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A SUMMATIVE STUDY ON THE CONTRIBUTORY IMPACT OF BUDDHISM TO THE INDIAN CULTURE AND SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT :

The overall impact of Buddhism on Indian culture and society had been significant throughout the history. It influenced various aspects such as religion, art, sculpture, language, and literature. Buddhism aimed to transform humanity through its practices and philosophical beliefs. It also played a crucial role in civilizing neighboring countries and the world throughout its own essence of Culture and the principles of Dhamma. Buddhism was India's greatest gift to the outer world. In one hand the ethos of Indian culture and civilization was carried by the Buddhist missionaries into China, Mongolia, Kampuchia, Korea, Japan, Burma, Java, Sumatra and other countries from the time of Asoka, on the other hand the essence of Buddhism had contributed a monumental colossus to the fabrics of Indian society and culture. This paper will look through a brief account of the latter with a holistic point of views of different angles and perspectives.



KEYWORDS : *Buddhism and Indian Society, Indian Culture and Buddhism, Indian Buddhism, Buddhism and India, Ambedkar and Buddhism in India, Buddha and Indian Society.*

INTRODUCTION :

Buddhism is regarded as one of the chief religions in the world. The historical journey of Buddhism begins around 2500 years prior when Gautama Buddha appeared to give his preaching and philosophize the entire universe. The formation of society and culture of India is one of the oldest and unique. In India, there is astounding cultural diversity throughout the country. The South, North, and Northeast have their own distinct cultures and almost every state has carved out its own cultural niche as well as societal evolution. There is hardly any culture in the world that is as varied and unique as India. India is a vast country, having variety of geographical features and climatic conditions. India is home to some of the most ancient civilizations, including four major world religions, Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism. The practice of Buddhism as a distinct and organized religion lost influence after the Gupta reign (c.7th century CE), and declined from the land of its origin in around 13th century, but not without leaving a significant impact. Except for Himalayan region and south India, Buddhism almost became extinct in India after the arrival of Islam in late 12th century. Presence of Buddhism is still found in the Himalayan areas such as Sikkim, Ladakh, Arunachal Pradesh, the Darjeeling and Kalimpong regions in West Bengal, and the Lahaul and Spiti areas of upper Himachal Pradesh. According to the census of India 2011, the Buddhist population in India is around 8.4 million which is around 0.7% of the total population, which makes Buddhism a minority religion in India. Although the population of Buddhism had been reducing since the due courses of the times in history, but still amid its vast ethnic inclusion throughout the various regions of Indian Peninsula, Buddhism

marked a pivotal cultural realm in Indian society and living. This current study will follow this essence carefully

THE CENTRAL CHARACTERISTIC TENETS:

Buddhism had a significant impact on Indian substantial religions by providing a simple and widely accepted alternative to the existing rituals and dominance of the priestly class. It influenced Indian religious thinking and appealed to the masses with its simplicity, use of vernacular language, and monastic order. Buddhism also had immense impact of Indian Society by promoting democratic spirit, social equality, and the inclusion of women and lower castes. The Buddhist texts like Tripitakas, Jatakas, Buddha charita, Mahavibhasa, Miliand panho, Lalit Vistara are assets to Indian literature. Like Jainism, Buddhism went a long way in influencing the Indian culture. The life and teachings of Buddha cast spell over the Indian mass. The kings patronized Buddhism and the people rendered their support to this religion. In due course of time Buddhism made great contribution to Indian society and culture. The basic tenets of Buddhism is very simple, naïve, effective and practical. Its core principles were very simple and straightforward. It can easily be followed by the people. It was not complex like Vedic religion with the various implications and tones. It also had no rituals. Due to the magnetic personality of Buddha, it spread throughout India. People accepted it due its simplicity.

The Buddhist monasteries played vital role in Indian culture. The Buddhist monks and nuns stayed in those monasteries. For the first time, democratic procedure was found inside a Buddhist monastery. The head of the monastery was elected not by selection but by vote which exhibited democratic spirit. Later on, the Hindus also followed this system. Sankaracharya set up four maths in four parts of India. Later on, others followed this system. It was possible due to the contribution of Buddhism in the land of India. let us see some of the major characteristics essence of Buddhism what created a monumental impact in Indian Society and Culture.

THE ESSENCE OF GOOD VIRTUES:

Buddhism taught many good qualities like truth non-violence, non-possession, compassion, brotherhood etc. All these virtues were meant to build up human character. These qualities were largely cultivated by the people in the society. The society grew with noble thought. The people by building their character helped in the creation of a healthy society.

