



8. Buddhist Ethics in the Indian Knowledge System and its impact on Assamese Life

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Abstract

Buddhism is a unique Religious system and an integral part of the Indian Knowledge system that provides a unique perspective on ethical values and principles that have influenced Indian Culture and society for centuries. Buddhist ethics emphasized compassion, Non Violence, courage, equanimity and social responsibility which are values that are deeply embedded in Indian culture and society. Buddhist ethics are rooted in a sophisticated philosophical system that explores the nature of reality, the nature of suffering, and the path to liberation. Although Buddhism is no longer a dominant religion in India, Hinduism has accepted all the great and noble elements of Buddhism. We may Speak Buddhism as a culture and as a culture it may be viewed as constituting the dominant strand in the fabric of the Indian culture. Buddhism may be considered more so in case of the Assamese culture than any other regional cultures of India. From the very ancient times different system of religious belief have been prevalent in Ancient Assam, Buddhism also one of them .Assam is a land of Brahmanical religion from very ancient times so it was not easy rise of Buddhism in that time. But there are many references about the Buddha's religion and its Prosperity and Ethics on Assamese culture. Buddhism continues to be practiced in Assam by several communities. There are many Theravada Buddhist Vihars in Assam and the oldest monastery in Assam is considered a meditation center. The impact of Buddhism in the Literature, culture, Religion and life of the people of Assam also noticeable. This paper try to spread a light on the development of Buddhism and its ethical impact on the people of Assam.

Keywords: Ethics, values, principles, Literature, Culture, Religion

Objectives of the study:

1. To Know the Buddhist Ethics and its influences in the Indian Knowledge System.
2. To see the origin of Buddhism in Ancient India.
3. To find out the Influences and impact of Buddhism in the society and culture of Assam as well as Assamese life.

Methodology of the study: The methodology of the study is based on both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources like ancient remains, inscriptions are studies and visit the places of Buddha Vihar situated in Assam. Secondary sources like books, Magazines etc related to this topics are studied.



Review of Literature:

1. Barua, B.K (2003) "The cultural History of Assam" is one of the most important book on Ancient Assam. Here the author Discuss about the prevalent form of Buddhism and he states that there is no such evidence which can be prove the later form of Buddhism.
2. Barua, Rajen (2017) "Buddhism In Assam" is one of the book gives an enlightening introduction to Buddhism in general with its historical perspective in Assam. The book also attempts to enhance the existing corpus of knowledge on the role of Buddhism in the growth of composite culture of Assam. Here the author discuss about the advent and influences of Buddhism in Assamese life such as culture, literature and religion.
3. Nath, Binita "Buddhism as a cult of Ancient Assam: A Historical Study" in this research paper the author discuss about the origin of Buddhism in Ancient Assam and contribution of Buddhism in the society and culture of Assam and also the impact of Buddhism in various filed of Assam.
4. Oza, Preeti "Buddhist Ethics in Indian Knowledge System" This paper discuss about the History of Buddhism in Indian Knowledge system, and evidences of Buddhism in India. This paper also discuss about the Buddhist Ethics and its impact on Indian Knowledge system and try to focus how the Buddhist ethical values and principles benefitted an individuals.

Introduction:

About 2,500 years ago, the religion and philosophy of Buddhism emerged in ancient India. Siddhartha Gautama, popularly referred to as the Buddha, founded it. He lived from roughly 563 to 483 BCE. With more than 500 million adherents worldwide, Buddhism has subsequently expanded throughout the world and emerged as one of the major religions. The Indian knowledge system, which includes a wide variety of philosophical, spiritual, and practical teachings that have evolved over thousands of years in the Indian subcontinent, includes Buddhism as a fundamental component. Buddhism is a significant component of Indian knowledge, and its teachings still have a significant influence on Indian philosophy, spirituality, and culture today.

