

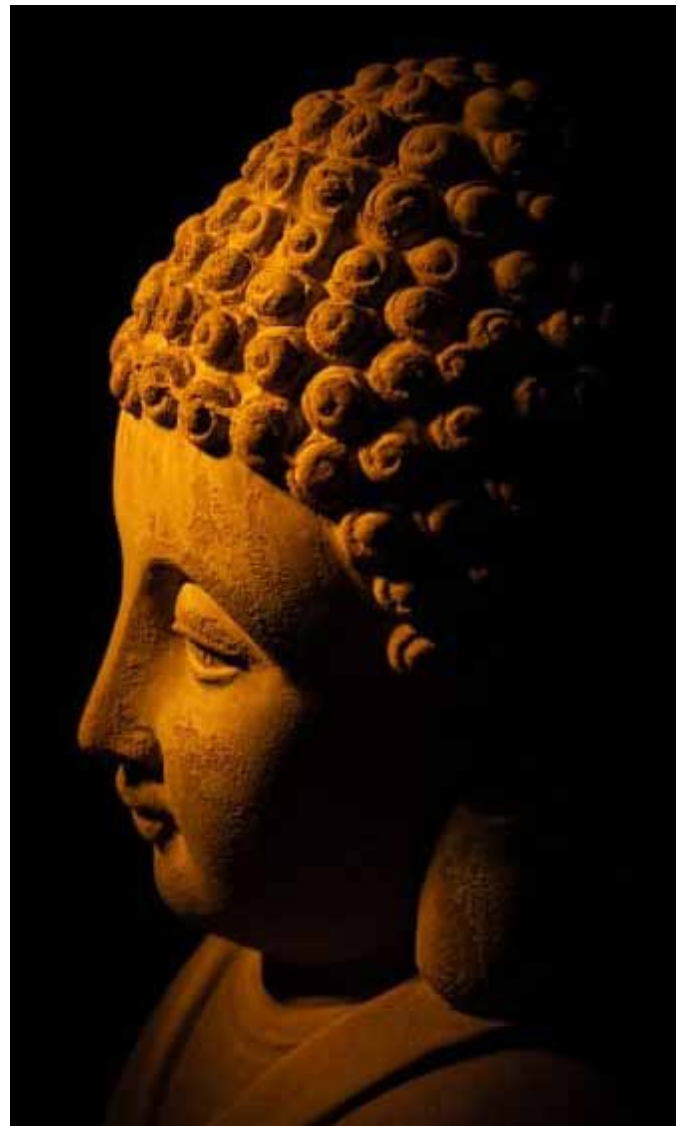
## GAUTAM BUDDHA: THE GLORIOUS MASTER

**I**n the annals of human civilization, the 6<sup>th</sup> Century BC was the most attractive and remarkable one. In this century alone the Greek Philosopher and Mathematician, Pythagoras; Gautam Buddha, the founder of Buddhism; Vardhman Mahavir, the exponent of Jainism and the Chinese political thinker and philosopher Confucius appeared on this earth almost at the same time, who had made profound, indelible contribution over man's socio-political, ethical, and religious life past 2500 years. Among those great men, the visit of the Lord Buddha to this planet was, by any scale, glorious and virtuous indeed.

In India, the period before the emergence of the Buddha was one of the darkest ages in the life of human history. It was, indeed, intellectually, and morally a backward era. While throwing light over the nature of this era, E.G. Taylor (1830/1887) had rightly said in his celebrated book 'Buddhism and Modern Thoughts': "Man had been ruled by external authority long enough. If he is to be truly civilized; he must learn to be ruled by his own principles. Buddhism is the earliest ethical system where man is called upon to have himself governed by himself". Taking a thread from the assessment of Buddhism as made out by Taylor, an American Prof. Dwight Goddard (1861 - 1939) in his book, '*The Buddhist Bible*' could not stop himself and thus said; "Among the world's religious teachers, Buddha alone has the glory of having rightly judged the intrinsic greatness of man's capacity to work out his salvation without extraneous aid".

