17

BUDDHA AND FUTURE OF HIS RELIGION

I

Out of the many founders of Religion, there are four whose religions have not only moved the world in the past, but are still having a sway over the vast masses of people. They are Buddha, Jesus, Mahommed and Krishna. A comparison of the presonalities of these four and the poses they assumed in propagating their religions reveals certain points of contrast between the Buddha on the one hand and the rest on the other, which are not without significance.

The first point which mark off Buddha from the rest is his self-abnegation. All throughout the Bible, Jesus insists that he is the Son of God and that those who wish to enter the kingdom of God will fail, if they do not recognise him as the Son of God. Mahommed went a step further. Like Jesus he also claimed that he was the messenger of God on earth. But he further insisted that he was the last messenger. On that footing he declared that those who wanted salvation must not only accept that he was a messenger of God, but also accept that he was the last messenger. Krishna went a step beyond both Jesus and Mahommed. He refused to be satisfied with merely being the Son of the God or being the messenger of God; he was not content even with being the last messenger of God. He was not even satisfied with calling himself a God. He claimed that he was '*Parameshwar*' or as his followers describe him "*Devadhideva*" God of Gods. Buddha never arrogated to himself any such status. He was born as a son of man and was content to remain a common man and preached his gospel as a common man. He never claimed any supernatural origin or supernatural powers nor did he perform miracles to prove his supernatural powers. The Buddha made a clear distinction between a *Margadata* and a *Mokshadata*. Jesus, Mahommed and Krishna claimed for themselves the *Mokshadata*. The Buddha was satisfied with playing the role of a *Margadata*.

There is also another distinction between the four religious teachers. Both Jesus and Mohammed claimed that what they taught was the word of God and as a word of God what they taught was infallible and beyond question. Krishna was according to his own assumption a God of Gods and therefore what he taught being a word of God, uttered by God, they were original and final and the question of infallibility did not even arise. The Buddha claimed no such infallibility for what he taught. In the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* He told Ananda that His religion was based on reason and experience and that his followers should not accept his teaching as correct and binding merely because they emanated from Him. Being based on reason and experience they were free to modify or even to abandon any of his teachings if it was found that at a given time and in given circumstances they do not apply. He wished, His religion not to be encumbered with the dead wood of the past. He wanted that it should remain evergreen and serviceable at all times. That is why He gave liberty to His followeres to chip and chop as the necessities of the case required. No other religious teacher has shown such courage. They were afraid of permitting repair. As the liberty to repair may be used to demolish the structure they had reared. Buddha had no such fear. He was sure of his foundation. He knew that even the most violent iconoclast will not be able to destroy the core of His religion.

II

Such is the unique position of Buddha. What about his religion ? How does it compare with those founded by his rivals ?

Let us first compare Buddhism with Hinduism. In the short space available the comparison must be limited to a few important points indeed only to two.

Hinduism is a religion which is not founded on morality. Whatever morality Hinduism has it is not an integral part of it. It is not imbeded in religion. It is a separate force which is sustained by social necessities and not by injunction of Hindu religion. The religion of the Buddha is morality. It is imbeded in religion. Buddhist religion is nothing if no morality. It is true that in Buddhism there is no God. In place of God there is morality. What God is to other religions morality is to Buddhism.

It is very seldom recognised that He propounded a most revolutionary meaning of the word *"Dhamma"*. The Vedic meaning of the *word "Dharma"* did not connote morality in any sense of the word. The *Dharma* as enunciated by the Brahmins and as propounded in the *Purvamimansa* of Jamini meant nothing more than the performances of certain *karmas* or to use terminology of the Roman religion observances. *Dharma* to Brahmins meant keeping up of observances, i.e. *Yagans, Yagas* and sacrifices to Gods. This was the essence of the Brahmanic or Vedic Religion. It had nothing to do with morality.

