

THE POLITICS OF METAPHYSICS IN INDIAN PHILOSOPHY

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Abstract: From ancient times to the present, concerning the Indian subcontinent, the caste system has been occupying every sphere of Indian society, culture, religion, philosophy, etc. The caste problem has influenced every philosophical discourse from the classical era to contemporary times. Most of the modern Indian political thinkers either justified the caste system or critiqued casteism but strongly supported the "Varṇa-system," hence casteism from the backdoor, or gave no place to the problem of caste in their writings. In India, any discourse on philosophy in contemporary times cannot be expected to be untouched by the flavor of classical Indian philosophical thoughts. In this article, the author would argue that, regarding classical Indian philosophy, it has been a general perception that the roots of all the schools of Indian philosophy lie in the Upanishads. Many prominent scholars of modern India strongly advocated this view, e.g., Swami Vivekananda, S Radhakrishnan, P V Kane, R D Ranade, etc. Still, one thing that can be observed in the methods of all these scholars is that they all show the similarities between the metaphysical theories of Upanishads and that of any other school of Indian philosophy which they wish to show been rooted in Upanishads; they conclude that the roots of all the schools of Indian philosophy lie in Upanishads; while ignoring their practical repercussions on the Indian social structure of the time. In this contrast, the author will try to deconstruct the central arguments of the prominent colonial and modern Indian thinkers and will attempt to demonstrate what has disappeared from the entire scenario of the reconstruction of the history of Indian philosophy, i.e., "emergence of Buddhism as an alternative to Vedic-Brāhmanism," "the co-opting pattern of Brāhmanism" by exploring the historicity of its foundational metaphysical concepts, and "how that Brāhmanical pattern is used in the modern era."

Introduction

"Recently, many Third World scholars have questioned and criticized colonial historiography¹ and its reconstruction of the past. Most prominently, the Chinese took the lead in this direction; they critiqued colonial history in their national struggle. To a large extent, Mao was responsible for the creative application of dialectical materialism to Chinese history." In India, Ambedkar was the first who engaged in such an extensive critique, and many Marxist, subaltern, and Dalit historiographers have also worked upon this project in their own way. Each school has its own historical and socio-political context which contribute to its method in writing Indian history, polity, philosophy and other disciplines. Every school presents its argument in relation to one another. 1980s mark the turning point in Indian history in bringing new epistemological positions corresponding to the struggles of Dalits, women, and Adivasis; caste, gender, region became reference points in the writing of history of any discipline including that of Indian philosophy. Dalit historiography poses challenges to colonial, Hindu nationalist, as well as the historians of subaltern studies. In this context philosopher and historiographer B.R. Ambedkar examines many dimensions of ancient India and provides a new framework to understand ancient Indian philosophical thoughts through the inner contradictions of Indian society from the Buddhist point of view. Many other scholars throughout India have endeavored to reconstruct the history of various dimensions of Indian

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¹ Historiography is an analytical meta-level study of descriptions of the past. The study generally focuses on other historians' narratives, interpretations, or presentation methods. Conal Furay and Michael J. Salevouris (1988) define "historiography" as "the study of the way history has been and is written, i.e., the study of historical writings. When you study historiography, you do not study the events of the past directly; rather, you study the changing interpretations of those events in the works of individual historians."

scholarship through Buddhist perspective in which one finds a dignified place for the downtrodden of Indian society. This article is also a trivial effort in the same direction.

I. Historiographies of Indian Political Thoughts: From Colonial, Hindu Nationalist to Post Independence

In the modern period, attempts to study ancient Indian political thought have often been plagued by the colonial construction of Indian history. The arrival of officials from the East India Company could be held responsible for laying the foundation for Indology. Colonial scholars divided the political history of India on a communal basis, i.e., the Hindu era, the Muslim era, and the Christian era. These were inspired by and served the Britishers' "divide and rule policy," which furthered imperialist interest. Later, as the struggle to get representation in the colonial government intensified, Hindu nationalist scholars challenged the colonial perspective of looking at India's past and endeavored to project a more glorified version of it instead. However, the communal framework set by colonial scholars driven by imperialist interests remained the same. The Indian past before Muslim rule (i.e., before around 1200 A.D.) was oversimplified and put under a single umbrella term, the "Hindu past." The inner contradictions of the Indian society, i.e., the historical and philosophical grounds of the caste system, which is deeply rooted in Indian society with its history of the development of enslavement in society, were overlooked. The author of this article's concern is not to compare the "theories" or "explanations" of these accounts with the "facts" of Indian history. On the contrary, the author is trying to say that those facts themselves have been produced by some "dominating ideological frameworks" that were inspired by the interests of the dominant classes of the society to directly or indirectly justify the existing exploitative societal structure.