- **Platform against the evils of Caste System In India :** Buddha fervidly opposed the caste system in Indian society which was an ugly practice during that remote phase of history. Due to his hostility the convulsion of caste system had been reduced from the society. The society breathed a healthy atmosphere. This trend continued throughout the years and Mahatma Gandhi and Ambedkar also adopted this principle of Buddha and became instrumental of it.
- **Historical Contextuality and Evolution:** Buddhism exerted its influence on the course of Indian history. The war of Kalinga changed Chandasoka to Dharmasoka Buddhism also attracted Kaniska and Harshavardhan. Mahatma Gandhi also learnt the lesson of Ahimsa from Buddhism and started the struggle for freedom against the Britishraj by following the path of nonviolence. Babasahab Ambedkar got his supreme root of strengths from Buddhism and successfully delivered the gigantic movements in Indian political-social-economic-cultural spectrum.
- **Liberty and Emancipation of Women:** Buddha was the incarnation of mercy and compassion. In his monastic order he also received nuns. By this he made a noble attempt for bringing the social emancipation of women. Now the women did not consider themselves as inferior to man. In every sense, Buddha was responsible for the upliftment of the women and their liberty and emancipation. It did reflect in the scenarios of India too.
- **Confluence between India and Foreign Countries:** Buddhism established an intimate contact between India and foreign countries. The Buddhist monks carried the preachings of the Buddha to the foreign countries from 3rd century B.C. onwards and foreign Buddhist pilgrims and students

came to India in search of knowledge. The foreigners who came to India were conquered by the rich culture of India and gave up their names and creeds and adopted themselves into the customs of local attributes. Thus Buddhism contributed largely to the synthesis which produced the modern Hindu and Indian society.

- **Societal Unity and Integration:** Since the time of the great patronage of king Asoka, of Buddhism spread in the nook and cranny of India It fostered the idea of national unity and integrity. Asoka, Kanishka and Harshavardhan and several others prominent monarchs became the ardent champion of nationalism and they tried to unite India under one umbrella. This integrating thread was followed by the Mughals and subsequent rulers. Thus, Buddhism undoubtedly brought national unity.
- **Galvanizing Impetus to Hinduism:** Buddhism gave a reshuffling impetus to the existing Hinduism. The Buddhist worshipped the image of Buddha. This inspired the Hindus to worship various images of gods and goddess. Instead of complex rituals, the Hindus prayed god through meditation and prayer. This became possible due to the influence of Buddhism on Hinduism.

▪ **The Towering Impact and Contribution of B.R. Ambedkar in the light Buddhist Doctrine:**

Babasaheb Ambedkar made a pivotal impact on Indian lives through its diverse channels of social justice, equality, rights, education, knowledge, untouchability, vision. His contribution became so higher that it had shaped the monumental impression in the global contexts too. Ambedkar presents Buddhism as a religion of principles committed to freedom of thought and universal equality. Ambedkar's Buddhism, as Gitanjali Surendran shows, was preceded by numerous Indian thinkers who argued that Buddhism was universal, rational, and ethical and an appropriate civic religion for India (Surendran 2013).

Ambedkar develops these ideas with a particular emphasis on Buddhism as especially responsive to the lives of the poor and marginalized. He rejects the idea of a stable canon understood as the true teaching of the Buddha. Instead, Ambedkar explicitly articulates three hermeneutic principles that justify and guide his interpretation, allowing him to reject doctrines he believed to be introduced by monks or Brahmins that are in tension with the rational, democratic, and moral teachings of the Buddha.

Because the Buddha "was nothing if not rational, if not logical," Ambedkar argues, we can accept what is logical and rational as the word of the Buddha. Ambedkar's second hermeneutic principle is that "anything attributed to the Buddha which did not relate to man's welfare cannot be accepted to be the word of the Buddha." (Ambedkar, 1957 'Buddha and His Dhamma'), Finally, he insists, we need to pay attention to the distinction between those views which the Buddha articulated with certainty and those about which the Buddha only expressed his views tentatively.

Ambedkar was the chief architect of the Indian constitution, which granted equal political rights to all adult citizens. He believed equal rights enshrined in the law were necessary for justice. Ambedkar was committed to the values of a modern, liberal democracy, values he worked hard to write into the constitution. He affirmed the citizen virtues and individual rights that enable shared democratic life. And yet, while "the idea of making a gift of fundamental rights to every individual is no doubt very laudable," Ambedkar writes, "the question is how to make them effective." Earlier in that same speech, Ambedkar insists that he has not borrowed his political philosophy – at the heart of which are democracy and the ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity – from French Enlightenment thought, as listeners might expect. Rather, he says, "My philosophy has roots in religion and not in political science. I have derived them from the teachings of my Master, the Buddha" (BAWS, 1-17). Thus we can see the visionary thoughts of Ambedkar had its inspirational roots on the doctrine of Buddha.

CONCLUSION:

Thus we have got the summative view of the fact that Buddhism had a significant impact on Indian culture and society into its various perspectives from time to time. It improved various aspects such as religion, art, sculpture, language, and literature. Buddhism challenged the dominance of the

Vedic religion and its many sects, and it opposed the caste system, promoting the idea of peaceful coexistence and social harmony. India continuously drew inspiration from Buddhism. From King Ashoka to Babasaheb Ambedkar, lineage of Buddhist doctrines throughout these luminaries of personalities had been so immensely dense at the context of Indian social and cultural realities. Buddha and his Dhamma thus contributed a mammoth contribution to the fundamental layers of Indian Socio-cultural fabrics, which is at the same time historic as well as significantly contemporaneous and ever lasting.

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