The word *Dhamma* as used by the Buddha, had nothing to do with rituals or observances. In fact he repudiated the *Yagas* and *Yagnas* as being essence of religion. In place of *Karma* he substituted morality as the essence of *Dhamma.* Although the word *Dhamma* was used by Brahmanic teachers as well as by the Buddha, the content of both is radically and fundamentally different. In fact, it might be stated that the Buddha was the first teacher in the world who made morality the essence and foundation of religion. Even Krishna as may be seen from Bhagvat Geeta was not able to extricate himself from the old conception of religion being equivalent of rituals and observances. Many people seem to be lured by the doctrine of *Nishkam Karma* other wise called *Anasaktiyoga* preached by Krishna in the Bhagvat Geeta. It is taken to mean in Boyscout sense of doing good without the expectation of reward. This interpretation of the *Nishkam Karma* is a complete misunderstanding of what it really means. The word *Karma* in the phrase *Nishkam Karma* does not mean, action in the generic sense of the word *Kanna* meaning 'deed'. It is used in its original sense in which it is used by the Brahmins and Jamini. On the point of observances there is only one point of difference between Jamini and the Bhagvat Geeta. The observance which used to be performed by the Brahmins fell into two classes :

(*i*) *Nitya Karmas and*

(*ii*) *Naimitika Kaunas*

The *Nitya Karmas* were observances which were enjoined to be performed regularly for which reasons they were

called *Nitya* and as a matter of religious duty, for which there was not to be any expectation of reward. On that account they were also called *Nishkam Karmas*. The other category of *Karmas* was called *Naimitika* that is to say they were performed whenever there was occasion, that is, whenever there was a desire to perform them and they were called *Kamya Karmas* because from their performance some benefit was expected to come. What Krishna condemned in the Bhagvat Geeta was *Kamya Karmas*. He did not condemn *Nishkama Karmas*. On the other hand he extolled them. The point to be borne in mind is, even for Krishna religion did not consist of morality. It consisted of *Yagnas* and *Yagas* through of the *Nishkama Karmas* category.

This is one point of contrast between Hinduism and Buddhism. The second point of contrast lies in the fact that the official gospel of Hinduism is inequality. The doctrine of *Chaturvarna* is the concrete embodiment of this gospel of inequality. On the other hand Buddha stood for equality. He was the greatest opponent of *Chaturvarna*. He not only preached against it, fought against it, but did everything to uproot it. According to Hinduism neither a *Shudra* nor a woman could become a teacher of religion nor could they take *Sannyasa* and reach God. Buddha on the other hand admitted *Shudras* to the *Bhikkhu Sangha*. He also admitted women to become *Bhikkhunis*. Why did he do so? Few people seem to realise the importance of this step. The answer is that Buddha wanted to take concrete steps to destroy the gospel of inequality. Hinduism had to make many changes in its doctrines as a result of an attack made by Buddha. It gave up *Himsa*. It was prepared to give up the doctrine of the infallibility of the Vedas. On the point of *Chaturvarna* neither side was prepared to yield. Buddha was not prepared to give up his opposition to the doctrine of *Chaturvarna,* That is the reason why Brahmanism has so much more hatred and antagonism against Buddhism than it has against Jainism. Hinduism has to recognise the force of the Buddha's arguments against *Chaturvarna*. But instead of yielding to its logic Hinduism developed a new philosophic justification for *Chaturvarna*. This new philosophic justification is to be found in the Bhagvat Geeta. Nobody is able to say for certain what the

Bhagvat Geeta teaches. But this much is beyond question that the Bhagvat Geeta upholds the doctrine of *Chaturvarna.* In fact it appears that this was the main purpose for which it was written. And how does the Bhagvat Geeta justify it ? Krishna says that he as God created the system of *Chaturvarna* and he constructed it on the basis of the theory of *Guna - Karma*-which means that he prescribed the status and occupation of every individual in accordance with his innate *gunas* (or qualities). Two things are clear. One is that this theory is new. The old theory was different. According to the old theory the foundation of *Chaturvarna* was the authority of the Vedas. As the Vedas were infallible so was the system of *Chaturvarna* on which it rested. The attack of the Buddha on the infallibility of the Vedas had destroyed the validity of this old foundation of *Chaturvarna.* It is quite natural that Hinduism which was not prepared to give up *Chaturvarna* and which it regarded as its very soul should attempt to find for it a better foundation which the Bhagvat Geeta proposes to do. But how good is this new justification given by Krishna in the Bhagvat Geeta ? To most Hindus it appears to be quite convincing, so convincing that they believe it to be irrefutable. Even to many non-Hindus it appears to be very plausible, very enticing. If the *Chaturvarna* had depended only on the authority of the Vedas I am sure it would have long disappeared. It is the mischievous and false doctrine of the Bhagvat Geeta which has given this *Chaturvarna*-which is the parent of the caste-system-apparently a perpetual loss of life. The basic conception of this new doctrine is taken from the Sankhya philosophy. There is nothing original about it. The originality of Krishna lies in applying it to justify *Chaturvarna.* It is in its application that the fallacy lies, Kapila, the author of the Sankhya system held that there is no God, that God is necessary only because matter is believed to be dead. But matter is not dead. It is active. Matter consists of three *Gunas : Raj, Tamas and Satva. Prakriti* appears to be dead only because the three *gunas* are in an equilibrium. When the equilibrium is disturbed by one of the *gunas* becoming dominant over the other two, *Prakriti* becomes active. This is the sum and subtance of the Sankhya philosophy. There can be no quarrel with this theory. It is perhaps true. It may therefore be granted that each