From the 6th century B.C.E to the 3rd century B.C.E witnessed a primary transitional phase in the evolution of Indian political thought. Many religious sects and philosophical schools originated in this phase. Buddhism had a more profound impact on the then-hierarchical social structure than any other school and soon emerged as an alternative to the hierarchical and inegalitarian ideology of Brāhmanism. Buddhism included the oppressed section of society and presented a socio-political and economic solution to the caste problem. The society envisaged by Buddha was based on rational principles, unlike the ritualistic Vedic-Brahminical system. While Buddhism did not envisage the complete eradication of social inequalities, it sought to contain them.

The political philosophy of a school must address the institutions that structure the power relations at the time of its formulation. In the case of India, the institution of caste originated, developed, and began this structuring before the state became visible as a strong framework for society. "The notions of justice, authority, rights and duties were understood and addressed within the domain of caste. Therefore, from ancient times, thinkers conceptualizing and philosophizing caste were also, in their own lives, divided and ruled by caste." (Shepherd, 2005, 11) After independence, Indian political science and philosophy scholars preferred working on the political philosophy developed by Western thinkers. Hardly any scholar turned their attention to ancient Indian political philosophy, and when they did so, their approach was very limited and mainly influenced by the dominating ideological frameworks.

It is essential to study ancient Indian Political philosophy and the different philosophical traditions that were at work during the formative stage of our society through an appropriate framework to understand the implications of the past for modern India. In the history of Indian political thought, the most crucial period was the 6th century BCE, which witnessed the emergence of various philosophical and religious schools which profoundly impacted the social and political structure of the society of the time.

As Gautam Buddha was the most influential social revolutionary in ancient India, any study of the political philosophy of ancient India ought to begin with him. This article, through analyzing the significant writings of prominent colonial, nationalist, and post-

independence scholars, tries to demonstrate that Gautam Buddha has been discussed as a religious preacher. Even in philosophy, sufficient attempts have not been made to expose the Brāhminical mystification and deification of the Buddha or the Hinduization of Buddhism.

Many great scholars of modern India like Vivekananda, Radhakrishnan, Pandurang Vaman Kane, R.D. Ranade, G.C. Pande, etc., endeavored to project the Vedic-Brāhmanical philosophy or Vedāntic philosophy not only as the source of all the Indian philosophical thought but also having an influence upon the various philosophical and religious schools throughout the world. For instance, Vivekananda said:

Before even the Buddhists were born, there are evidences accumulating every day that Indian thought penetrated the world. Before Buddhism, Vedanta had penetrated into China, into Persia, and the Islands of the Eastern Archipelago. Again when the mighty mind of the Greek had linked the different parts of the Eastern world together there came Indian thought; and Christianity with all its boasted civilization is but a collection of little bits of Indian thought. Ours is the religion of which Buddhism with all its greatness is a rebel child, and of which Christianity is a very patchy imitation. (Vivekananda, 1962-64, 275)

The imperialist agenda entirely inspired colonial historiography and was a part of the ideological effort to appropriate history as a means of legitimizing British rule over India. This view was challenged by the Hindu-nationalist or Vedic-Brāhmanical thinkers who were inspired by the growing political awakening to get representation in the Government. The communal framework set by the colonial scholars remained the same, i.e., the Hindu, Muslim, and Christian/modern eras. The only difference was that the Hindu-nationalist historiography harbored the communal framework, substituting the dark Hindu past with the glorious Hindu past. Colonial as well as Hindu-nationalist scholars both put the Indian past and scholarship before the Muslim invasion under the single umbrella term “Hindu,” and by doing so, they completely messed up the history of Indian scholarship. Buddhism, which originated as a movement in opposition to the Vedic tradition, is often claimed to be a reformative sect in the Vedic tradition. B.R. Ambedkar was the first scholar who systematically opposed and exposed this messing up of the Indian historiography. There were also many other scholars before, contemporary, and after Ambedkar like Jyotiba Phule (Phule, 1873) E V Ramasamy Periyar (Veeramani, 2018), G. Kalyana Rao (Kalyan Rao, 2000), Katti Padma Rao (Padma Rao, 1998), Kancha Iliaha Shepherd, Lal Mani Joshi, etc. and many Marxist scholars – D. D. Kosambi, R. S. Sharma, Romila Thapar, D. N. Jha etc. who wrote comprehensively to expose the colonization and the Hinduization of the historiography of Indian polity, philosophy, sociology and other disciplines. This work is also an attempt to add something in the same direction.

