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BUDDHISM IN INDIAN PHILOSOPHY*

A. RAGHURAMARAJU

I

The radical and the ritual are two significant aspects surrounding the phenomenon of religion. The radical consists of elements that differ, disagree, dissent, oppose, or even exclude, the then existing religion, or religions. This could be with respect to either their ideas or practice. The ritual or regulative is concerned with formulating, systematising, building, laying the rules, maintaining, emulating, and eventually consolidating new ideas. Giving importance to the latter and not factoring in the former can seriously compromise one's understanding of the nature of religion. Further, let me reinforce my argument by introducing a distinction between a leader and a follower. A leader is one who knows how to handle not only what is politically correct, but also that which is politically incorrect. The competence about these two realms significantly distinguishes a leader from the followers. The follower mostly deals with what is politically correct. If we take into consideration the second aspect, we then cover only the confirmative aspect of religion, while leaving out its radical aspect. Very often, a new religion begins with a difference; hence, difference forms the foundation of religion. Even the novelty of a new religion comes later in the chronological order. There is an imperative need to take note of these foundations and their chronological order, not only to arrive at a comprehensive idea of a religion, but also to understand its later functions. The immediate reason for bringing this to the table of discussion is to make a case for the indispensable significance of difference between two, or amongst more than two religions, or

even philosophies. This essay, therefore, presents a critique of an attempt—an arduous attempt—to deny the difference between two important philosophical or religious schools, between Hinduism and Buddhism.

S. Radhakrishnan tries to absorb Buddhism into Hinduism. He undertook this task in *Volume I* of his magnum opus, *Indian Philosophy*. Radhakrishnan expends a great deal of time upon accomplishing this task; he offers a variety of resources, and advances various philosophical arguments. To begin with, he does acknowledge the originality and uniqueness of the Buddha and Buddhism. With reference to early Buddhism, he writes:

There is no question that the system of early Buddhism is one of the most original which the history of philosophy presents. In its fundamental ideas and essential spirit it approximates remarkably to the advanced scientific thought of the nineteenth century. The modern pessimistic philosophy of Germany, that of Schopenhauer and Hartmann, is only a revised version of ancient Buddhism. It is sometimes said to be 'little more than Buddhism vulgarized.' As far as the dynamic conception of reality is concerned, Buddhism is a splendid prophecy of the creative evolution of Bergson. Early Buddhism suggests the outline of a philosophy suited to the practical wants to the present day and helpful in reconciling the conflict between faith and science (2008: 287).

Therefore, in Radhakrishnan's assessment, Buddhism is original; it is a precursor, inspiring the pessimistic philosophy of Germany; it is practical and, more importantly, it is up-to-date. Having thus eulogised Buddhism, Radhakrishnan proceeds to identify certain important shifts in philosophy brought about by the Buddha, the most important being that while the Upanisads were 'a work of many minds', Buddhism, on the other hand, was the 'considered creed of a single individual' (ibid.: 291). Indicating another difference between the Upanisads and Buddhism, Radhakrishnan states that in the 'Upanisads we have an amazing study of an atmosphere, in Buddhism the concrete embodiment of thought in the life of a man' (ibid.: 291). This shift away from many minds to a single individual and the ensuing unity of thought and life was, according to Radhakrishnan, what 'worked wonderfully on the

world of the time' and was in fact responsible for the 'success of early Buddhism' (ibid.: 291).

Radhakrishnan proceeds to acknowledge Buddha's contribution. Buddha, he avers, 'wished to steer clear of profitless metaphysical discussions' (ibid.: 297). He first emphasised the special and novel aspects of Buddhism, noting the shift it brought about and acknowledging its contribution. This enhances the image of Buddhism. He, however, goes on to make his move to undermine the position of Buddhism, which we shall see how, through a long chain of argumentation.

Radhakrishnan now reports that the Upanisads and Brahmanism's 'creed' was 'collapsing' and their system 'disintegrating'. The unsaid subtext of this statement is that Buddhism did not take on a strong philosophical system, but one that was already in decline. In that sense, the statement erodes the importance of Buddhism. Radhakrishnan goes on to explain, however, that it was against the background of this disintegrated system that Buddha sought to 'provide a firm foundation for morality' on the 'rock of facts' (ibid.: 300). This firm foundation, provided by ancient Buddhism, claims Radhakrishnan, 'resembled positivism in its attempt to shift the centre from the worship of God to the service of man' (ibid.: 300–1).

