

Critical Evaluation of Indian Historians' Analysis of Buddhism

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Abstract

Buddhism is most prominent topic in the study ancient Indian history. The reason for its presence and visibility in Indian History owes to its presence on a wide time scale traverse during 6th century BC to 11th century AD. There are many special and unique features of the Buddhism reshaped not only Indian culture and society but it also played an eminent role in spreading its teachings to the world where it is still shining as a prominent religion. However, in its own birth land, the Buddhism was not able to preserve and save itself. Indian historians shared their diverse opinion on this subject but the most strange and weird observation in their writings is that they are all seems to be biased against the Buddhism. The eminent historians, for instance DN Jha opines, Buddhism as status quo movement which has followed the caste and untouchability in the same manner as that of Hinduism. Romila Thapar, claimed the great Buddhist monarch Ashoka as non-Buddhist and the concept of Dhamma as a continuation of ancient Hindu thoughts rather Buddhism. RC Majumdar says that the Dhamma was not policy of heretic but a system of beliefs created out of different religious faith. Irfan Habib went a step ahead by declaring that the Buddhist concept of Karma led to creations of caste and propagation of untouchability in India. So is the view of prominent author and ex-Buddhist monk Rahul Sankrityayan- who later turned towards Marxism. Ramvilas Sharma one of the famous leading figure even claimed that there is hardly any scientific teaching in Buddhism and whatever little logical things found available in it is the result and impact of Upanishads (on it). The overall common belief in Indian history is that the Buddhist teaching of non-violence and peace resulted in making Indians meek and weak which resulted in to her political slavery for centuries. A few scholars also claimed the Buddha to be anti-women and pro-establishment. Moreover, none of the historian finds Ashokan regime-which was a well known to be welfare state-was seldom referred as a golden age of ancient India. But they did not hesitate to glorify the Gupta era as golden age which was in fact one of the darkest phases of Indian culture as it is the time when there was downfall of Buddhism and evil customs like Sati system, caste rigidity, and slavery were coming into society.

These views and such opinions of mainstream historians have been presented not only in higher academic writings but these views are taught in school and university syllabus of India. However, these views are far away from reality. The unbiased and rational study of Indian Buddhist history proved these opinions as wrong and biased.

keywords: Indian Historian, Honesty, Ashoka

Introduction

Buddhism is one of the most prominent topics in the study of ancient Indian history. The reason for its presence and visibility in Indian history owes to its existence on a wide time scale traversed during 6th century BC to 11th century AD. There is no doubt that many special and unique features of the Buddhism not only reshaped Indian culture and society¹ but it also played an eminent role in spreading its teachings across the world- where it is still shining as one of a prominent religion. However, in its own birth land, the Buddhism was not able to sustain its existence. Indian historians shared their diverse opinion on this subject. But the most strange and weird commonality in their writings is that they are all seem to be biased against the Buddhism and on some occasions they did factual errors in dealing with this important subject. The paper is an attempt to critically evaluate the writings of eminent Indian historians.

One prominent and believed to be one of the most reputed Hindi author and historian Ramvilas Sharma, in his various writings for instance, Gandhi, Ambedkar, Lohia; Itihas Darshan and in 'Some Aspects of the Teaching of Buddha' levelled various serious charges against the Buddha². In one of this writings he claims that there is hardly any original teaching in Buddhism. Whatever the Buddha said was either already been discussed in Upanishads or by the Charvakas. He says, 'Buddha did not believe in god or soul and he did not accept the authority of any sacred book. The Charvakas also said the same thing and he is indebted to them for this much of rationalism in his teaching.'³ Elsewhere he said, 'Sariputta's explanation of consciousness had already been discussed by Dirghata-

¹ The core of the Buddha's teaching is 'Sheel, Samadhi and Pragma.' The base of this is equanimity in short or in modern terminology it could be simplified in three famous words which came out in French revolution, Liberty, Equality and Fraternity. Buddhism doesn't believe or perpetuate any division in society on the basis of caste, race, class, gender which is well attested by the fact that the Buddha opened the door of his Sangha for all including those from most vulnerable castes and women. There is also number of Shudras rose to kingdoms.

² These three write-ups appeared at diverse period of time but in all these three with minor changes he repeated the same allegations.