Any serious attempt to study ancient Indian political philosophy made by Indian political scientists has been greatly influenced by colonial ideology. The term ‘colonial historiography’ has been used in two senses. One relates to the history of the colonial countries, while the other refers to the works which were influenced by the colonial ideology of domination. It is in the second sense that most of the historians today write about colonial historiography. In fact, the practice of writing about the colonial countries by the colonial officials was informed by the desire for domination and justification of the colonial rule. In most such historiographical works, Indian society and culture were demeaned, while at the same time, Western culture and values were praised and glorified. The historiographical works written by James Mill, Mountstuart Elphinstone, and Vincent Smith are a few examples of this trend. For instance, James Mill, in his book *History of British India*, says that according to the Asiatic model, the government was monarchical among the Hindus. With the usual exception of religion and its ministers, no system of rule differed from the will of a single person. He characterized Indian thinkers and people as rude and ignorant. (Mill, 1858, 141)

Eminent orientalist also expressed similar ideas in their work; for example, Professor Max Müller, in his work *A History of Ancient Sanskrit Literature*, said that “The Indian never

knew the feeling of a nationality and his heart never trembled in the expectation of national applause.”(Müller, 1860, 30) Similarly, Emile Sénart, in his work *Caste in India*, says that India never developed the idea of either the state or the fatherland and that it never evolved any political constitution. (Sénart, 1930, 198, 212)

Colonial scholars did not see the contradictions throughout the socio-political history of ancient India and never bothered to examine Buddhist political thoughts. The colonialist position regarding the ancient Indian polity came as a challenge to Indian scholarship, and the most significant response to this challenge came from the Indian scholars themselves. There were two phases in the progress of research on Hindu ancient Indian Polity- “moderate” and “radical,” which took place during the growth of the nationalist movement. (Sharma, 2005, 3) The second phase, which is of more significant concern, started with the strong nationalist movement following the Bengal partition in 1905. Prominent scholars of this period are K.P. Jayaswal, R.C. Majumdar, D.R. Bhandarkar, U.N. Ghoshal, A.K. Sen, N.C. Bandyopadhyaya etc

The most significant work on ancient Indian Polity was *Hindu Polity* (1924) by K.P. Jayaswal, a compilation of his articles contributed to *Modern Review* between 1912 and 1915. For the first time, he showed that the ancient Hindu Political system was comprised partly of republics and constitutional monarchies. The conclusion drawn by K.P. Jayaswal in *Hindu Polity*, for the first time, presented a strong ideological case for complete independence. He said, “it is proposed to outline here certain chief features of Hindu polity. The Hindu race has experimented with great and various systems of state and political machinery.” (Jayaswal, 1943, 3) Following Jayaswal, answering the question that Indians could never separate politics from religion, Bhandarkar said, “Is it not clear from the enumeration that the Hindu mind sharply and consistently separated polity and also economics from philosophy and theology and regarded it as an independent subject?” (Bhandarkar, 2014, 3-4)

Not only Bhandarkar but also subsequent Hindu political scientists such as R.C. Majumdar, B.K. Sarkar and other scholars followed the same framework. The most important thing for Hindu nationalist scholars was proving that Hindu thought had democratic content. They referred to all European opinions as Christian ones. Therefore, the whole discourse took the shape of a religious conflict, and eventually, all ancient Indian political and philosophical schools were viewed as the Hindu monolith. Hindu nationalist scholars were trapped in the framework of Eurocentrism. Most prominent Hindu nationalist scholars tried to prove that the ancient Hindu political system consisted partly of Athenian republics and constitutional monarchies. In trying to prove that democratic traditions existed in ancient India, their mind operated within the Eurocentric colonial framework set up by James Mill and Max Müller. While significant stress lay on Hindu identity, the focus shifted from narrating stories and epics to scrutinizing ideas

In the post-independence India D. D. Kosambi, R. S. Sharma, Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya, and Romila Thapar have done significant work to re-examine creatively the political theory of ancient India, in *Introduction to the Study of Indian History* D. D. Kosambi outlines a new methodology and shows how India was a place of contending schools of thought. (Kosambi, 1956) One of the most critical studies in the mid-fifties was R.S. Sharma's *Aspects of Political Ideas and Institutions in Ancient India*, where he pointed out the methodological limitations of nationalist ideology. (Sharma, 2005)

There is another stream of historiography known as “Subaltern historiography,” which is said to be inspired by England’s “history from below” tradition in the 1970s and 80s. The Subaltern Studies began in the early 1980s as a critique of the existing historiographies, which were accused of ignoring the people’s voice. The writers associated with the project promised to offer an entirely new kind of history in Indian studies. In the early years, the volumes edited by Ranajit Guha, the *Subaltern Studies*, made efforts to explore the consciousness and actions of the oppressed groups in Indian society. The primary argument of the subaltern historiographers is that the existing way of writing history exclusively concentrated on the elite, historians focused on the Indian National Movement, and that too only from the

perspective of the movement's leaders while dismissing the subalterns. (Guha, 1997) Subaltern historiography claims to try to restore a balance by emphasizing the role of the politics of the downtrodden people against the privileged politics in Indian intellectual history

On the other hand, "Dalit-historiography" challenges colonial, Hindu nationalist, Marxist, as well as historians of subaltern studies. Apart from the historiographers related to the above perspectives, B.R. Ambedkar, a philosopher and historiographer, examined the many dimensions of ancient India. He provided a new framework to understand ancient Indian Political thought through the inner contradictions of Indian society, i.e., from the point of view of the oppressed masses. With this perspective, he wrote *Buddha and His Dhamma*, regarded as his magnum opus. His other major works are "*Castes in India*," "*Annihilation of Caste*," "*Philosophy of Hinduism*," "*The Hindu Social Order*," "*Revolution and Counter Revolution in Ancient India*."