Radhakrishnan then asserts that early Buddhism was 'not an absolutely original doctrine' (ibid.: 303). He reads the word 'original' to mean breaking away completely from the age and country. Radhakrishnan thus surprises the reader by claiming that Buddhism 'is no freak in the evolution of Indian thought' and 'Buddha did not break away completely from the spiritual ideas of his age and country' (ibid.: 303). As the statement shows, the definition of originality that Radhakrishnan uses is problematic; at the very least it is an interpolation within Buddhism, and is external to it. To substantiate his move, Radhakrishnan offers an argument by introducing a distinction; he writes: 'open revolt against the conventional and legalistic religion of the time is one thing; to abandon the living spirit lying behind it is another' (ibid.: 303). There is something unconvincing about this change in Radhakrishnan's attitude towards Buddhism; but let us move on to analyse his next move. Claiming the Buddha as part of a continuous ancient way of being, he declares that 'Buddha himself admits that the dharma which he has discovered by an effort of self-culture is

the ancient way, the Aryan path, the eternal dharma' (ibid.: 303). Radhakrishnan writes:

Buddha is not so much creating a new dharma as rediscovering an old norm. It is the venerable tradition that is being adapted to meet the special needs of the age.... Early Buddhism, we venture to hazard a conjecture, is only a restatement of the thought of the Upanisads from a new standpoint (ibid.: 303).

In this view, Buddhism is not a break from tradition but a reformed, hermeneutic version of the same tradition from a fresh standpoint. Thus, in his interpretation, Buddhism is parasitic on a Brahmanism in need of reform, and possesses no autonomy of its own outside this ambit. Radhakrishnan proposes to substantiate the claim that the 'spirit of the Upanisads is the life-spring of' early Buddhism by pointing out the aspects that these two philosophies have in common:

- (i) Both the Upanisads and early Buddhism accept the 'doctrine of impermanence' (ibid.: 313).
- (ii) Buddha, 'following the Brahmanical theory, presents hell for the wicked and rebirth for the imperfect' (ibid.: 374).
- (iii) Only 'metaphysics that can justify Buddha's ethical discourse is the metaphysics underlying the Upanisads'. And Buddha did not look upon himself as an innovator, but only a restorer of the ancient way, i.e., the way of the Upanisads (ibid.: 397).
- (iv) Finally, the incomprehensibility of the absolute by the intellect is accepted by both the schools.

Thus, for Radhakrishnan, Buddhism '... is a return of Brāhmanism to its own fundamental principles' (ibid.: 398–99). Having drawn out the commonalities between Buddhism and Brahmanism, Radhakrishnan states, however, that Buddhism brought about the democratic practice of including the masses by breaking open the exclusivism of the Upanisads (ibid.: 398). Nonetheless, even this concession to Buddhism that Radhakrishnan makes, in acknowledging its contribution towards democratising Hinduism, is

immediately weakened when he goes on to say that such 'democratic upheavals are common features of Hindu history' (ibid.: 398). Revealing his desperation and the vulnerability of his position by resorting to examples from the post-Buddha period, Radhakrishnan writes that when 'the treasures of the great sages were the private property of a few, Rāmānuja, the great Vaisnava teacher, proclaimed the mystic texts to even the pariahs' (ibid.: 398).

Having underscored the attributes common to the two systems, Radhakrishnan makes the bold move of ironing out two major differences between Buddhism and Brahmanism, namely, the denial of *atman*, and the rejection of caste, by the Buddha. With reference to the first, Radhakrishnan claims that the Buddha advocated both *atma-vada* and *anatma-vada*. To quote:

The two doctrines were preached by Buddha for two very different objects. He taught the existence of Ātman when he wanted to impart to his hearers the conventional doctrine; he taught the doctrine of an-Ātman when he wanted to impart to them the transcendental doctrine (ibid.: 328).

The Buddha's adherence to this dual position, according to Radhakrishnan, is played down by later interpreters like Nagasena, who 'drew the negative inference that there was no soul' (ibid.: 331). Nagasena, alleges Radhakrishnan, ignored the Buddha's silence. Hence, according to Radhakrishnan, this difference between *atman* and *an-atman* is not a substantial one.