Even the Nobel Laureate of 1913 for *Gitanjali*, Rabindranath Tagore in his work, 'Buddhadeo' unequivocally wrote: "India is being made known among the galaxy of nations due to the fact that Lord Buddha was born in India". He further expressed his earnest wish in his poetic style that let Tathagat reappear on the Indian soil by saying: "Bring to this country, once again, the Blessed name which made the land of his birth sacred to all distant lands. Let thy great awakening under the Bodhi tree be fulfilled".

It is certainly needless to observe that the Buddha is the tallest religious master who invented and propagated the real philosophy of life among the masses like this: "Religion is necessary for a free



society; not every religion is worth having; religion must relate to the facts of life and not to theories and speculations of God or soul or heaven or hell. It is wrong to make God, the centre of religion. It is wrong to make salvation of the soul as the centre of religion; it is wrong to make criminal sacrifices to be the centre of religion, real religion lives in the heart of man and not in *shastras*. In fact, man and morality must be the centre of religion. If not, religion is a cruel superstition, the function of religion is to construct the world and to make it happy and not to explain its origin or its end. It would be futile to do so".

Buddha said that the unhappiness in the world is due to conflict of interests and the only way to solve it is to follow the 'Great Eight-fold Paths' propounded by him at around BC 528. Those are: right view, right aim, right speech, right mindfulness, right perseverance, right conduct, right livelihood, and



right concentration. By following these eight-fold paths, Buddha is sure to establish the kingdom of righteousness on this earth by banishing the sorrow and unhappiness from the face of the planet. In his time and few centuries later, many rich and poor were attracted towards his teachings in and outside India. However, the existing Hindu socio-religious order is based on the inequality, followed by caste and *chaturvarnya* systems. Buddha stood for liberty, equality, fraternity, and justice. He strongly denounced caste system and *chaturvarnya* which he found detrimental to establish an egalitarian society.

Buddha, unlike others, is the only religious master who enthused the humanity by saying that anyone could be enlightened like him if the seeker decides to pass through the ordeal he had undergone. Everybody needs to ponder over this statement he made 2500 years ago. These great words must hypnotize and excite every sensible person even today, to select the right path for her/his journey. Significantly, in other religions, their individual masters took deliberate attempts to see that nobody, no devotee unsettles their pedestal. Buddha, in contrast, democratized his enlightenment by saying that anyone could achieve Buddhahood; if he or she follows him step by step.

Buddha speaks plain. His message is straight. He is the only master who threw open his teachings for anyone to test or challenge. This is something unbelievable. But it is a fact. No other religious masters dared to allow devotees to challenge their philosophies. In appreciation of Buddha, a famous American writer, W.C. Fields (1880-1946) observed: "You cannot look for loopholes in Buddha. Yes, you can look for loopholes in Jesus. Jesus was not well educated. He is using a very rough language because he was a rough man, a carpenter's son. Whereas, Buddha was the son of a king, well-educated and well cultured. His words are soft, convincing and prudent."

Importantly, Bertrand Russell, a noble laureate of 1950 also followed the line of W. C. Fields to praise Buddha. During a lecture on 'Why I am not a Christian?' at the National Secular Society at London on 6<sup>th</sup> March 1927, he impressed upon the gathering by saying: "With Jesus, I can fight. But before Buddha, I suddenly feel hesitant. I am not certain about my grounds. Because Buddha convinces me on his own grounds. You can look for loopholes in Jesus. But it is not so with Buddha. Buddha believes in logical analysis of everything. He asks for proof. Buddha is

strictly logical. He will not utter a single word which cannot be proved with the help of human senses.