Buddhism's origins can be found in ancient India, where it developed in opposition to the dominant philosophical and spiritual traditions of the day. Siddhartha Gautama, popularly referred to as the Buddha, established it while residing in India in the fifth century BCE. The Indian knowledge system was greatly influenced by Buddhism, especially in the fields of psychology, ethics, and philosophy. Numerous prominent Indian intellectual traditions, such as Vedanta, Jainism, and Yoga, have been impacted by the Buddha's teachings on the essence of reality, the nature of suffering, and the way to emancipation. Buddhism, which emphasizes the value of compassion, nonviolence, and nonattachment in living a moral life, has helped shape Indian ethical traditions. Indian ethical philosophy has also been greatly influenced by the Buddhist idea of karma, which highlights the connection between deeds and their results. Furthermore, Buddhism has been crucial to the growth of Indian psychology, especially in the area of mindfulness. Indian intellectuals' approach to the study of the mind and the nature of



consciousness has been significantly influenced by the Buddha's teachings on the development of mindfulness, or sati in Pali.

History of Buddhism in the Indian Knowledge System: Siddhartha Gautama, popularly known as the Buddha, created Buddhism in the sixth century BCE, marking the beginning of the religion's history in the Indian knowledge system. India had a rich and varied intellectual and spiritual heritage at the time, and it was a complex and diverse society. Brahmanism, Jainism, and other ascetic movements were among the prevalent religious and intellectual traditions of the era when Buddhism first appeared. The Four Noble Truths, which focused on the nature of suffering, its causes, and the Eightfold Path's route to emancipation from suffering, were at the core of the Buddha's teachings. Buddhism developed into one of India's most significant religious and philosophical traditions over time had a profound effect on Indian society and culture. In many facets of Indian life, including philosophy, medicine, literature, and the arts, Buddhist teachings were integrated. Emperor Ashoka promoted Buddhism during the Mauryan Empire (322–185 BCE), disseminating the Buddha's teachings both inside and outside of his realm. This resulted in the building of numerous significant Buddhist monuments, including the well-known stupa at Sanchi, and helped to establish Buddhism as a significant religious and cultural force in India. But when other religious and philosophical traditions gained popularity, Buddhism started to fade in India. Buddhism in India declined as a result of the invasions of foreign nations, the growth of Hinduism, and the fall of the Mauryan Empire. Buddhism continues to be a vital component of Indian knowledge today, having a profound influence on Indian spirituality, philosophy, and culture. Millions of people worldwide are still motivated by the teachings of the Buddha, and Buddhism's legacy in India continues to play a significant role in the nation's rich spiritual and intellectual history.

Buddhist Ethics: Ethics is a philosophical study of morality. Understanding the basis and framework of morals regarding how one should live can be considered ethics. Ethics serves as a guide and enables people to act rationally in society; it is not a set of rules that everyone must abide by. Buddhist ethics includes a number of moral precepts and ideals, ethical ideas and concepts, and constructive advice on how to live. These moral guidelines are derived from the Buddha's teachings and are intended to foster compassion, spiritual development, and the reduction of one's own and other people's suffering. These are a few of the main ethical precepts of Buddhism.

The Five Precepts are rules for moral behavior that include abstaining from sexual immorality, stealing, lying, killing, and taking drugs.

Eight fold Path: A collection of eight principles known as the "Eightfold Path" directs adherents toward proper comprehension, purpose, speech, action, livelihood, effort, mindfulness, and



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focus.

Compassion: Buddhists are urged to act kindly and understandingly toward people as well as to cultivate compassion for all living things.

Non-attachment: Buddhism encourages adherents to develop non-attachment and detachment from worldly desires and material goods because it teaches that attachment to these things causes suffering.

Mindfulness: The practice of mindfulness involves paying attention to one's thoughts, feelings, and environment in the here and now, without passing judgment or becoming sidetracked.

Interconnectedness: Buddhism places a strong emphasis on the interdependence of all living things and exhorts its adherents to take actions that advance the welfare of both the world and other people. Buddhist ethics are centered on encouraging moral conduct, empathy, and awareness in order to foster spiritual development and lessen suffering for both individuals and others.

Buddha used a range of techniques to teach his followers Buddhist ethics, including formal discourses, casual discussions, and firsthand experiences. He adapted his teachings to each disciple's unique needs and abilities by using a range of techniques to impart Buddhist ideals. His lectures placed a strong emphasis on the value of firsthand knowledge and introspection, inspiring his followers to gain their own understanding of the fundamentals of Buddhist ethics.