³ Buddhism: The Marxist Approach p. 61

mas (a Vedic sage).⁴ But while levelling these charges Sharma fails to understand that the Buddha's denial of god and soul is no doubt similar to that of other Indian materialists such as Charvakas but deep down, the Buddha's teachings were not just restricted to these denials alone, in fact the Buddha dealt almost all the issues of human concerns, which in modern terminology is known as psychology⁵, sociology, history and polity⁶. The Sharma's other point of coping teachings from Upanishad was even more ridiculous on simple ground that there is no fixed dates available on the creation of these scriptures. The Upanishads were in fact post Buddha production as argues Kosambi on the ground that it mentions the name of Ajatshatru who was younger contemporary of the Buddha. He writes, 'the mention of a past king Ajatshatru of Kasi in the Upanishad shows the nascent doctrines were in the air of the sixth century.'⁷ The students of history know that the business of composing Upanishads were continued up till the medieval centuries where one more Upanishad Allopnishad was being composed in the praise of Mughal emperor Akbar. But strange even before Sharma, the learned author Nehru in his famous Discovery of India also aired the same view by saying: 'Buddhism borrowed from Vedanta and Upanishads.'⁸

Sharma also criticise the Buddha as anti-poor and status quo, by mentioning that there was no progressive agenda in Buddha's mission as it was in Marxian approach. He writes, 'It is true that among Buddhists there were priests, there were Kings but there was also a large group of people without any rights.'⁹ But Sharma, here ignores the fact that the Buddha's teaching helped a lot of despised communities to raise their level, it is interesting that after the Buddha's Dhamma revolution, all the major ruling dynasties of India were of Shudra varna. The Nagas, the Nandas and the Mauryans who reigned in Magadh from 363 BC till 185 BC i.e., a long period of 178 years were ruled by the Shudra dynasties. This is strange that such a revolutionary socio-political impact is yet unacknowledged by the historians. Moreover, they ignores the Buddha's admission of Shudras into his Sangha as mere formality but fails to understand that still in India- as in other religious minded countries the priest carries highest position no

⁴ Ramvilas Sharma, Gandhi Ambedkar Lohia aur Bhartiya Itihas ki Samasyaen p. 615

⁵ The Buddha's analysis of mind and his meditation is now widely recommended by Psychologists. See for instance, <http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/open-page/meditation-as-immunostimulant/article6386647.ece>

⁶ See for instance Kancha Illiaha's God as Political Philosopher, where he presented the Buddha as political philosopher.

⁷ DD Kosmbi, The Culture and Civilization of Ancient India in Historical Outline p. 103

⁸ Jawahar Lal Nehru, Discovery of India, p.187

⁹ Ramvilas Sharma, Ibid p .536

matter whether he is rich or poor, intelligent or stupid, attractive or not. In such a case when a person from extreme humble social background would become a monk in Buddhist Sangha, it would naturally not only raise his individual position in society but also upgraded the position of his family (where he was born and bought up) to great extent¹⁰. It is in record that the Great Buddhist emperor Asoka, used to worship monks by putting his forehead on the ground before the feet of monks. One of his commander even asked him why he is bowing down before monks of despised communities. To which Asoka responded, caste doesn't matter in the case of Dhamma. There is no doubt that such attempt by leading Buddhist rulers was successful in breaking the mental barriers of the castist people¹¹.

The historian on other hand for instance, DN Jha believes Buddhism as was reluctant to any social change and has followed caste and untouchability in the same manner as that of in Hinduism. He writes¹²:

In spite of the protestant character of Buddhism and Jainism neither waged any powerful struggle against caste system and untouchability. On the contrary, Buddhism like brahmanical religion seems to have recognized the phenomenon of untouchability, which originated in the post vedic period and remains to this day an appalling feature of Indian social life. The Chandalas and Nishadas, originally aboriginals, were recognized as untouchables by Buddhism. At once place the Buddha himself equates the food earned by unlawful means with the leavings of a Chandala. This is in tune with attitude of the early brahmanical law givers, who prescribed bathing as essential for such members of higher castes as a touch of Chandala. The Jataka stories describes Chandala as amongst the meanest being on caste and regard even contact with air that touches their body as pollution. We are told in one story that the daughter of a setthi of Banaras washed her eyes that were contaminated by the mere sight of a Chandal. The new religions therefore did not try to abolish the existing social differentiation they strongly refuted, lower the importance of caste for attaining nirvana.