Buddha's teachings are not like the established dogmas of a religion. In other religions, there is belief, there is God, there is soul and there is salvation. There is paradise and hell too. Whereas, in Buddhism, all these inconceivable things have been discarded with great force of reasoning. This is something unique. Never did such things happened in the history of human consciousness. Notwithstanding, the Buddha's unparalleled philosophy was repressed by external and internal forces for about 1200 years from 8<sup>th</sup> century AD to 20<sup>th</sup> century AD. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it was Dr. Ambedkar who astonishingly emerged on the horizon of the existing Hindu socio-religious order, like a sun emitting energy to bring a new lease of life to the oppressed mankind in the subcontinent. His rising and its effects on the grounds could be equated with the biological process of photosynthesis, where the sun rays play the role of a catalyst to help produce energy for the sustenance of plants. In absence of the sun, the plant kingdom is bound to go extinct. In the same way, the arrival of Dr. Ambedkar greatly impacted the lives of the suppressed, oppressed and the discriminated humanity in India. He thoughtfully concluded that without conversion to another religion, it would be impossible to achieve manhood by his people as their basic human rights were abridged by the prevailing system for the past thousands of years.

To achieve his goal, he organized hundreds of public meetings and conferences throughout the country to make his people ready to move from their historical religion to some other faith where equality, liberty and fraternity are ensured for their dignified livelihood. In a packed public meeting held at Bombay on 31<sup>st</sup> May 1936, he delivered a stirring speech saying: "Why do you remain in that religion which doesn't treat you as human being? Why do you remain in that religion which prohibits you from entering temples? Why do you remain in that religion which does not allow you to get education? Why do you remain in that religion which insults you at every step?" These thunderous words impacted the minds and hearts of the audience instantly for conversion to some other religion where liberty, freedom and brotherhood prevail.

In Buddhism, Dr. Ambedkar found no discrimination, there is no talk of God, nor there is recognition to the existence of soul or salvation.



Buddha is the only preacher who has called upon the man to have himself governed by himself without any inconceivable support. This basic philosophy of Buddha attracted the mind of Dr. Ambedkar when he was thinking of denouncing his Hindu religion since 1935. In his BBC broadcast of 12th May 1956, on 'Why I like Buddha and how it is useful to the world', he emphatically said: "I prefer Buddhism because it gives three principles in combination which no other religion does. Buddhism preaches *Pradnya* (wisdom), *Karuna* (love) and *Samata* (equality) together. This is what man wants for a good and happy life. Neither God nor soul can save humanity." In this broadcast, he further stated that Buddhism was a complete answer to maintain peace in the world. He was completely against the propaganda of communism in countries like Russia as the philosophy of communism was based on the bloody revolutions. Whereas the foundation of Buddhism is on the bloodless revolutions. It is just a change of mind and heart on its own, without any external kind of force – physical or economical.

Finally, the day dawned on 14<sup>th</sup> October 1956 at Nagpur when Dr. Ambedkar initiated his 5-lakh people into the fold of Buddhism in a peaceful manner,

unheard of in the history of mankind. While making a significant speech before the vast gathering on 15<sup>th</sup> October 1956 from the place of conversion, now popularly known as 'Deeksha Bhoomi', he impressed upon the audience: "Man cannot live by bread alone. Man has mind which needs food for thought. Religion instils hope in man and drives him to activity. Hindu religion has watered down the enthusiasm of the downtrodden. And I found it necessary to change our faith and embrace Buddhism. Some people say that Buddhism is on its dead bed. If it is so, it is our duty to raise it to a better status. We should act in a manner to enthuse and inspire other people too. A great responsibility has fallen on our shoulders. You should endeavour this religion sincerely and keep in view the position it had once attained. You must lead such a life that you may command respect from the public of all walks of life. If you do not do so, people will laugh at our conversion. Do not think that this religion is like the dog-collar tied around your neck. This religion can save not just this country but the whole world. Therefore, you must take pledge today that you, the followers of Buddhism, will not only work to liberate yourself but will try to elevate your country and the world. Buddha and Buddhism alone can save this world." ■

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