

Good essay on formations: the buddha and his dharma

[Religion](#), [Buddhism](#)



According to a recent scholarly opinion, Buddha sometimes lived between fifth and fourth century BCE. But there are several controversial views on the exact birth of Buddha. The author gives a thorough review of the ancient Indian social system. Sanskrit was the prominent language, and the society was divided into different segments, what we can call a social hierarchy. On the apex of the hierarchy was priest or Brahmins. 'The priests, or brahmanas (anglicized as "Brahmins") occupied an elite position in this early, village-based society' (Berkwitz 14) While telling the reason of the highest position of Brahmin Berkwitz (p. 14) states, 'they were the ones who recited and preserved the Sanskrit hymns that were uttered during the performance of sacrifices to the gods.' (p. 14). Second position there were Kshatriyas or Warriors, followed by Vaisya. They would provide food, and goods and the lowest among the hierarchy were the Shudras. They were the servants of upper classes. The Buddhist monk rejected the path of Brahmins to perform rituals for material pleasure, and they started taking interest in renounced life.

The problem of rebirth also has been thoroughly discussed by the writer in this chapter. The main reason according to religious scholars behind a rebirth is the strong desire. The author also talks thoroughly about Buddha and his Dharma. In this, the author tells about the enlightenment of Buddha after his meditation. The events and phenomena are interdependent. The event arises due to their dependence on other factor or condition. This insight of Buddha was like a revolutionary discovery. The ultimate pleasure, as told by Buddha is possible after the complete destruction of ignorance and desire. In the first sermon after enlightenment, Buddha gives a new path

called “ Noble Eightfold” path, which consists of eight factors, and they are divided into three groups; wisdom, morality and concentration. The writer also throws light on Buddha’s Four Noble Truths which are the solution of the problems of the human condition. The first one is the reality of a Dukkha or suffering; the second is the cause of Dukkha and third is cessation of dukkha or sufferings. The way to overcome sufferings is to be free from craving.

The relationship between urbanization and the rise of Buddhism in the Gangetic plain is not clear. Urban areas were fertile grounds for the growth of new religious movements like Buddhism that are different from Brahmanical tradition and social hierarchy determined by birth.

The monk used to dwell in temporary structures near villages and towns.

They started getting donations from the wealthy lay donors. Buddha permitted donations if they were given to the Sangha and not an individual. Buddha was against the Brahmanical claims to superiority and purity based on birth. Buddha also refuted the doctrines and practices of the Jain.

Foundations: Mainstream Buddhist texts and communities

The writer starts the chapter with the concept of Sangha. Buddha had established Sangh before he left the world. Dharma was transmitted orally when Buddha was alive. The wandering phase of monks and nuns changed and they started living a settled life. The process ‘ is sometimes referred to as the “ domestication” of Sangha.’ (Berkwitz p. 34) Buddha allowed them to live in the residence donated by the devotees. There are four offenses for monks and nuns they are 1. Engaging in sexual relation, 2. Theft, . 3. Murder 4. Boasting.

The code of conduct called Pratimoksha was adopted by Sanghas. It was the

list of rules of how a monk should live their aesthetic life. The rules became necessary as the number of monks and nuns grew and expanded to new regions. The author also has thrown light on the concept of Vinaya. Previously reluctant on involving women in the path of renunciation, eventually Buddha agreed to involve them in the spiritual path. The women are known as Bhiksuni. Certain rules are there for Bhiksuni in Buddhism. Many of the women are renowned for their spiritual accomplishment. Though the involvement of women in Sangha was controversial, they were very active members of Sangha.

The council or the meeting of monks was first held in Rajagrha, and the second council was held in Vaishali and then in Pataliputra. After that many types of council were held. The councils helped to understand the crucial aspect of the canon formation.

Various Buddhist canons were composed variously by different monastic orders orally and written over several centuries. After the Parinirvana of Buddha, Sangha began to divide into different schools within a century. Many Buddhist schools structured their thought and scholarship around their respective Abhidharma literature. Every school had different abhidharma. Though their content was different, they gave the same teaching according to the Sutras of Buddha.

The writer discusses about the fourfold higher reality such as rupa (matter), cetasika (mental factors), citta (consciousness) and unconditioned state of Nirvana

Origins and development of the Mahāyāna

In this chapter, the author talks about the origin of lay practice. For making lay practice more relevant it is important to know the origin and development of Mahayana; a school of Buddhism. Buddhist laity has the responsibility to support Sangha in establishing Dharma. The five virtues a Buddhist laity should have are faith (Shraddha), morality (Sheela), generosity (Tyaga), learning (Shruta) and wisdom (Prajna). The faith is not the complete acceptance of what Buddha says. The author discusses all these five virtues. The laity can offer gifts to Sangha. ' Emperor Ashoka contributed directly to the growth and spread of Buddhism.' (Berkwitz p. 70) It was also a custom to offer to the destructive spirits such as Yakshas or Pretas, who are believed to be there to threaten the ordinary people with death, and disease. (Berkwitz p. 70)