In this opinion Jha did fundamental mistake, first while talking of untouchability he forgets that all the mainstream Indian historians have dated the origin of untouchability in Indian society much later than the

¹⁰ In tribal Catholic converts, whenever a boy joins the Church in the process of ordination of priest his family starts earning special respect among the community.

¹¹ Here it is important to note that Dr Ambedkar has mentioned that caste is nothing but notion of mind.

¹² DN Jha, Ancient India: An Introductory Outline, p.39.

Buddha period.¹³ However, it is true that society was already stratified in to four fold social grading from the Rig vedic period onwards and till the post vedic period many tribes such as Chandala, Nishada, Pukkasa and many others were being looked down by the elite castes. Yet to charge the Buddha for inculcating social distance and untouchability is no way factual. The mention of Setthi's daughters washing of her eyes on sight of Chandal has nothing to do with Buddhism as Jataka are not the tales of Buddhist lifestyle alone but it the description of the events that happened at that time. The characters in Jataka were both Buddhists as well as non-Buddhists. It is therefore naturally in Jataka to include Buddhist as well as non-Buddhist practices. But if we read Matanga Jataka, one gets to know that Matanga, who according to Gail Omvedt¹⁴ seems to have been famous hero –leader of the Chandals, is in direct conflict with Brahmins. Besides that another Matang called Kashyapa Matang was a Buddhist missionary in the first century. Taranath also records a Matangi-pa who is said to have been a disciple of Nagarjuna¹⁵. Not only this, even one of the former the Buddha was born into a Matanga¹⁶ family. Regarding the historical Buddha it is clear that he inducted number of despised castes into his Sangha, for instance, Upali, a Barber, Sunita, a Pukkusa, Sati a fisherfolk and many others.¹⁷ He categorically denied supremacy of caste and questions the graded inequality on logical grounds such as recorded in Amabattha Sutta, Prabhavasutta and in various other places¹⁸. He used to say¹⁹:

Just as, O monks, the great rivers Gangâ, Yamunâ, Aciravati, Sarabhû, and Mahi, on reaching the ocean, lose their earlier name and identity and come to be reckoned as the great ocean, similarly, O monks, people of the four castes (vannas)... who leave the household and become homeless recluses under the Doctrine and Discipline declared by the Tathâgata, lose their previous names and identities and are reckoned as recluses who are sons of Sâkyâ.

Yet ignoring these humanitarian attitudes of the Buddha, a

¹³ It is generally accepted that the untouchability was emerged during Gupta period. See for instance, RS Sharma, Ancient India.

¹⁴ Gail Omvedt, Buddhism in India p.p.130-131

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Matanga is Dalit caste (ex-untouchable) of India.

¹⁷ Dr Ambedkar in his The Buddha and His Dhamma and elsewhere mentions number of such cases.

¹⁸ The Buddha's attitude against caste is well discussed by various modern Buddhist scholars, for instance, see Dr. Ambedkar's Revolution and Counter Revolution in India, Gail Omvedt's Buddhism in India, Kancha Illaiha's God as Political Philosopher, I also dealt this issue in details in my unpublished PhD thesis.

¹⁹ http://www.buddhanet.net/e-learning/buddhism/bud_lt21.htm

Historian of great repute Irfan Habib views that the Buddhism also contributed to the ultimate denigration of the peasantry in the varna structure by quoting Huen Tsang by saying that the Buddha forbade the ploughing to monks as it involves killing.²⁰ However this is strange charge the Buddha himself came from the community where his own father used to plough the fields.²¹ Moreover, there was no such restriction to lay followers. But Habib not only stopped here but he also charged the Buddha for establishing caste system in India by saying:²²

Almost everyone seems agreed that the in universalizing the caste system within in Indian, brahmanas have played a key role, and that by integrating the caste doctrine into the dharma, brahmanas made the caste system and Brahmanism inseparable. One result of these assumptions has been that the role of Buddhism in the process of caste formation has often escaped notice.

And yet may be asked whether Buddhism did not have its own contribution to make to the development of the caste system. The Karma doctrine or the belief in the transmigration of souls which formed the bedrock of the Buddhist philosophy was an ideal rationalization of the caste system, creating a belief in its equity even among those who were its greater victims.