individual as a form of *Prakriti* is made up of the three *gunas*. It may even be granted that among the three *gunas* there is a competition for dominance of one over the other. But how could it be granted that a particular *guna* in a particular individual which at one time—say at the time of his birth-happens to dominate his other *gunas* will continue to dominate them for all times, till his death? There is no ground for this assumption either in the Sankhya philosophy or in actual experience. Unfortunately neither Hitler nor Mussolini were born when Krishna propounded his theory. Krishna would have found considerable difficulty in explaining how a signboard painter and a bricklayer could become dictators capable of dominating the world. The point of the matter is that the *Prakriti* of an individual is always changing because the relative position of the *gunas* is always changing. If the *gunas* are ever changing in their relative position of dominance there can be no permanent and fixed system of classification of men into *varnas* and no permanent and fixed assignment of occupations. The whole theory of the Bhagvat Geeta therefore falls to the ground. But as I have said the Hindus have become infatuated by its plausibility and its "good look" and have become slaves of it. The result is that Hinduism continues to uphold the Varna system with its gospel of social inequality. These are two of the evils of Hinduism from which Buddhism is free.

III

Some of those, who believe that only the acceptance of the Gospel of Buddha can save the Hindus are filled with sorrow, because they do not see much prospect of the return or revival of Buddhism in India. I do not share this pessimism.

In the matter of their attitude to their religion, Hindus today fall into two classes. There are those who hold that, 'all religions are true including Hindu' and the leaders of other religions seem to join them in this slogan. There cannot be a thesis more false than the thesis that all religions are true. However this slogan gives the Hindus, who have raised it, the support of the followers of other religions. There are Hindus who have come to realize that there is something wrong with their religion, the only thing is that they are not ready to denounce it openly. This

attitude is understandable. Religion is a part of one's social inheritance. One's life and dignity and pride are bound up with it. It is not easy to abandon one's religion. Patriotism comes in "My country" right or wrong. "My religion" right or wrong. Instead of abandoning it the Hindus are finding escape in other ways. Some are consoling themselves with the thought that all religions are wrong, so why bother about religion at all. The same feeling of patriotism prevents them from openly embracing Buddhism. Such an attitude can have only one result. Hinduism will lapse and cease to be a force of governing life. There will be void, which will have the effect of disintegrating the Hindu Society. Hindus then will be forced to take a more positive attitude. When they do so, they can turn to nothing except Buddhism.

This is not the only ray of hope, there are hopes coming from other quarters also.

There is one question which every religion must answer. What mental and moral relief does it bring to the suppressed and the downtroddon ? If it does not, then it is doomed. Does Hinduism give any mental and moral relief to the millions of Backward Classes and the Scheduled Castes ? It does not. Do Hindus expect these Backward Classes and the Scheduled Castes to live under Hinduism which gives them no promise of mental and moral relief ? Such an expectation would be an utter futility. Hinduism is floating on a volcano. To-day it appears to be extinct. But it is not. It will become active once these mighty millions have become conscious of their degradation and know that it is largely due to the social philosophy of the Hindu religion. One is reminded of the overthrow of Paganism by Christianity in the Roman Empire. When the masses realized that Paganism could give them no mental and moral relief they gave it up and adopted Christianity. What happened in Rome is sure to happen in India. The Hindu masses when they are enlightened are sure to turn to Buddhism.