Other scholars who endeavored to reconstruct Indian history, polity, and philosophy from a Buddhist perspective are Iyothee Thassar, Lakshmi Narasu, Lal Mani Joshi, etc. They tried to develop a perspective of Indian history, philosophy, and polity from a Buddhist point of view.

II. Approaches to Buddhism

We have seen the various streams of Indian historiography. However, when we talk about Buddhism especially, another categorization used for "approaches to Buddhist studies" could be The Older Anglo-German School, The Leningrad School, the Franco-Belgian School, and the Brāhmanical school (Joshi, 2009, 1-10). A brief description of these schools is required to understand any Buddhism-related concept.

The older Anglo-German School: T.W. Rhys Davids, H. Oldenberg, Edward Conze are prominent names of this school. The masters of this school believe that Buddha's original teachings were preserved more faithfully in the Pāli canon than any other. This school primarily relied on the Pāli texts for its study and interpretation of the original teachings of Buddhism. Rhys Davids, in his book *The Dialogues of the Buddha* says, the Pali texts, the Dīgha, and the Majjhima Nikāyas contain a complete exposition of what the early Buddhists considered the teaching of the Buddha to have been. (Davids & Davids, 2015, vii) Most modern anglophone scholars who do not have knowledge of the canonical languages of Buddhism but insist on writing about Buddhism use the works related to this school as their source.

However, L M Joshi claims there is no evidence to sustain the belief that the Buddha spoke the Pali language. He says "It is possible that the Buddha used two or perhaps three languages in His sermons and dialogues. I believe that He must have conversed with the learned brāhmaṇas in Vedic dialect which later on became the foundation of Sanskrit. While in Magadha He must have spoken a Magadhi form of speech, and in Kosala He would have employed the language of that province." (Joshi, 2009, 3) This does not imply that it questions the authenticity of the Pali texts, but it means that the Pali canon preserved one of the many versions of Buddha's teachings as the Theravādin scholars understood it. It would not be very accurate to assume that the Pali canon preserved the words of Buddha precisely how he pronounced them. Edward Conze said that the Pali Canon stresses the ethical side of Buddhism. Similarly, T W Rhys Davids, one of the prominent scholars of the school, said that "Nibbāna is purely and solely an ethical state to be reached in this birth by ethical practices, contemplation and insight." (Davids and Stede, 1975, 362)

The Leningrad School: This school tried to understand Buddhist thoughts by studying the Indian, Tibetan, Mongolian, and Chinese Buddhist texts. Stcherbatsky, Rosenberg, and Obermiller are prominent scholars of this school. Stcherbatsky sees Buddhism as "the most powerful movement of ideas in the history of Asia" (Stcherbatsky, 1923, XI). The most

significant contribution of this school is bringing out the real meaning of the complex Buddhist term “Dharma” by the Buddha’s original teachings. This school emphasizes the intellectual side of Buddhism. Stcherbatsky’s *The Central Conception of Buddhism and the Meaning of the word ‘Dharma’* and *Buddhist Logic* are the most significant contributions of this school to modern Buddhist studies.

The Franco-Belgian School: Scholars of this school study Buddhism with the help of all kinds of available resources, from literary to archaeological. Sylvain Lévi, Louis de la Vallée Poussin and Etienne Lamotte are some notable names of this school. La Vallée Poussin was one of the first who emphasized on the fact that the Pali canon tells us about only one among the several aspects of Buddhism i.e. Theravāda, and it would be illusionary and faulty to interpret Buddhist principles merely on the basis of the Pāli canon. But this school, due to its Roman-Catholic prejudice and imperialist conceit, could not understand the essentials of Buddhism. As La Vallée Poussin wrote in one of his prominent works *The Way to Nirvāṇa*:

On the one hand, whereas we have been for centuries trained to make our ideas clear, this was not the case with Indians. The historian has not to deal with Latin notions worked out by sober and clear - sighted thinkers, but with Indian “philosophumena” concocted by ascetics whom we shall describe presently: men exhausted by a severe diet and often stupefied by the practice of ecstasy. Indians do not make a clear distinction between facts and ideas, between ideas and words; they have never clearly recognized the principle of contradiction. Buddhist dialectic has a four-branched dilemma: Nirvāṇa is existence or non-existence, or both existence and non-existence, or neither existence nor non-existence. We are helpless.