There are some ways in which Lord Buddha taught Buddhist ethics. The Buddha gave many discourses, or talks, in which he expounded on the principles of Buddhist ethics. These teachings covered a wide range of topics, including the Four Noble Truths, the Noble Eightfold Path, the Five Precepts, and the Six Perfections. The discourses were usually given in a formal setting, such as a gathering of monks or laypeople. Buddha lived a simple and ascetic lifestyle, renouncing worldly possessions and pleasures to pursue spiritual realization. He taught by example to his disciples. He constituted the ethical principles he taught, such as compassion, non-violence, and nonattachment, in his own behavior and interactions with others. The Buddha also gave personal instruction to his disciples, tailoring his teachings to their individual needs and capacities. He would often answer their questions, provide guidance on specific issues, and offer encouragement and support in their practice. The Buddha also engaged in debate and discussion with his disciples, encouraging them to question his teachings and to explore the principles of Buddhist ethics for themselves. This approach helped to develop their critical thinking skills and deepen their understanding of the teaching

Advent of Buddhism in Assam: About the 6th century BC, various races such as the Lichhavis, the Koliyas, the Sakyas, the Mallas, the Jallas, etc. Probably Austric, Bodo, and Aryan origins



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sprang up in the North and North Eastern India in the Himalayan belt, and they ruled over small states who lived very close to the border of Assam with a spirit of racial superiority and self-determination and with a kind feudal system of government. The kingdom of Kamrupa (Assam) had strong ties to these border kingdoms from Narakasura's time, and people from these border regions immigrated to Assam. One historian asserts that it is highly probable that the Mallas moved to Assam, took on the role of Thakkar, and established themselves in the western region of the state; once more, the Kaliya kingdom was known for being the birthplace of Narakasura.

According to several historians, the association of the Kalitas with Kolutas, as with Buddhist Koliyas, which is a sister tribe of the Sakyas Naraka line, was probably Kalitas. It is very likely that Buddhism was thus introduced into ancient Assam through these Mallas, Koliyas, or Kalitas even during the lifetime of the Buddha in 500 bc. The Kalitas were an ethnic group who embraced many castes, and they were also regarded as Brahmanas who acted as non-Vedic or pre-Vedic priests in ancient Assam. According to the historian Dimbeswar Neog, that these Kalitas were certainly regarded as Brahmanas and they did the priestly business of the Koches, sometimes even in preference to Vedic priests, has been proved from authoritative and historical sources. This suggests that they were probably Buddhists, and it may be because of this that the Kalitas in Kamrupa were stigmatized by later Brahman immigrants during the rule of Pushyavarman dynasty, as Kula-lupta, or the people who lost or dropped their caste or varna. In any case, it is fairly certain that Assam was anciently divided into several, or many, small kingdoms, and that after the time of Buddha, the Western kings adopted the Buddhist faith. All these show clearly that Buddhism was probably flourishing in ancient Assam from Buddha's time.

The influence of Buddhism in Assamese Life:

Literature: The influence of Buddhism can be seen in Assamese literature since about 600 AD, when Assamese literature was basically oral. One of the renowned literary figures, Hem Chandra Goswami, who had edited a classic book titled 'Asamiya Sahityar Saneki' in seven volumes, had classified the earliest period of Assamese literature as the Giti Period. Sahajiya Tantrik Buddhism had a significant effect during this time, as evidenced by all of the oral and Bhonita literature. This Sahajiya Buddhist influence can be heard in a number of folk songs, such as the Nisukoni Git, Lora Umolwa Git (Lullabies), Dhainam (midwives' song), Biyanam (wedding songs), Nao Khelwa nam (boat songs), Halbwa git (farmers' songs), Jotor git (weaving songs), Baramahi nam (perennial songs), Gawolia nam (rural songs), Ainam (mothers songs), Tokari git (violin songs), etc.

Culture: The customs in Assam are very much influenced and molded by Buddhist liberal beliefs. The Assamese culture has influenced various characteristics that point to a basic



Buddhist culture. There are some practices that are seen only in countries such as Burma, China, Tibet, etc. that are also practiced in Assamese culture, such as 'Sopwa'. In this tradition, a boy is taken as the son-in-law of the bride in the bride's house. In such a case, the boy does not have a right to his son. Assamese people eat meat and fish as part of a healthy, non-vegetarian diet. Even the Vaishnavite saint of Assam, Sankarngdev (Sankardev), ate meat and fish and was not vegetarian. The main causes of this are the pragmatic viewpoints affected by Buddhism and the lack of Brahmanism's impact in Assam. In general, all Buddhist nations—including China, Japan, Tibet, Burma, and others—are not vegetarian. In addition to them, the majority of Assamese people are not vegetarians. Assamese people generally have a worldly view of life. This is again due to Buddhist influence.