The Karma and Transmigration doctrine that however referred by Habib was never been a part of Buddhism. These were the Brahmanic ideas. The Buddhism denies existence of soul in any form so is the case of Karma, the Buddhist doctrine of karma is diametrically opposite to that of Brahmanism. In this regards Ven. Buddhadasa says²³:

Nowadays, wrong teachings concerning karma are publicized in books and articles by various Indian and Western writers with titles such as "Karma and Rebirth." Although they are presented in the name of Buddhism, they are actually about karma and rebirth as understood in Hinduism. So the right teaching of Buddhism is misrepresented.

Romila Thapar one of the most prominent and recognized authority of Ancient Indian history, discussed the history of Buddhism in her two three well known books .While beginning with the roots of the Buddha's

²⁰ Irfan Habib, *Essays in Indian History* p. 169.

²¹ Dharmmanand Kosambi in his *Bhagwan Buddha: Jeevan aur Darshan* elaborated this and said that the Sakyans were actually agriculturists.

²² *Ibid* p.p 167-168

²³ Buddhadasa Bhikkhu: *Karma in Buddhism: A Message from Suan Mokkh* p.4 in *Rethinking Karma*

lineage, she claimed Sakyans to be a vedic tribe.

The republics consisted of either a single tribe such as the Shakyas, Koliyas and Mallas or a confederacy of tribes such as the Vrijjis and Yadavas. The republic had emerged from the Vedic tribes.²⁴

This statement had no ground or any evidence. There is hardly any other historian who linked Sakyans with vedics. It is generally known and accepted in the history that the Sakyans were a non-vedic tribe. Romila's belief could easily be refuted in the study of Kosambi where he categorically denied any vedic lineage to Buddha's tribe. He says, 'There were no Brahmins or caste-classes within the tribe, nor have high vedic observances ever been reported of the Sakyas. In spite of being Kshatriyas, the Sakyans also worked at agriculture.'²⁵ Elsewhere based on the derivation of from word ikshu= sugarcane, he viewed that Ikshvaku which said to lineage clan of the Buddha, was pre-Aryan tribe.²⁶

The remark of Thapar to an extent could be an attempt to assimilate the Buddha into vedic fold. In one of her another famous book, Ashoka and Decline of Mauryas, Thapar elaborated her agenda further and imposed her idea that the Dhamma-frequently mentioned by Asoka in his inscriptions-was no way Buddhism (in her words narrow sectarianism) but she said that the Dhamma of Asoka was his personal belief based an age old culture and ideology prevailing in Indian soil. Thereby she concluded that Asoka was not a Buddhist-as frequently claimed by the Buddhists and a wide range of historians. This belief is again an individual idea of Thapar without any evidence or logic. It is strange that those who did even very little reading on Buddhism could easily understand that the Dhamma is no way a sectarian approach but teaching of universal love with no boundaries of caste, creed, gender, nation or anything else. The Dhamma mentioned by Asoka, was also the same as propagated by the Buddha. But the learned authority of ancient India fails to understand this. However her argument was well refuted by one historian Harishankar Kautiyal.²⁷

The Asoka's explanation of Dhamma, were derived from Buddhist texts such as Dighnikas's Lakkhan Sutta, Chhakvatti Sehnad Sutta, Rahulovaad Sutta and Dhammapada. In these scripture there was mention of Chakravarti Smrat (Universal Emperor) who wins the heart of people by love not by sword. Asokan's definition of non-violence is derived from Rahulovad Sutta.

²⁴ Romila Thapar, A History of India 1 p. 50

²⁵ DD Kosambi, The Culture and Civilization of Ancient India in Historical Outline p. 108

²⁶ DD Kosambi, An Introduction to the History of Ancient India p 125.

²⁷ Pracheen Bharat ka Itihas p. 185

Thapar's biasness against Buddhism is also reflected in one of her writings, where she says, Ashoka became obsessed with Dhamma. This wrong understanding of Dhamma, was of course not the unique thinking of Thapar but the same view has already been aired by another famous historian RC Majumdar who said 'Asoka never sought to impose his sectarian belief on others.'²⁸ Elsewhere he echoed the same view by saying Dhamma was not the policy of heretic but a system of beliefs created out of different religious faith. Majumdar further carried imposing his belief by saying that Asoka was more influenced towards Brahmanism rather than Buddhism. He says²⁹

The prospect that he held before the people at the large is not that of sambodhi or nirvana but of svarga (heaven) and of mingling with the devas. Svarga could be attained by all people high or low, if only they showed zeal, not in adherence to a sectarian dogma or the performance of popular ritual (mangala) but in following the ancient rule (porana pakiti).