Moreover, we look at the Buddhist doctrines from the outside. Whereas Nirvana is for us a mere object of archaeological interest, it is for Buddhists of paramount practical importance. Our task is to study what Nirvana may be; the task of Buddhists is to reach Nirvana. (Poussin, 1917, 110-112)

Here L. M. Joshi rightly says that “Those who are not aware of the transcendental quest in Buddhist tradition will find it impossible to appreciate Buddhist doctrines and practices. The outsider who treats the Buddha and the Buddhahood as a mere object of archaeological interest’ will not be able to understand its meaning.” (Joshi, 2009, 8)

One who cannot distinguish between words (śabda) and their meaning (artha) and deals only with the words will be unable to reach the essentials of Buddhism and be lost in the jungle of philology.

The Brāhminical School: It is based on the brāhminical literature of the first millennium of the Christian era. The literature related to this school promoted the “Hinduization” of Buddhism and presented Gautam Buddha as an incarnation of God, “Vishnu.” The school is responsible for the deification of the Buddha and the gradual Hinduization of Buddhist doctrines. Another reason to call this school brāhminical is that here, Buddhism is perceived to be a reform in the Vedic tradition and as a branch of the Vedic-Brāhminical school. Joshi rightly said about it: ‘This hypothesis, repeated endlessly, upheld dogmatically and defended passionately, is founded on the assumption that every noble and profound idea must have originated within the “Eternal Religion” (sanātan-dharma) which is ‘the Hindu Religion.’” (Ibid., 9) One of the essential characteristics of this school is “syncretism.” Brāhminical scholars try to present Buddha as a Vedantic teacher because, according to them, whatever he preached had its roots in Upanishads, and Buddhism is just a reformation movement in Vedic tradition; hence, Buddhism, in actuality, is Hinduism, and Buddhists are Hindus.

In this section, we will see the views of the three prominent thinkers of Modern India, i.e., Swami Vivekananda, Radhakrishnan, and P.V. Kane, who advocated that Buddhism was a reformation movement in the Vedantic tradition

It was an era of Hindu revivalism, the building of national pride, and nationalistic enthusiasm, and Vivekananda was one of the forerunners of the “Hindu Renaissance.” Western orientalist impacted his thoughts, but he differed on many points from them and did

not wholly accept their views. He said that the Hindu religion is based upon the Vedas, which are eternal, without beginning and end. (Vivekananda, 1962-64, vol.1, 6,448) The Vedas or the Śruti means the Upanishads. (Ibid., vol. III, 395) Thus, by Hinduism, he means the religion of the Vedānta, i.e., Upaniśads. Based on his conception of Hinduism, he says, "Hinduism is the most satisfactory religion in the world, and Advaita Vedānta is 'the crest-jewel of all spiritual thought.'" (Ibid., vol. III, 432, 448) All the systems of Indian thought are based on the Upanishads; the impact of Indian (Vedantic or Hinduistic) thought can be seen in Pythagoras, Socrates and Plato. (Ibid., vol. III, 434) "Buddhism is one of our sects." (Ibid., vol. III, vol. IV, 135) "Buddha was one of the samnyāsins of the Vedānta. He started a new sect, just as others are started today. The ideas which now are called Buddhism were not his. They were much more ancient." (Ibid., vol. III, vol. V, 309)

Vivekananda repeatedly claimed that Buddhism was a reformist movement, he said:

The relation between Hinduism (by Hinduism, I mean the religion of the Vedas) and what is called Buddhism at the present day is nearly the same as between Judaism and Christianity. Jesus Christ was a Jew, and Shākya Muni was a Hindu. The Jews rejected Jesus Christ, nay, crucified him, and the Hindus have accepted Shākya Muni as God and worship him. But the real difference that we Hindus want to show between modern Buddhism and what we should understand as the teachings of Lord Buddha lies principally in this: Shākya Muni came to preach nothing new. He also, like Jesus, came to fulfil and not to destroy. (Ibid., vol. III, vol.1, 21)

Similarly, Dr. Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan in a foreword written to the book *2500 Years of Buddhism* wrote:

Buddhism did not start as a new and independent religion. It was an offshoot of the more ancient faith of the Hindus, perhaps a schism or a heresy. While on the fundamentals of metaphysics and ethics the Buddha agreed with the faith he inherited, he protested against certain practices which were in vogue at the time. He refused to acquiesce in the Vedic ceremonialism.' 'The Buddha's main object was to bring about a reformation in religious practices and a return to the basic principles. (Bapat, 1956, XIII, XIV)