Making a further point, Radhakrishnan claims that the Buddha did not 'oppose the institution [of caste], but adopts the Upanisad standpoint [which is that] [t]he Brāhmin or the leader of society is not so much a Brāhmin by birth as by character' (ibid.: 369). In his view, the Buddha undermines that spirit of caste which later gave rise to inhuman practices. Yet, even this reformist move, for him, is not new to Brahmanical theory, as the latter too 'looked upon the highest status of the Sannyāsin as above caste' (ibid.: 370). Summing up his views on this topic he writes:

... in the world of thought both Upanisads and Buddhism protested against the rigours of caste. Both allowed the highest spiritual dignity to the poor and the humble, but neither rooted out the

Vedic institutions and practices, though on this point Buddhism is a little more successful than Brāhmanism (ibid.: 371).

Thus, for Radhakrishnan, the Buddha does not reject caste outright, as has been attributed to him, but only rejects its subsequent corrupt versions. More importantly, the Upanisads, in Radhakrishnan's interpretation, do not clearly advocate caste. Having identified all these common features between Buddhism and Brahmanism, Radhakrishnan makes yet another move in the same direction and claims that the Buddha is dependent on Hinduism. He writes: 'The rules of Buddhist Sangha were borrowed from the Brāhmanical codes, though they were adapted to missionary purposes' (ibid.: 369).

At the end of the discussion Radhakrishnan turns the matter on its head when he points out a central defect in Buddhism. He writes that the 'central defect of Buddha's teaching is that in his ethical earnestness he took up and magnified one half of the truth and made it look as if it were the whole' (ibid.: 399). Radhakrishnan attributes this error to the Buddha's 'distaste for metaphysics' that consequently 'prevented him from seeing that the partial truth had a necessary complement and rested on principles which carried it beyond its self-imposed limits' (ibid.: 399). Explaining Hinduism's hostility towards Buddhism, Radhakrishnan writes:

The Hindu quarrels not so much with the metaphysical conceptions of Buddha as with his practical programme. Freedom of thought and rigidity in practice have marked the Hindu from the beginning of his history. The Hindu will accept as orthodox the Sāmkhya and the Pūrva Mimāṃsā systems of thought, regardless of their indifference to theism, but will reject Buddhism in spite of its strong ethical and spiritual note, for the simple reason that the former do not interfere with the social life and organisation, while the latter insists on bringing its doctrine near to the life of the people (ibid.: 596).

Radhakrishnan goes on to add that:

While the Upanisads tolerated, even if they did not encourage the caste rules, Buddha's scheme definitely undermined the institution of caste (ibid.: 597).

This is not only important, but also interesting, as it discloses the substantial threat the Buddha poses to Brahmanism. While other schools of Indian philosophy offered differences in the realm of ideas, Buddhism threatened to intervene in both its social life and organisation. In this context, it sought to diminish the distance between theory and practice. It is this move by the Buddha, according to Radhakrishnan, which threatened to change the organisation of social life that incurred the wrath of the Hindus.

Thus, Radhakrishnan begins by acknowledging that Buddhism is original, modern and scientific, a trendsetter, and a practical and updated school of thought. He then identifies Buddhism as a system that revolves around a single individual, and which sought to remove abstract metaphysics. Subsequently, as if reversing this view, Radhakrishnan claims that early Buddhism is not an original doctrine, but merely presents the Upanisads from a new standpoint. In support of his assertion, Radhakrishnan points out common themes in Buddhism and Hinduism, and explains the differences between the two, such as *anatma-vada* and the rejection of caste in Buddhism. While conceding that Buddhism broke open the exclusivist tendencies in the Upanisads, and facilitated the participation of the masses, Radhakrishnan nonetheless underplays this ostensibly unique characteristic too by claiming that these democratic overtures are also found in Hinduism, thus erasing this difference between Buddhism and Hinduism. In conclusion, Radhakrishnan points out the defects in the Buddha's teachings and states the reasons for Hindus being intolerant of Buddhism. As I have already pointed out, there is something unconvincing about the long and arduous route of philosophical argumentation that Radhakrishnan has undertaken. We must, however, note three points in his discussion: first, the politics of denying differences between Hinduism and Buddhism underlying his attempt; second, his solid and persistent attempt at offering a philosophical argument in support of his view; and third, his acknowledgment of the sociological fact that Buddhism posed a real threat to Hindu society.

While disagreeing with Radhakrishnan's attempt to deny the differences between Buddhism and the Upanisads, we must, however, pay close attention to two other aspects. A close scrutiny of his argument shows that he is making two important points here: (a) he endorses Buddhism's attempt to reduce the gap between

theory and practice present in corrupted versions of the Upanisads and Brahmanism; (b) he admits that this attempt by the Buddha angered the Hindus.