However, here Majumdar forgets that the words like Deva and Svarga no doubt having deep attachment with Brahmanism but had frequently been used in the Buddhist scriptures. And the ancient rule (Porana Pakiti) mentioned by the Asoka was not any way brahmanic ideas and culture but the democratic values of the tribal culture that was in existence from Sakyan to later tribal communities. Further how one could forget that despite using some of these brahmanic terminology, Asoka ridiculed the religious practises carried by womenfolk. In one of his inscriptions Asoka says:

In times of sickness, for the marriage of sons and daughters, at the birth of children, before embarking on a journey, on these and other occasions, people perform various ceremonies. Women in particular perform many vulgar and worthless ceremonies. These types of ceremonies can be performed by all means, but they bear little fruit. What does bear great fruit however, is the ceremony of the Dhamma. This involves proper behaviour towards servant and employees, respect towards ascetics...

As mentioned earlier there were many other prominent historians with similar biasness so is the case historian, Radhakumud Mookerji who had gave a strange reason for Asoka's respect and reverence towards Buddhism in general and towards Monks in particular. He says³⁰:

²⁸ An Advanced History of India ed. Majumdar, Raychaudhary and Dutta p. 99

²⁹ Ibid p.100

³⁰ Radhakumud Mookerji, Asoka 1995 p.60

Prince Mahendra and Princess Sanghamitra both renounced the world and entered the Sangha as its members. That is why Asoka shows a distinct predilection for ascetics in his edicts.

But while passing this statement, Mookerji forgets that Asoka embraced Buddhism much before than the royal siblings Mahendra and Sanghamitra joined the Sangha. In fact the brother-sister duo were influenced towards Sangha by the looking the dedication and commitment of their parents towards Buddhism.

India during the Mauryan period particularly at the time of Asoka reached to its zenith. There was an advanced stage of development in the field of architecture which is visible in remains of the Asokan inscriptions, science and technology, literature, administration and above all the emergence of the welfare nation which is still in modern period absence in many part of the world. Still none of the historians finds this period as golden era of India; rather most of them even do not hesitate in declaring the Gupta period (300 AD) as a golden age. The reason they mention behind this declaration is the growth and development in the fields of arts, science and literature. The argument is however, has little truth, as there has already been much development in these sectors during Mauryan regime moreover how one can ignore that in the light of these development in Gupta period there was emergence and establishment of social downfall of society. The evil customs like caste, untouchability, patriarchy in its worst form of enforced widowhood, sati system and the rise of feudalism were the striking characteristics of this period. As rightly marked by Kosambi, 'During Gupta period, the civilising and socialising work of the Buddha and of Asoka was never continued. The tightening of caste boundary begins.'³¹

In the history of ancient India and of Buddhism, the decline of Buddhism is of remarkable importance. This is issue should be a striking subject of study as when the Buddhism continued to survived in the other parts of world why it extinguished from her own birth land. The reasons for the decline of Buddhism mentioned by historians are weird. RC Majumdar, who tried to present Asoka's Dhamma as non-Buddhist old tradition strangely, blamed his appointment of Dhamma Mahamatra and policy of non-violence as a responsible factor for the decline of Buddhism³². So there is a chunk of historians who thinks that the large donations to Sangha led to economic decline of the Mauryan Empire. But none of them tried to accept the Buddhist source as evidence. Dr Ambedkar dealt this issue seriously using the reference of Haraprasad Shastri, he said³³:

³¹ Kosambi, The Culture and Civilization of Ancient India in Historical Outline p. 173

³² RC Majumdar, An Advanced History of India p. 103-104

³³ Dr Ambedkar 'Revolution and Counter Revolution in India p. 268

The decline of Buddhism is the result of Brahmanic reaction, who lost all their special privilege as Asoka prohibited all animal sacrifices which constituted the essence of Brahmanic religion. The Brahmins had not only lost state patronage but they lost their occupation which manly consisted in performing sacrifices for a fee which often times was very substantial and which constituted their chief source of living. The Brahmins therefore lived as suppressed and depressed classes for nearly 140 years during which the Maurya Empire lasted. A rebellion against the Buddhist sate was the only way escape left to the suffering Brahmins and there is special reason why Pushyamitra should raise banner of revolt against the Mauryas.