P.V. Kane one of the greatest scholars of 20th century also harbored the same attitude towards Buddhism:

Buddha was only a great reformer of the Hindu religion as practised in his time. He did not feel or claim that he was forming a new religion, nor did he renounce the Hindu religion and all its practices and beliefs. The Buddha referred to the Vedas and Hindu sages with honour in some of his sermons. He recognised the importance of Yogic practices and meditation. His teaching took over several beliefs current among the Hindus in his day such as the doctrine of Karma and Rebirth and cosmological theories. A substantial portion of the teaching of Buddha formed part of the tenets of the Upanishadic period. (Kane, 1962, vol.5, part 2, 1004)

In support of their claim Kane and Radhakrishnan both quote a paragraph from *samyuttanikāya*, I am quoting this paragraph after Radhakrishnan:

Even so have I, monks, seen an ancient way, an ancient road followed by the wholly awakened ones of olden times... Along that have I gone, and the matters that I have come to know fully as I was going along it, I have told to the monks, nuns, men and women lay-followers, even, monks, this Brahma - faring, brahmacariya that is prosperous and flourishing, widespread and widely known, become popular in short, well made manifest for gods and men. (Bapat, 1956, IX, X)

Kane, commenting on this paragraph, highlights "Buddha does not claim that he was unique, but claimed that he was only one of a series of enlightened men and stressed that the moral

qualities which he urged men to cultivate belonged to antiquity.” (Kane, 1962., V, part 2, 1005) Similarly Vivekananda also said “the twenty-four before him are unknown to history, although the Buddha known to history must have built upon foundations laid by them.” (Vivekananda, 1962-64, vol.1, 105-106)

It may be noted that many modern western scholars of the Older Anglo-German school and the Franco-Belgian School had also widely propagated certain aspects of the Brahmanical attitude towards Buddhism. (Joshi, 2009, 8)

III. Critique of the Brāhminical/Hindu Nationalist Approach

We have seen the Brahmanical view of the origin of Buddhism out of the Vedic tradition. Now, we will investigate the factuality and historicity of this doctrine.

The basis of their repeated claim is that they assert that the Vedās are thousands of years older than the Buddha. Vivekananda claims that the Upaniśads are at least as old as 7000 BC. (Vivekananda, 1962-64, vol.1, vol.1, 456) But after examining the historicity of the Vedas and Upaniśads, L. M. Joshi concludes that “the oldest parts of Vedic ‘revelation’ are not older than circa 1200 BC; the Vedic literature, including the Vedas, Brāhmaṇas, Āraṇyakas, Upanishads and Kalpsūtras, was developed between 1200 BC and 300 BC.” The existence of ascetic sages of non-vedic cultural tradition in pre-Āryan and non-Āryan Harappan culture is proved by the sculptures of men in the posture of yoga and dhyāna. Their continuity in the Vedic age is attested by the Keśī-sūkta of the *Rigveda*, which describes a muni. Other early Vedic texts also contain occasional references to the *munis* living out the fold of Vedic Āryan society. (Joshi, 2009, 44)

When we examine the historicity of the fundamental ideas of Indian philosophical and religious schools, we find that these are the concepts of yoga, dhyāna, karma, rebirth, samsāra, and nirvāṇa. Still, these ideas are of pre-Vedic origin, and priestly seers of Vedic tradition borrowed them from the Śramaṇas or ascetic sages of non-Vedic and pre-Vedic cultural tradition. (Ibid., 36-45) A passage of *Samyuttanikāya* which Radhakrishnan and Kane used to misquote, where Buddha claimed to “seen an ancient path, an ancient road traversed by the rightly enlightened ones of former times.” (Davids, 1972, Part 2, 74) According to Vivekananda, Radhakrishnan, and Kane, those “rightly enlightened ones” were Upaniśadic “seers.” However, according to the compilers of the Pali canon, those “rightly enlightened ones” were none other than the śramaṇas or ascetic sages of the pre-Vedic era who had attained the Buddhahood before the Śakyamuni. Buddhist sources never recognized the priestly Vedic seers like Śvetaketu, Naciketa, Uddālak-Āruṇi, Yājñavalkya, etc. Instead, some Buddhist texts mention a list of twenty-four Buddhas believed to be predecessors of Gautama Buddha. (Joshi, 2009, 46-47)

In his book *Philosophies of India*, a prominent scholar, Heinrich Zimmer, also mentioned non-Vedic and pre-Vedic impact on the Vedic philosophy and tradition. Regarding the two schools of śramaṇa tradition- Sāṃkhya and Yoga, he said: The main conceptions of this dual system are: 1. that the universe is founded on an irresolvable dichotomy of “life-monads” (*puruṣa*) and lifeless “matter” (*prakṛti*), 2. that “matter” (*prakṛti*), though fundamentally simple and uncompounded, nevertheless exfoliates, or manifests itself, under three distinctly differentiated aspects (the so-called *guṇas*), which are comparable to the three strands of a rope, and 3. that every one of the “life-monads” (*puruṣa*) associated with “matter” (*prakṛti*) is involved in the bondage of an endless “round of transmigration” (samsāra).