IV

So much by way of comparison between Hinduism and Buddhism, how does Buddhism, and in comparison with other non-Hindu Religions? It is impossible to take each of these non-Hindu Religions and compare with Buddhism, in detail.

All I can do is to put my conclusions in a summary form. I maintain that:—

(i) That society must have either the sanction of law or the sanction of morality to hold it together. Without either, society is sure to go to pieces.

In all societies, law plays a very small part. It is intended to keep the minority within the range of social discipline. The majority is left and has to be left to sustain its social life by the postulates and sanction of morality. Religion in the sense of morality, must therefore, remain the governing principle in every society.

(ii) That religion as defined in the first proposition must be in accord with science. Religion is bound to lose its respect and therefore becomes the subject of ridicule and thereby not merely loses its force as a governing principle of life, but might in course of time disintegrate and lapse, if it is not in accord with science. In other words, religion if it is to function, must be in accord with reason which is merely another name for science.

(iii) That religion as a code of social morality, must also stand together another test. It is not enough for religion to consist of a moral code, but its moral code must recognise the fundamental tenets of liberty, equality and fraternity. Unless a religion recognises these three fundamental principles of social life, religion will be doomed.

(iv) That religion must not sanctify or ennoble poverty. Renunciation of riches by those who have it, may be a blessed state, but poverty can never be. To declare poverty to be a blessed state is to pervert religion, to perpetuate vice and crime, to consent to make earth a living hell.

Which religion fulfils these requirements ? In considering this question it must be remembered that the days of the Mahatmas are gone and the world cannot have a new Religion. It will have to make its choice from those that exist. The question must therefore be confined to existing religions.

It may be that one of the existing religions satisfies one of these tests, some two. Question is — Is there any religion which

satisfies all these tests ? So far as I know, the only religion which satisfies all these tests is Buddhism. In other words Buddhism is the only religion which world can have. If the new world—which be it realised is very different from the old-must have a religion—and the new world needs religion far more than the old world did—then it can only be religion of the Buddha.

All this may sound very strange. This is because most of those who have written about Buddha have propagated the idea that the only thing Buddha taught was *Ahimsa.* This is a great mistake. It is true Buddha taught *Ahimsa.* I do not want to minimise its importance. For it is a great doctrine. The world cannot be saved unless it follows it. What I wish to emphasize is that Buddha taught many other things besides *Ahimsa.* He taught as part of his religion, social freedom, intellectual freedom, economic freedom and political freedom. He taught equality, equality not between man and man only, but between man and woman. It would be difficult to find a religious teacher to compare with Buddha, whose teachings embrace so many aspects of the social life of people, whose doctrines are so modern and with main concern to give salvation to man in his life on earth and not to promise it in heaven after he is dead!

V

How could this ideal of spreading Buddhism be realised ? Three steps appear to be quite necessary.

First : To produce a Buddhist Bible.

Second : To make changes in the organisation, aims and objects of the *Bhikkhu Sangha.*

Third : To set up a world Buddhist Mission.

The production of a Bible of Buddhism is the first and foremost need. The Buddhist literature is a vast literature. It is impossible to expect a person who wants to know the essence of Buddhism to wade through the sea of literature. The greatest advantage which the other religions have over Buddhism is that each has a gospel which every one can carry with him and read wherever he goes. It is a handy thing. Buddhism suffers for not

having such a handy gospel. The Indian *Dhammapada* has failed to perform the function which a gospel is expected to. Every great religion has been built on faith. But faith cannot be assimilated if presented in the form of creeds and abstract dogmas. It needs something on which the imagination can fasten—some myth or epic or gospel—what is called in journalism, a story. The *Dhammapada* is not fastened around a story. It seeks to build faith on abstract dogmas.

The proposed gospel of Buddhism should contain (i) a short life of Buddha (ii) The *Chinese Dhammapada* (iii) Some of the important Dialogues of Buddha and (iv) Buddhist Ceremonies, birth, initiation, marriage and death. In preparing such a gospel the linguistic side of it must not be neglected. It must make the language in which it is produced live. It must become an incantation instead of being read as narrative or an ethical exposition. Its style must be lucid, moving and must produce an hypnotic effect.