The nature of communal violence sparked that time by Sunga was such that he made a proclamation of setting a price of 100 gold pieces on the head of every monk. The condition of the Buddhists under the imperial sway of the Sungas, orthodox and bigoted, can go more easily imagined than described. From Chinese authorities it is known that many Buddhists still do not pronounce the name of Pushymaitra without a curse.³⁴ The result of this counter revolution was such that it resulted not only in the life of Buddhist intellectuals and leaders but a large amount of Buddhist scriptures and monuments were brutally destroyed. As recorded by Buddhist historian Taranath³⁵:

The Brahmana king Pushyamitra, along with other tirthakas, started war and they burned down numerous monasteries form Madhyadesa to Jalandhar. They also killed a number of vastly learned monks. But most of them fled to other countries. As a, within five years the Doctrine was extinct in the north.

Leading Buddhist scholar Gail Omvedt also provides details in this regard, she says, 'Buddhist sources point more specifically to a great deal of violence in the millennial-long conflict of Buddhism and Brahmanism. Hsuan Tsang, for example give many stores of violence, including the well-known story if the Shaivaite king Shaksanka cutting down the Bodhi tree, breaking memorials stones and attempting to destroy other images. He also mentions a great monumental cave-temple construction in a mountainous area in Vidarbha, said to have been done by the Satvahana king under the instigation of Nagarjuna, that was totally destroyed....The second hostility appears to be that of Mihirkula (the fiercely anti-Buddhist king who raided north India in the 6th century.³⁶

³⁴ Ibid p. 269

³⁵ Quoted from Gail Omvedt's Buddhism in India p. 170

³⁶ Ibid p.p. 169-170.

The Indian Historians also ignored the detailed history of another Buddhist legend Kanishka. His murder by his own army while he was sleeping was in some way similar to that of killing of last Mauryan successor Brihadrath but this incident was ignored by them as a normal incident.

There is also a sense of unanimity among the historians in the matter of decline of Buddhism from India. AL Basham for instance opined that the persecution was not the main cause of decline of Buddhism³⁷ so is the opinion of Nehru who was not able to find any struggle between Buddhism and Brahmanism. He viewed that there is no feud between Buddhism and Hinduism. He also viewed that Buddhism borrowed from Vedanta and Upanishads.³⁸ Romila Thapar went a step ahead by saying, 'Buddhist source claim that he (Sunga) persecuted the Buddhists and destroyed their monasteries and places of worship, especially those which had been built by Ashoka. This was clearly an exaggeration, since archaeological evidence reveals that Buddhists monuments at this time were being renewed.'³⁹

This opinion is same like other of her above mentioned biased opinions. There has not been a single evidence to prove that the Sunga was not responsible for the destruction of as many as 84,000 stupas and to carry a communal violence against the Buddhists. However, the stupas for instance, the Sanchi which was said to be elaborated during this regime was no way carried out by the Sunga's. It was rather rebuilt by the native Buddhist citizens. The reason of rebuilding may be reaction against the Pushyamitra's atrocities. This fact could be referred by looking into the archaeological remains of the Sanchi, where one can find the names of the Buddhist layperson (donors) carved in the great monument but not the name of Sunga as claimed by Thapar.

When the Buddhism was extinguished from India, the ideological remains were not washed out. Many modern Buddhist scholars tried to present this idea. The emergence of Kabir, Raidas and many other revolutionary thinkers in medieval India were such examples, who directly carried on the message of the Buddha without using any external formalities. But the Indian thinkers even do not spared him instead of accepting the Buddhist impact on Kabir, they for instance Ramvilas Sharma bought a strange connection of him (Kabir) with Vedanta and Upanishads. These saints were not inspired from the Buddhist philosophy, but they were inspired by the Vedanta. From Kashmir to Kanyakumari there

³⁷ AL Basham, Wonder That was India p. 267

³⁸ Nehru, Discovery of India p. 187

³⁹ Romila Thapar, A History of India p. 92

was no saint who had not been inspired by Vedanta.⁴⁰

But if one actually analyse the teachings of Kabir there no evidence could be found to show the linkage with any form of influence with Vedanta or Upanishads. First Kabir and all his contemporary saints were illiterates and had no knowledge of Sanskrit- a language in which all these brahmanic scriptures were composed therefore there is no question of their reading, understanding and influencing from these Sanskrit literature arises. Secondly, they were not remained silent on the Vedic literature but were not hesitant in criticizing these texts. Kabir says:

‘Oh, priest leave aside Veda and allied scriptures, these are not divine but all your creations to confuse the mind of ignorant fellows.⁴¹’

Thirdly, those who are trying to pose Kabir and his other contemporary Dalit thinkers as the pupils of a Brahmin teacher Ramananda is most ridiculous argument on simple ground that the teachings and practise of the Ramananda on one side and Kabir and his Dalit contemporaries on other side are not only fundamentally different but contrary to each other⁴². There is also no evidence to show Ramananda as a teacher of these thinkers.⁴³

Kabir in fact seems to be very much influenced by the Buddhism. His verses in the contemporary mainstream language of downtrodden were simple translation of the Buddha’s teachings. For instance, the Buddha’s last message *Atta Deepo Bhav* is delivered by Kabir in following way:

‘As oil dwell inside oilseed, ignition stone carries ignition inside it. So is your master resides in your heart. Everything is there inside you; it is up to you to understand⁴⁴’

⁴⁰ Ramvilas Sharma, Gandhi Ambedkar Lohia p. 636

⁴¹ The original lines of this doha in hindi is ‘Ved kiteb chhod de pande ae sab man ke bharna suno kahin ham hai pande ae sab tumhre karma.

⁴² This allegation could be seen as means of appropriation of Dalit vision into Brahmanic ideology. There have been many articles and books produced by contemporary Dalit authors on this issue. For instance, Rajkumar Ahirwar and SS Gautam’s *Sant Shiromani Guru Ravidas Vichar Darshan*, Brajranjan Mani’s *Debrahmanising India*, Gail Omvedt’s *Buddhism in India* and other.

⁴³ Whatever claims being made were just heresy .There was no valid factual evidence on this regards. This allegation could be seen as means of appropriation of Dalit vision into Brahmanic ideology.

⁴⁴ Original Hindi words are ‘Jyo chakmak me tail hai, chakmak me hai aag tera sai tujh me hai jag sake to jag.

The historians even tried to ignore the revival of Buddhism in modern India, which emerged especially with the historical conversion of Dr Ambedkar on 14th October 1956 where about 3,00,000 of his followers adopted Buddhism.⁴⁵ Romila Thapar⁴⁶ ignores this issue by putting this fact only in footnote of her chapter where also she ignores the name of Dr Ambedkar. Ramvilas Sharma was even shrewder as he says that Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism was not spiritual but a political act as he wanted to claim special provision for Dalit communities so therefore to bound illiterate people in a camp he chose Buddhism.⁴⁷ This was again not only logically but also factually wrong comment as first if there would be an political motive behind conversion Dr Ambedkar would have chose Christianity⁴⁸ instead as by then he would be in position to demand and secure special rights for himself as well as for Dalits- as the British were in power at the time of Ambedkar's struggle, secondly when on 1956 he practically embraced Buddhism much before that he successfully enacted the special privilege and rights for the Dalits in the constitution of India.

Conclusion

The writing of history of India in modern sense was begun by westerners. Historians and authors such as Vincent A Smith, Muir, Max Muller, Winternitz, Willian Jackson Rhys David, Horner and many other intellectuals were credited to produce the history of India, Indeed their work was an eye opener. But they were often criticized by a new breed of Indian Historians who disapproved their works by referring them as a colonial perspective. However when the Indians themselves involved in the task of writing History, their own caste-class bias came out open. For the readers of the marginalized section particularly Buddhists and Dalits the writings of Indian historians are more colonial than the western authors.

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⁴⁵ Dhanajay keer's *Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar Jeevan Charit* p.476

⁴⁶ Romila, *A History of India* 1 p. 68

⁴⁷ Ramvilas Sharma *Ibid* p. 621

⁴⁸ Conversion to Christianity is still a lucrative offer in India, unlike other religious groups Christianity being a western religion is supporting the converts in all sort of materialistic and other gains particularly easy access to quality education and health care. It is interesting to share that Muslims and Christian lobbies came with lucrative offers to Dr Ambedkar. But there was no offer from any Buddhist mission yet he chose Buddhism for his deep love and understanding of Dhamma.

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