These ideas do not belong to the original stock of the Vedic Brāhminical tradition. Nor, on the other hand, we find among the basic teachings of Sāṃkhya and Yoga any hint of such a pantheon of divine Olympians, beyond the vicissitudes of earthly bondage, as that of the Vedic gods. The two ideologies are of different origins, Sāṃkhya and Yoga being related to the mechanical system of the Jains, which, as we have seen, can be traced back, in a partly historical, partly legendary way, through the long series of the Tīrthaṅkaras, to a remote, aboriginal, non-Vedic, Indian antiquity. Therefore, the fundamental ideas of Sāṃkhya and

Yoga must be immensely old. Nevertheless, they do not appear in any of the orthodox Indian texts until comparatively late - specifically, in the younger stratifications of the Upaniṣads and in the *Bhagavadgītā*, where they are already blended and harmonized with the fundamental ideas of the Vedic philosophy. Following a long history of rigid resistance, the exclusive and esoteric brāhman mind of the Āryan invaders opened, at last, and received suggestions and influences from the native civilization. The result was the coalescence of the two traditions. Moreover, this produced, in time, the majestic harmonizing systems of medieval and contemporary Indian thought. (Zimmer, 1952, 281)

Joshi and Heinrich Zimmer pre-suppose the Āryan-invasion theory to be true, which is controversial. Our concern here is not the “Āryan-invasion” theory but that the Vedas, Upaniṣads, and the subsequent brāhmanical literature borrowed basic ideas of its philosophy from the non-Vedic and pre-Vedic Śramanic philosophical traditions to assimilate and subsequently to Hinduize the Śramanic philosophical traditions. Lal Mani Joshi's efforts were primarily to falsify the theories through which it has been tried to prove that the basic ideas of the Śramana philosophy were rooted in Upanishads. However, according to Joshi, the fact is that the Vedic tradition had borrowed its ideas from the thoughts of Śramaṇas or ascetic sages of the non-vedic cultural tradition of the pre-Āryan time.

While discussing the triumph of Brāhminism, Ambedkar mainly focused on the ideological battle in Ancient India, which culminated in the triumph of “brāhmanism” with the formation of “Manu Smṛiti.” (Ambedkar, 1957, vol.3, 267-76) But L.M. Joshi focused on the ideological battle as well as the process of assimilation of the Śramanic philosophical tradition - the task of brāhminism was to assimilate Buddhism on the one hand and condemn Buddhism on the other. Thus, Joshi focused more on the debrāhmanization of Buddhist history and philosophy and lacked the direct political conflict between Buddhism and Brahminism. In contrast, Ambedkar's stand was more steadfast, drastic, and comprehensive, centered on the political scenario of Ancient India, directly affirming that ‘the history of India is nothing but a history of a mortal conflict between Buddhism and Brāhmanism’ and in this conflict, Brahmanism made a clean sweep of Buddhism. (Ibid, 267, 274) There is a difference in approach between the thinkers' methods, but ultimately, they complement each other.

Some scholars, even in the modern era, like Oldenberg, G.C. Pande, R.D. Ranade, etc., rigidly consider Vedic or Upanishadic philosophy identical to Indian Philosophy, and they put all other schools under the umbrella of Upanishadic philosophy. G.C. Pande, in his work *Śramaṇ Tradition* says “Modern scholars like Jacobi and Oldenberg basically accept this thesis and attribute the gnostic and ascetic traditions of Indian spirituality to a reformist school within the Vedic tradition evidenced by the Upanishadic literature as also by the dharmasūtras. Buddhist and Jaina ascetics are then believed to continue this reformist and anti-ritualistic trend.” (Pande, 1978, 4-6) Similarly, R.D. Ranade opined that “the Upanishads indeed occupy a unique place in the development of Indian thought. All the later systems of Indian Philosophy have been rooted in the Upanishads.” (Ranade, 1926, 3-4)

By showing the roots of the metaphysics of other schools of philosophy in the “Upaniṣadas” (Ibid., 178- 228), they try to assimilate all those movements which were not only foundationally different from the “Vedic Philosophy” but also emerged as an opposition to the “Vedic Philosophy and social structure,” and presented alternatives to it. In a society, whenever some structural changes take place, they are reflected in the culture, religion, nature of political institutions, and philosophies. G.C. Pande oversimplified the moral consequences of Śramanic traditions without thoroughly studying the evils of casteism prevailing upon the then society and the transformation in the social structure. Based on the metaphysical theories, he speculated on moral principles and their impact on society to suit his agenda. He said, “Śramanism cut man loose from the sense of dependence on the gods and also sundered the bond of moral obligation tying the individual to his community.” (Pande, 31)