Even though Radhakrishnan makes his point on behalf of Hindus, it must be noted that he concedes the fact that Buddhism did perform this act of attempting to reduce the gap. This fact was also highlighted by B. R. Ambedkar, although, unlike Radhakrishnan, he bolstered the radical difference between Buddhism and Hinduism. Before I discuss Ambedkar let me report yet another view, that of Ganganatha Jha, that concurs broadly with Radhakrishnan. Jha, in the introduction to his English translation of *The Tattvasangraha of Shāntaraksita with a Commentary of Kamalashila*, traces the attempt to establish common features between Hinduism and Buddhism to Vijñānabhikṣu. Agreeing with him, Jha says,

I have often felt,—as Vijñānabhikṣu also felt—that there was deep kinship between ‘Vedānta’ and ‘Buddhist Idealism’,—the only difference of importance being that while the Buddhist Idealist regarded *Jñāna*, like everything else, to be momentary, though *real*—more real, at any rate, than the External world,—the Vedānta regarded *Jñāna*, at least, the Highest *Jñāna*, ‘Consciousness’, which is the same as ‘Soul’, the highest Self, to be the only Reality—and *permanent* (1986: viii) .

Tracing this move to reconcile the difference between these rival schools to pre-Samkara and stating his differences with the prevalent view he says,

We have been inclined to regard this as an achievement of the Great Shankarāchārya who succeeded thus in reconciling Hinduism and Buddhism and thus helping the fusion of the two. —It seems however that this feature of the ‘Vedānta’, this stressing of the eternality of ‘*Jñāna*’, at any rate, was older than Shankarāchārya,—if we admit the date usually assigned to this great writer (ibid.: viii).

He thus concludes that Shankarāchārya who came after the 7th century can be ‘credited only with having *emphasized* this idea and thereby led to the fusion of the two Philosophies or Religions’ (ibid.: viii, emphasis in the original). So there is a long history to

this attempt and Radhakrishnan is merely a recent participant on this already trodden path.

II

In sharp contrast to Radhakrishnan, Ambedkar emphasises the radical stand of the Buddha and Buddhism. Ambedkar rejects the Vedas and the Upanisads, and accepts Sankhya in addition to Buddhism in Indian philosophy. Interestingly, although he accepts Sankhya, he rejects the Bhagavad Gita. He claims that the aim of the Gita was to 'defend certain dogmas of religion on philosophical grounds' (Rodrigues, 2010: 193). This is intriguing since the Gita is based on the metaphysics of Sankhya.

For Ambedkar, the Vedas are a collection of *mantras*, i.e., hymns, or chants, and are 'mere invocations to deities such as *Indra, Varuna, Agni, Soma, Isana, Prajapati, Bramha, Mahiddhi, Yama* and others'. There is not 'much philosophy in the Vedas' except 'speculations of a philosophical nature' about the 'origin' of the world, the creation of 'individual things', and their maintenance (ibid.: 205). The Buddha, according to Ambedkar, 'did not regard all the Vedic sages as worthy of reverence', but only 'ten Vedic Rishis'. He did not see anything 'morally elevating' in the Vedic mantras. Ambedkar argues that for the Buddha, the '*Vedas* were as worthless as a desert', and so he 'discarded' them as 'useless' (ibid.: 207).

The Brahmanas are a part of the Vedas, and both are called *Śruti*. The Brahmanic philosophy, says Ambedkar, held the Vedas as not only 'sacred' but also 'infallible'. Further, for Brahmanic philosophy, 'performance of Vedic sacrifices and observances of religious rites and ceremonies and the offering of gifts to Brahmins' can save souls from transmigration and give them salvation. In addition to this, Ambedkar points out, Brahmins have a theory for an ideal society, that is the *Chaturvarna*, which entailed the division of society into four classes: Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras. These classes are not equal but are ruled by 'graded inequality'. The first one is placed at the top, while the last one is relegated to the bottom. There is also a division of occupations, which is 'exclusive', and does not permit trespass. Another rule of this theory of an ideal society is that education must be denied to Shudras and women of all classes. A further rule is that a man's life is divided into four stages. This, Ambedkar explains, is the 'divine pattern of an ideal

society called Chaturvarna' (ibid.: 212). Finally, the Brahmanas also endorsed the doctrine of karma (ibid.: 212).

