

PREFACE TO ‘ THE ESSENCE OF BUDDHISM ’— THIRD EDITION

The author of this book was Prof. P. Lakshmi Narasu. While I have great pleasure in introducing this book to the public I confess that I had not met the author and known very little about his personal life. I have tried to obtain whatever details that could be gathered about his personal life and literary work. For this purpose, I have found Dr, Pattabhi Sitaramayya to be the source. He knew Prof. Narasu personally and was a friend of his. I give below the main facts in the life of Prof. Narasu as given to me by Dr. Pattabhi.

Prof. P. Lakshmi Narasu, B.A., was a prodigy of the last century. He was a graduate in Physics from the Madras Christian College. From being a tutor and demonstrator, he rose to the position of an Assistant Professor by 1897 and was given full charge of Physics and Chemistry for the B. A. classes in 1898-99, during the absence of Prof. Moffatt, the permanent Professor of Physics on leave. Prof. Moffatt was a raw youth who was appointed to the professorship over the head of Prof. Narasu who had already won his distinction in Physics in the sphere of wireless telegraphy – which in the nineties of the last century as yet in its infant stage of progress. During the years 1898 and 1899 Prof. Narasu, as he used to be called in those days, was already an Examiner in Physics and Chemistry — both for B. A. and M. A. Examinations. Prof. Narasu was particularly strong in Dynamics. Once when an alteration arose over the correctness of a question in Dynamics, Prof. Wilson, a hot-headed Englishman who was Professor of Chemistry in the Presidency College, Madras and Chairman of the Board of Examiners in Physics and Chemistry, questioned the correctness of the view expressed by Prof. Narasu regarding some problem in Dynamics. Prof. Narasu took up the challenge at once. ‘ Do you want to teach me, Mr. Narasu ’ asked the arrogant Wilson to which in reply Prof. Narasu retorted -after working out the problem — ‘ I am glad I am teaching Prof. Wilson something in Dynamics.’ The incident is of interest to us fifty years after its occurrence, because it shows

that Prof. Narasu was an Iconoclast. Prof. Narasu was a Social Reformer. He fought caste to the best of his ability and raised the standard of Revolt against its tyranny in Hinduism, so early as in the nineties of the 18th century. He was a great admirer of Buddhism and gave courses of lectures on the subject week in and week out. He was highly popular with his students over whom he exercised a magical personal influence so as to broaden their outlook and widen their visions. His sense of self-respect, both personal and national was of a high order and he did not stand the arrogance and sense of self-superiority of his European colleagues to whom he was always ready to give their due in the domain of scholarship but at whose hands he would not take insults lying down.

Prof. Narasu's eminence as an Educationist did not take long to obtain general and widespread recognition and era long he was promoted to the Principalship of the Pachiappa's College.

Prof. Narasu was a highly public-spirited citizen and took active part in the organization of a body known as the 'National Fund and Industrial Association' under whose auspices, petty donations were being collected with which aid was rendered to students who desired to go abroad for advanced technical education. Japan was the country which attracted the young man of the day and it was their ambition to learn the technique of various small industries and manufactures - notably - soap making, enamelling and paints manufacture and so on. But the Professor's one sin was social reform and in Buddhism he found his solace. He was one of the earliest to discern the evils of the caste system, early marriages and prohibition of widow marriage and it was then considered in Reform Circles a matter for gratification that one of his brothers was a practical Social Reformer, having married a widow. That was the era when Christian Missionaries were not only countenancing the social reform movement but viewed it with high favour as marking a half-way house between orthodox Hinduism and conversion to Christianity. It did not take long for them to change their views and look upon such progressive movements as constituting a real hindrance to proselytization. Prof. Narasu was the stalwart of the 19th century who had fought European arrogance with patriotic fervour, orthodox Hinduism with iconoclastic zeal, heterodox Brahmins with nationalistic vision and aggressive

Christianity with a rationalistic outlook - all under the inspiring banner of his unflagging faith in the teachings of the Great Buddha.

In recent times many people from different parts of India have been asking me to recommend a good book on Buddhism. In responding to their wishes, I felt no hesitation in suggesting Prof. Narasu's book. For, I think that it is the best book on Buddhism that has appeared so far. Unfortunately, the book has been out of print for a long time. I, therefore, decided to reprint it so that the desire of those who have an interest in the teachings of Buddhism may have in their hand a text which is complete in its treatment and lucid in its exposition. I must thank the representatives of the old firm of Varadachari and Co., Madras, who held the copy right of the original publication for permission to reprint the book.

In writing this foreword to this reprint, it was my intention to deal with some of the Criticisms which have been levelled against the teachings of Buddha by his adversaries—past and present. I have given up that intention for two reasons. In the first place, my health will not permit me to engage myself in this task. Secondly, I am myself working on a Life of Buddha and I think that I could deal with this matter better in my own work wherein I could do more justice to it than in a foreword to another man's work. I have taken this decision more especially because I am sure that the reader of Prof. Narasu's book will not suffer in any way as a result of my decision.

B. R. Ambedkar.¹

“RAJ GRAHA,”

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