Pande's malaise can be observed here as there is no logical relation between “losing the dependency on god” and “the moral obligation of an individual to his community”; it seems that Pande wanted to justify the self-destructive obligation of the suppressed communities to

the dominating class/castes, because in the then society rituals played important role to maintain the supremacy of the “Brāhmin” class because it was the most important tool of Brāhmanism, and in rituals God played a central role. Similarly, again, he claims that “Śramanic morality is an ascetic morality of wantlessness which identifies the past life withdrawal from society. If niggardliness and sterility are held to be the main evil in the vedic tradition, pleasure-seeking, egoism and violence are the main evils of the Śramanic view.” (Ibid.) Here Pande’s petty and short-tempered attitude and his haste to establish the supremacy of “Vedic morality” can be observed as he sees “niggardliness” and “sterility” as the only evil in the Vedic tradition. He makes groundless claims of the Śramanic schools being pleasure-seeking, egoistic, and violence-promoting. On the other hand, in his book, he tried to present “Śramanic traditions” as reform in the Vedic tradition (Ibid., 5-9), Nevertheless, its struggle against the social evils, societal contradictions, and how the Śramanic tradition presented a distinct “Value-system and way of life,” alternative social and political institutions, was completely ignored.

Conclusion

From the 6th to 3rd century BCE, society underwent profound structural changes. Agricultural production upsurged due to the discovery of "Iron" and other inventions. “Trade and commercial activities” were increasing. The number of cities was growing, and new political frameworks were undergoing formation in new empires, posing challenges to the older, semi-tribal, oligarchic republics. Artisan guilds, wealthy merchants, and landowners were flourishing. People suffered from the transformation, commercialization, and the growing class society (Mehta, 1939). In this backdrop, two major streams of ideas – “Brāhmanism” and “Śramanism” – came into contention.

The Brāhminical stream had its own metaphysical and epistemological aspect established among the forest ascetics and its ritual aspect found among the advisers of the kings. Buddhist and other *Śramana* trends had disseminated their spiritual principles among those who relinquished all worldly desires but did not reside in forests, e.g., Buddhist monks spent most of the year in monasteries established near the towns. They had the full support of the growing commercial class and peasantry.

The Buddhist conception of society and state and the spiritual outlook were completely different from the Brāhminical theories. The Ruler was expected to be a virtuous king who obeyed the “*Dhamma*.” It differed from the Brāhminical rulers, whose most important duty was implementing laws against the hybridization of “Varnas” and “Castes.” The Sangha had privilege over the ordinary people because, in this area, people practiced meditation and searched for spirituality. With the emergence of “Mahāyāna Buddhism,” it was accepted that an ordinary person could also attain Nirvāna. Still, it is essential to note that righteous human relations relationships were encouraged rather than ritualism. “In the important Sigolavada sutanta in the Digha Nikaya,” the young merchant Sigola is instructed that rather than follow the various rituals, he should practice, as part of the “four quarters,” right relationships with teachers, friends, wives, and *dasa-kammakaras* or employees. (Omvedt, 2011, 12)

Buddhism was unconditionally against the structural evil of casteism. It rejected casteism and, in many Buddhist texts, portrayed untouchables, who were then known as the Chandals, in leading roles. Gail Omvedt says:

The opposite of the Vasettha sutta in the Sutta Nipatta is the Vaselasutta, which describes the ancient hero Matanga, a glorious spiritual hero before whom nobles and Brahmins bowed down. In a jataka his story is elaborated further. The Chandals are always shown as enemies of Brahmins; for instance in one of the stories Sariputta, the Buddha’s most esteemed follower, takes birth as a Chandala, and gives true spiritual teaching to a Brahman student, forcing him “between his feet” for his inability to answer questions. (Cowell, 1895, Jatak no. 377) All in all, Buddhism played a leading role in contesting the field of defining

social order with Brahmanism, and within this gave an important role to untouchables, who are often depicted as spiritual if not quite Buddhist followers. (Omvedt, 2011, 13)

The social structure whose foundation was laid by Buddhism was completely different from the inequalitarian vedic-brāhmanical social structure of the time, and this foundational difference can be observed in every discipline, whether it may polity, sociology, ethics, epistemology, or metaphysics. As Rhys Davids puts it, “The central position of the Buddhist alternative to those previous views of life was this: Gautama ignored the whole of the soul theory and held all discussion about the soul with which the Vedanta and the other philosophers were chiefly concerned as not only childish and useless, but actually inimical to the ideal of a perfect life here and now in this present world, in arhatship.” (Davids, 2019, 39)

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