The Buddha, insists Ambedkar, 'strongly opposed' the thesis that the Vedas are 'infallible' and that their authority 'should never be questioned' (ibid.: 212). On the contrary, he declares that 'nothing was infallible and nothing could be final' (ibid.: 213). The Buddha also denies any 'virtue in sacrifice'. While accepting sacrifice in the 'sense of self-denial for the good of others' as true sacrifice, the Buddha regards as false sacrifice the 'killing of animals as an offering to God for personal benefit' (ibid.: 213). He also rejects the theory of Chaturvarna as unnatural, arbitrary, rigid and bereft of freedom. While conceding that inequality 'exists in every society', the Buddha, writes Ambedkar, rejects Brahmanism that endorses graded inequality. Ambedkar explains:

Far from producing harmony, graded inequality, the Buddha thought, might produce in society an ascending scale of hatred and a descending scale of contempt, and might be a source of perpetual conflict (ibid.: 214).

The Buddha found this ordering of society to be not only selfish but also wrong, designed to serve the interests of a few at the cost of all, particularly, the Shudras and women. Being denied access to learning and education, these segments of society did not know who was responsible for their degraded condition. Their ignorance, instead of causing them to rebel against Brahmanism, made them 'become the devotees and upholders of Brahmanism' (ibid.: 215). So, for these reasons, concludes Ambedkar, 'the Buddha rejected Brahmanism as being opposed to the true way of life' (ibid.: 215).

In Ambedkar's critique of the Upanisads, the '... main thesis of the *Upanishads* was that Brahman was a reality and that Atman was the same as Brahman. The Atman did not realize that it was Brahman because of the *Upadhis* in which it was entangled.' So, the question [as asked by the Upanisads] was: 'Is Brahmana a reality?' In Ambedkar's reckoning, the 'acceptance of the Upanishadic thesis depended upon the answer to this question' (ibid.: 216). In contrast, says Ambedkar, the 'Buddha could find no proof in support of the thesis that Brahman was a reality. He, therefore, rejected the thesis of the *Upanishads*' (ibid.: 216). The question above was put

to no less a person than Yajnavalkya, 'a great seer who plays so important a part in the *Brihadarnyaka Upanishad*.' He was asked: 'What is Brahman? What is Atman? All that Yajnavalkya could say was: 'Neti! Neti! I know not! I know not!' How can anything be a 'reality about which no one knows anything', asked the Buddha (ibid.: 216). The Buddha had, therefore, no difficulty in rejecting the Upanisadic thesis as being based on pure imagination (ibid.: 216). In contrast to Radhakrishnan, Ambedkar sees no commonalities between the Upanisads and Buddhism. Rather, in Ambedkar's view, the Buddha clearly and wholly rejected not only the Vedas but also the Upanisads.

Although Ambedkar rejects outright the Vedas, Brahmanas and the Upanisads, he accepts, together with Buddhism, the importance of one old system of Indian philosophy—Sankhya. Ambedkar considers Kapila, the founder of Sankhya, to be the most pre-eminent 'among the ancient philosophers of India' (ibid.: 207). An important dimension of Ambedkar's philosophy is that although he endorses the philosophy of Sankhya, he does not accept the Bhagvad Gita, which is based on the metaphysics of Sankhya. Also, Ambedkar made another interesting move, in this context, by revealing the close relationship between the Gita and Buddhism.

According to Ambedkar, the Gita is not a 'gospel', and hence it has 'no message'. It only defends 'certain dogmas of religion on philosophical grounds' (ibid.: 193). The first dogma the Gita defends is the justification of war on the basis of the mortality of human existence (ibid.: 194). Second, it defends the dogma of the Chaturvarna by 'linking it to the theory of innate, inborn qualities in men' (ibid.: 194). The third such defence is of 'Karma Marga': that is, the selfish motive behind performance of the karma is removed by 'introducing the principle of Anasakti, i.e., performance of Karma without any attachment for the fruits of the Karma' (ibid.: 195).

Ambedkar dismisses the Gita's Chaturvarna theory. Referring to Krishna's defence of the Chaturvarna, which is based on Sankhya's Guna theory, Ambedkar writes:

In the Chaturvarnya there are four Varnas. But the gunas according to Sankhya are only three. How can a system of four varnas be defended on the basis of a philosophy which does not recognize more than three varnas? (ibid.: 197).

Underscoring the carefully timed efforts of the Gita to rescue the doctrines of counter-revolution, Ambedkar writes:

Nonetheless there is not the slightest doubt that without the help of the *Bhagvad Gita* the counter-revolution would have died out ... if the counter-revolution lives even today, it is entirely due to the plausibility of the philosophic defence which it receives from the *Bhagvad Gita* ... (ibid.: 197–98).

