, enunciated in Buddhism has contributed towards the establishment of cordial relations among the nations, and showed a genuine interest in the solution of the problems of tormented humanity and became actively associated with the organizations like the United Nations. Organization is working for international security and peace¹⁹. The spread of Buddhism around the globe fostered international understanding. As a humanist force, it profoundly influenced religious and moral ideas in its time and acted as a powerful catalytic factor in transforming the existing social conditions. Life and teachings of Buddha like those of Jesus Christ, who strived for the promotion of peace, are beyond the accidents of history²⁰.

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