There is a world's difference between a Hindu *Sannyasi* and a *Buddhist Bhikkhu.* A Hindu *Sanyasi* has nothing to do with the world. He is dead to the world. *A Bhikkhu* has everything to do with the world. That being so the question arises, what was the purpose for which the Buddha thought of establishing the *Bhikkhu Sangha* ? What was the necessity for creating a separate society of *Bhikkhus* ? One purpose was to set up a society which would live up to the *Buddhist* idea embodied in the principles of Buddhism and serve as a model to the laymen. Buddha knew that it was not possible for a common man to realize the Buddhist ideal. But He also wanted that the common man should know what the ideal was and also wanted there should be placed before the common man a society of men who were bound to practise His ideals. That is why He created the *Bhikkhu Sangha* and bound it down by the rules of *Vinaya.* But there were other purposes which He had in his mind when He thought of founding the *Sangha.* One such purpose was to create a body of intellectuals to give the laymen true and impartial guidance. That is the reason why He prohibited the *Bhikkhus* from owning property. Ownership of property is one of the greatest obstacles in free thinking and application of free thought.

The other purpose of Buddha in founding the *Bhikkhu Sangha* was to create a society the members of which would be free to do service to the people. That is why He did not want the *Bhikkhus* to marry.

Is the *Bhikkhu Sangha* of today living up to these ideals ?

The answer is emphatically in the negative. It neither guides the people nor does it serve them.

The *Bhikkhu Sangha* in its present condition can therefore be of no use for the spread of Buddhism. In the first place there are too many *Bhikkhus*. Of these a very large majority are merely *Sadhus* and *Sanyasis* spending their time in meditation or idleness. There is in them neither learning nor service. When the idea of service to suffering humanity comes to one's mind every one thinks of the Ramakrishna Mission. No one thinks of the Buddhist *Sangha*. Who should regard service as its pious duty the *Sangha* or the Mission? There can be no doubt about the answer. Yet the *Sangha* is a huge army of idlers. We want fewer *Bhikkhus* and we want *Bhikkhus* highly educated, *Bhikkhu Sangha* must borrow some of the features of the Christian priesthood particularly the Jesuists. Christianity has spread in Asia through service—educational and medical. This is possible because the Christian priest is not merely versed in religious lore but because he is also versed in Arts and Science. This was really the ideal of the *Bhikkhus* of olden times. As is well known the Universities of Nalanda and Taxila were run and manned by *Bhikkhus*. Evidently they must have been very learned men and knew that social service was essential for the propagation of their faith. The *Bhikkhus* of today must return to the old ideal. The *Sangha* as is composed cannot render this service to the laity and cannot therefore attract people to itself.

Without a Mission Buddhism can hardly spread. As education requires to be given, religion requires to be propagated. Propagation cannot be undertaken without men and money. Who can supply these ? Obviously the countries where Buddhism is a living religion. It is these countries which must find the men and money at least in its initial stages. Will these ? There does not seem to be much enthusiasm in these countries for the spread of Buddhism.

On the other hand time seems quite propitious for the spread of Buddhism. There was a time when religion was part of one's own inheritance. At one time a boy or a girl inherited the religion of his or her parent alongwith the property of the parent. There was no question of examining the merit and virtues of religion. Sometimes the heir did question, whether the property left by the parents was worth taking. But no heir was there to question whether the religion of his or her parents was worth having. Time seems to have changed. Many person throughout the world have exhibited an unprecedent piece of courage with regard to inheritance of their religion. Many have, as a result of the influence of scientific enquiry, come to the conclusion that religion is an error, which ought to be given up. There are others who, as a result of the Marxian teaching, have come to the conclusion that religion is opium which induces the poor people to submit to the domination of the rich and should be discarded. Whatever be the causes, the fact remains, that people have developed an inquiring mind in respect of religion. And the question whether religion is at all worth having and if so which religion is worth having, are questions which are uppermost in the minds of those who dare to think about this subject. Time has come, what is wanted is will. If the countries which are Buddhist can develop the will to spread Buddhism the task of spreading Buddhism will not be difficult. They must realize that the duty of a Buddhist is not merely to be a good Buddhist, his duty is to spread Buddhism. They must believe that to spread Buddhism is to serve mankind.[1]

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[1] : Magazine 'Maha Bodhi': Maha Bodhi Society Journal, Culculta ; Vaishak Number, Vol. 58, May 1950.