Ambedkar goes on to claim that there is no difference between Jaimini's *Purva Mimamsa* and the *Bhagvad Gita*. If there were any difference, it would lie, according to Ambedkar, in the Gita being a 'more formidable supporter of counter-revolution' and its therefore providing a 'permanent basis which they never had before and without which they [that is, the counter-revolutionaries] would never have survived' (ibid.: 198). In this context, Ambedkar asserts—contrary to those like Telang and Tilak—that the Gita 'has been composed after Jaimini's *Purva Mimamsa* and after Buddhism' (ibid.: 199). Ambedkar rejects those 'typical' Hindu scholars who are 'reluctant to admit that the *Bhagvad Gita* is anyway influenced by Buddhism and is ever ready to deny that the *Gita* has borrowed anything from Buddhism' (ibid.: 202). With reference to these 'typical' Hindu scholars, Ambedkar writes:

It is the attitude of Professor Radhakrishnan and so also of Tilak. Where there is any similarity in thought between the *Bhagvad Gita* and Buddhism too strong and too close to be denied, the argument is that it is borrowed from the *Upanishads*. ...[to thus avoid] allow[ing] any credit to Buddhism on any account (ibid.: 202).

Pointing out the similarities between the Gita and Buddhism, not only in 'ideas but also in language' he says:

The *Bhagvad Gita* discusses *Brahma-Nirvana*. The steps by which one reaches *Brahma-Nirvana* are stated by the *Bhagvad Gita* to be (1) *Shraddha* (faith in oneself); (2) *Vyavasaya* (firm determination); (3) *Smriti* (remembrance of the goal); (4) *Samadhi* (earnest contemplation) and (5) *Prajna* (insight or true knowledge) (ibid.: 203).

In identifying the source whence the Gita borrowed the Nirvana theory Ambedkar points out that as 'no *Upanishad* even mentions the word Nirvana' the 'whole idea is peculiarly Buddhist and is borrowed' from Buddhism' (ibid.: 203). There are other ideas in the Gita that are borrowed from Buddhism, Ambedkar asserts. They are: the definition of a true devotee: '(1) *maitri* (loving kindness); (2) *karuna* (compassion); (3) *mudita* (sympathising joy); and (4) *upeksa* (unconcernedness).' These are found in *Māhpadana Sutta* and *Tevijja Sutta*. The other idea that the Gita takes from Buddhism is on the question of what knowledge is, and what ignorance is. The explication, in chapter XIII, 'reproduced word for word the main doctrines of Buddhism...' from the Gospel of Buddha (ibid.: 204). Further, even the 'new metaphorical interpretation of karmas' in chapter VIII is a 'verbatim reproduction of the words of Buddha' from *Majjhina Nikaya I, 286 Sutta XVI* (ibid.: 204). Thus, Ambedkar concludes that the:

... *Bhagvad Gita* seems to be deliberately modelled on Buddhist *Suttas*. The Buddhist *Suttas* are dialogues. So is the *Bhagvad Gita*. Buddha's religion offered salvation to women and *Shudras*, Krishna also comes forward to offer salvation to women and *Shudras*. Buddhists say, 'I surrender to Buddha, to Dhamma and to Sangha.' So Krishna says, 'Give up all religions and surrender unto Me.' No parallel can be closer than what exists between Buddhism and the *Bhagvad Gita* (ibid.: 204).

Therefore, we have in Ambedkar an acceptance of Buddhism and those aspects of the Sankhya that were accepted by the Buddha, and a complete rejection of the Vedas, Brahmanas, Upanisads and the Gita. The last, Ambedkar argues, is a response to Buddhism, and is a philosophical defence of Purva Mimamsa. While Radhakrishnan denies any significant difference between Hinduism and Buddhism, Ambedkar in contrast, reinforces the differences. While Ambedkar uses the differences between Hinduism and Buddhism to claim the rejection of the former by the latter, Radhakrishnan, on the other hand, explains the differences away to establish continuity between the former and the latter. Although Radhakrishnan attempts to erase the differences between Hinduism and Buddhism—and this may not be a politically correct thing to do—he seriously engages with the

issue and persistently pursues his line of argument, philosophically. It is one thing to disagree with Radhakrishnan and another to dispense with him. Thus, there is a need to distinguish between political correctness and theoretical engagement. Not pursuing ideas with theoretical rigour can, at times, cost politics heavily. This is particularly so, not while making political claims, but when it comes to making sure political claims endure. In the case of Ambedkar, he is politically correct. He clearly, but only briefly, states his differences with his contemporaries such as Telang, Tilak and Radhakrishnan. However, what Ambedkar has stated has not been progressively followed up and explored further by the philosophical community.