After the death of Buddha, the Stupa worship began. The Stupas were built by the lay devotees. The Mahayana theory emerged out of lay-dominated stupa cult was rejected. The forest practitioners were exalted in early Mahayana texts. The prominence was given to wilderness dwelling. Many arguments and debates took place on the authenticity of Mahayana texts. There were old texts and new texts. The texts were memorized earlier, but with the discovery of writing, the literate monks could write down their revelation and that material could be copied and circulated as well as preserved. A number of early Mahayana Sutras emphasized spectacular visions of other realms or vivid descriptions of celestial land of Bliss. Dedicating our life for being Buddha himself is the real way of happiness. The philosopher Nagarjuna was the pioneer of Mahayana approach to

Buddhist thoughts. His work draws on the notion of emptiness. Much has been informed by the author in this chapter, about Nagarjuna and his philosophy such as emptiness, and truth. Later on, Bhavaviveka wrote commentaries on Nagarjuna's ideas. Asang and Vasubandhu developed some ideas in conjunction with the early Mahayana Sutra, which address to the role of consciousness in determining one's experience. Many scholars later on studied on the term consciousness. The teaching of Tathagatagarbha (Womb of Buddhhood) arose in South Asia in certain sutras associated with early Mahayana.

Perfection of Wisdom and Nāgārjuna

The Mahayana doctrine talks prominently on the “ Perfection of Wisdom.” At first the author in this chapter explains the vastness of the Perfection of Wisdom Sutras, which has 100, 000 verses. Rahulbhadra was one of the Buddhist Siddhas. The author focuses on two Buddhist scholars and their perspectives on Wisdom. The two scholars were Guru-Shishya (Teacher-Disciple) Rahulbhadra was a Buddhist Siddhi, and he was a teacher of great philosopher Nagarjuna. The interpretation of the verse is that see the things with detachment and you will get real happiness. If you start seeing things with attachment, your miseries will start. The author points out the element called “ empty” (Shunya). Things do not exist the way we look at it. If we want to be enlightened, the phase of emptiness is very important. If you are conscious about your existence, you will never be enlightened.

The theme of Buddhism “ The Middle Way” is also discussed in the chapter. Middle way theme is associated with avoiding two extremes. The Perfection

of Wisdom lies in giving up two extremes and following the path of Middle Way.

Nagarjuna is the Buddhist philosopher, who founded Madhyamika School. He is believed to be the first systemiser of Perfection of Wisdom doctrines.

Nagarjuna had a keen appreciation for the dynamics of reality. Nagarjuna was criticized by his opponents by calling him “ nay-sayer”, or nihilist who denied all realities.

The writer focuses on the two truths; the Ultimate Truth (Paramarthsatya) and Conventional Truth (Samvrtisatya) which is also known as “ relative truth” Nagarjuna mentions the theory of these two truths. Nagarjuna equates emptiness with interdependent origination. Nagarjuna further states that for understanding the teaching of Buddha, it is crucial to know the distinction between two truths. While talking about “ Nirvana”, Nagarjuna states that Nirvana and Samsara are not distinct or separable. The chapter discussed two argumentative views. It is an argument between Nagarjuna and his opponents on the theme of truth, emptiness and nirvana.

Tantric Teaching

The ultimate objective of every human life is to gain peace and happiness and to attain complete enlightenment. The base of Buddhism is on the objective of getting free from desire and attaining enlightenment. There are various ways of attaining the enlightenment. Tantric Buddhism emerged out of Nonduality perception. John Strong describes the concept of non-duality. Non-duality is the term associated with the non-difference between Atman and Brahmana. The objective of this non-duality is to realize one's self

Tantric Buddhism is also known as Vajrayana. It appeared in India in around 6th century A. D. The tantric Buddhism is completely different from Sutras. The exact period of the emergence of Tantra is not possible to mention. The Buddhist Tantra is very close to Vajrayana sects of Tibetan Buddhism. It is not possible for every person to escape from his worldly duty and live an ascetic life. His duties also are equally important for him.

Tantric teaching is based on the non-distinguishing status of Samsara and Nirvana. (Strong 206) The concept behind it is that the person can attain salvation by keeping himself in Samsara. The spirituality can be attained by living in Samsara, and the person does not need to escape himself from the bondage of his worldly life. 'Tantra asserted that the enlightenment could be attained by means of things of this world itself.' Our body, speech, mind everything is bestowed by God. We can use them as a drive or tool to lead our path towards spirituality. The Vajrayana is commonly considered a shortcut to enlightenment. Tantric Buddhism has placed on the idea that if we want to be free from something, we should use that 'something' for our freedom. For example, if we want to be free from poison, the best way is to use poison itself. Similarly water in the ear can be removed by water, or thorn can be removed with the help of thorn. The same logic is applied in the process of removing miseries from human life. Passion or desire is the cause of every misery. In such circumstances, the passion itself should be used as a tool to get rid of passions.

Strong has finely described the Tantric Buddhism. The Tantra and sutra are two complete different ways to follow Buddhism. We can say that Sutra is philosophically inclined path whereas Tantra is mystical.

Sources

Berkwitz Stephen. South Asian Buddhism: A Survey Routledge Publication. 2012.

Strong John. The Experience of Buddhism. Wadsworth/Thomson Learning Publication. 2002