Religion: On the religious front also, we see a strong influence of Buddhism in Assamese life, which is not dominated by Brahmanical culture but by village Namghors and Sattras. The widespread Buddhism in the region is largely responsible for the resurgence of neo-Assam Vaishnavism in Assam. As a result, Assam Vaishnavism might be considered Buddhism on a Vaishnavite pedestal. This is evident in many elements of the religion, including its structures, practices, and even philosophy. The fundamental idea of Buddhist monks gathering at a monastery to debate and spread the Dharma was not a Brahmanical custom, but rather a Buddhist one. This is not like Brahmanic forest ashrams. Various titles were used to refer to the Buddhist monasteries, including Sanghas, Arams, Viharas, and subsequently Sattras.

Many aspects of Assamese Vaishnavism's Sattras suggest that it originated in Buddhism, making it unique in India. The Sattras are built precisely like Buddhist shrines, having in and out doorways that resemble the Buddhist shrines and a small area around by four rows or four hatis. But according to our records, the concept of a residential monastery is not only of Buddhist origin, but the name "sattras" was also used in reference to the Buddhist residential Sattras that King Samudrapal constructed and gifted in 1232 AD. In the stone inscription on the religious front also, we see a strong influence of Buddhism in Assamese life, which is not dominated by Brahmanical culture but by village Namghors and Sattras.

The similarity with Buddhism is also seen strongly in its other institutions, such as the Namghor (village assembly cum prayer hall). This also indicates its Buddhist origin. Similar to the Sattras, Namghors are very much an Assamese tradition that is not found in other parts of India. While all Indian villages have a village temple, Assamese villages have Namghors or Vihars.

There are some Buddhist shrines and relics in Assam, which shows the great development of Buddhism in ancient Assam. For example, Hayagriva Madhav, Kamakhya Temple, Tameswari, Surya Pahar, etc. One of the oldest monasteries in Assam is Buddhist Vihars, considered a meditation center. Assam Buddha Vihar is a holy place for peace-loving people irrespective of caste, creed, and religion. The surrounding greenery has a magical charm that lures the visitors to



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imbibe of its natural beauty, Buddhist culture, and tradition. In this Buddha Vihar, children are taught the Buddhist philosophy rather than the theoretical aspects of Buddhism. It helps to shape and mold their behavior in the light of Buddhist ethics. Students are guided with wisdom to reveal the triple path as shown by Buddha: Sila, Samadhi, and Prajya illuminate and help cultivate behavior in the children.

According to the oral tradition of Assam, Buddha spent the later period of his life in Assam and also breathed his last breath in this province. Thus Buddha's culture and tradition are not quite new here. In the present day, the birthday of the lord Buddha, known as Buddha Purnima, is celebrated with great pomp and gaiety. On this occasion, in Buddha Vihar, only vegetarian food is consumed by the residents and students, and a day-long feast is arranged for guests to enjoy different food. So, we can see that there are various instances of strong Buddhist influences on the religion and culture of Assam.

Conclusion :

Buddhism places a strong emphasis on living in harmony with nature and the interconnectedness of all beings. It also highlights the significance of leading a healthy, balanced life for the good of society as a whole as well as for the well-being of individuals. And finally, Buddhist ethics emphasize the importance of non-violence, conflict resolution, and mutual understanding. These ethical values are influenced on the people of India as well as in Assam. Assam is rich in cultural diversity with a mixed demographic of twelve ethnic groups. One of them, known as the Tai ethnic group, a large branch of the Mongolian ethnic group, has been living in different parts of Assam, especially in some border areas of south Assam, with their own religious beliefs, traditions, and customs. This Tai ethnic community currently living in Assam is Buddhist. They are influenced by the Theravada Buddhism during their stay in Myanmar before entering Assam. The Theravada tradition they follow is very ancient and a small community; they are considered to be the most peaceful people in India. So, Buddhism survives in the form of Theravada in Assam due to the presence of these communities. But it is noteworthy that most of the signs of Buddhism have disappeared from modern Assam—only some of its ruins, legends, and historical studies remain.

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