There is a need to extend Ambedkar's engagement with different traditions and make these philosophically more rigorous, and to bring in rich resources from Buddhism, particularly in relation to Hinduism. In an interesting paper, Gopal Guru makes a claim for Dalits to take to theory (2002). I would want to extend this to include a philosophical engagement with Buddhism and reopen the critical philosophical engagement with Hinduism. Along with the political claims clearly stated by Ambedkar, the philosophical insights and ideas available in his writings can be extensively elaborated. These can be further related to the core, the fundamental philosophical themes in Buddhism as well as Hinduism: this opening between political ideas that are extended to philosophical discussions, and insights that are formulated as philosophical theories, relating Ambedkar to Buddhism and highlighting his critique of Hinduism, and reopening the critical relation between Buddhism and Hinduism—all these can reinvigorate the discussion on Indian philosophy. This manner of the clearing of a space, or making an opening, has successful precedents, since this is what was undertaken by Buddhist philosophers in relation to the Buddha. They extended and philosophically formulated his ideas in a metaphysical discourse, even though the Buddha rejected metaphysics. The rich and extensive philosophical resources from Buddhism can be used to consolidate the critique of Hinduism initiated by Ambedkar. This, in my reading, would not only consolidate the political views that Ambedkar proposed, but also make the debate between Hinduism and Buddhism more current. Hence, we may say that Ambedkar brings political correctness to the discussion, making it more

contemporary. However, one of the limitations in Ambedkar is that, in his preoccupation with exposing the injustice done by Hindu society to Dalits, he considers only the impact of Buddhism on the Gita, without considering the impact of Hinduism on Buddhism. In other words, both Radhakrishnan and Ambedkar tend to take extreme positions, albeit in opposite directions. It is in this context that I shall discuss the work of T. R. V. Murti.

III

Murti states his philosophical differences with Radhakrishnan's denial of differences between Hinduism and Buddhism. Like Ambedkar and Radhakrishnan, Murti credits Buddhism with offering a modern perspective. In his estimation, the 'egalitarian stand taken by Buddhism, as contrasted with the hierarchical pattern of Brāhmanism, in regard to the cultivation of spiritual life is in closer conformity with the ideals of today' (Coward, 1983: 163). Directly taking on Radhakrishnan, he asks:

Does all Indian philosophy stem from one original source—the Upanisads? And are all Indian religions variations of the Vedic? Following the lead of Professor Radhakrishnan, the foremost Indian thinker of today, there is a large and impressive body of opinion favouring the unilinear tradition and development of Indian thought (ibid.: 163).

Contesting this dominant view of unilinear development, Murti asserts that in the 'estimation of the Buddhist and non-Buddhist' that includes Jaina and Brāhmanical orthodox tradition, 'the differences between the two are radical'. Aside from these extreme positions, however, he claims that 'both these estimates seem to suffer from the fallacy of over-simplification. Probably the truth lies some-where in the middle' (ibid.: 163). Specifying the nature of this middle path, Murti states that a 'careful analysis would reveal that Hinduism (Brāhmanism) and Buddhism belong to the same genus; they differ as species' (ibid.: 163–64). Using this formula, he goes on to emphasise a third dimension of the relation between Buddhism and Hinduism—their complementary nature. This dimension eluded the attention of both Radhakrishnan and Ambedkar. Focusing on this complementary dimension, Murti

clarifies, 'In a sense, they are complementary to each other; one emphasises what the other lacks or slurs over. Without basic affinity they would have been completely sundered from each other ...' (ibid.: 164). And without differences they 'could not have vitalised and enriched each other. In view of the differences in their basic standpoints and the mode of their historical development, we should be alive to their differences as much as we affirm their affinities' (ibid.: 164). Recounting the commonalities between them, Murti writes:

Both Brāhmanism and Buddhism are types of spiritual religion. They try to realise a state of utter negation of the ego, the abolition of selfishness Again in both, the highest state is attained by a non-discursive intellectual intuition, a kind of mystic absorption Both religions have always believed in the Law of Karma as the Law of the Universe and as the arbiter of human destiny (ibid.: 164).

Then, turning to the differences in their philosophies, he asserts:

All systems of Hindu thought subscribe to the *ātma-vāda*—the conception of reality as Being, substance and permanent. In its most radical form, as in the Vedānta of Sankara, it denied the reality of change, and characterised it as appearance (ibid.: 164).

In contrast, writes Murti,

the Buddhist schools rejected the reality of the soul or substance (*anātma-vāda*) and conceived the real as Becoming (ibid.: 164).

Besides those described above, there are other vital differences between the two systems with regard to their religious views. Underscoring these, Murti avers:

The source of religious inspiration in Brāhmanism is the revelation as given to us in the Vedas; in Buddhism it is reason (ibid.: 165).

The other irreconcilable difference between Buddhism and Hinduism, according to Murti is that:

For Buddhism the fundament is the moral consciousness and the spiritual urge is for purifying the mind of its passions (*visuddhi-mārga*). The fundament of Brahmanism is God-consciousness; and the goal is exaltation or deification (*ibid.*: 166).

Thus, for Murti, the '*en rapport* relationship with God is what distinguishes Hinduism from Buddhism' (*ibid.*: 167). He states that 'the Mādhyamika, Vijnānavāda and Vedānta exhibit some common features as to their form' but that 'they differ in the mode of their approach, and possibly with regard to that entity with which they identify the absolute' (*ibid.*: 171). Further, while the 'Vedānta analyses illusion from the knowledge-standpoint ...' the Vijnānavāda, on the other hand, 'analyses illusion from an opposite angle' (*ibid.*: 173).

Rejecting those who, like Radhakrishnan, do not sufficiently emphasise these 'differences' Murti declares:

It has been the fashion to consider that the differences between the Mādhyamika *sunyata* and *Brahman* are rather superficial and even verbal, and that the two systems of philosophy are almost identical. At least Professor Radhakrishnan thinks so, and Stcherbatsky's and Dasgupta's views are not very different (*ibid.*: 177).

Reiterating his own position on this matter of the relationship between Hinduism and Buddhism, Murti says that 'although their generic identity is undeniable, the specific differences are equally undeniable' (*ibid.*: 219). Disagreeing further with Radhakrishnan, Murti claims that Buddhism's opposition to the Upanisads is not to be seen in Buddha's rejection of ritualism when the Upanisads themselves are wary of this practice, but rather in his rejection of *atman*. To quote:

In the dialogues of Buddha we breathe a different atmosphere. There is a distinct spirit of opposition, if not one of hostility as well, to the *ātmavada* of the Upanisads. Buddha or Buddhism can be understood only as a revolt not merely against the cant and hollowness of ritualism—the Upanisads themselves voice this unmistakably—but against the *ātma*-ideology, the metaphysics of Substance-view (Murti, 2010: 16–17).

Trenchantly questioning Radhakrishnan's interpretation of the Buddha's silence with regard to atman, Murti writes:

If the ātman had been a cardinal doctrine with Buddhism, why was it so securely hidden under a bushel that even the immediate followers of the Master had no inkling of it (ibid.: 17).

To support his analysis, Murti elucidates the implications of accepting atman for its spiritualism and moral dimension. He says:

An unchanging eternal soul, as impervious to change, would render spiritual life lose all meaning; we would, in that case, be neither the better nor the worse for our efforts. This might lead to inaction (akriyāvāda). Nay more; the ātman is the root-cause of all attachment, desire, aversion, and pain (ibid.: 17).

Having identified the genus-like similarities and species-like differences, Murti then highlights the active and negotiated relations between the two schools of thought. Murti's contribution lies in elucidating this transformative relation between Hinduism and Buddhism, rather than merely stating either differences or absence of differences. This is what distinguishes Murti from both Ambedkar and Radhakrishnan. Ambedkar recognises only the impact of Buddhism on the Gita and does not see any significant influence of Hinduism on the shaping of Buddhism. While Radhakrishnan strategically and infrequently acknowledges the interrelations between the two systems, in the end, he underplays them by subsuming Buddhism within Brahmanism, thus making the process of transformation restricted and less significant. In Radhakrishnan, it becomes a marginal activity overshadowed by his overall concern, which is to correct Brahmanism through the critical application of Buddhism. In contrast, Murti claims that Buddhism and Brahmanism have mutually impacted each other.

Stating the nature of influence in clearer terms, Murti writes that influence can be 'expressed as much through opposition as by acceptance' (Coward, 1983: 168). Accounting for the transformation within Buddhism, Murti asserts that in its earlier phase it 'was a radical pluralism [subsequently has become] in the Mahāyāna a

radical absolutism with a different conception of Buddha and the Bodhisatva ideal' (ibid.: 168).

He attributes this transmutation to both internal and external factors. These are: ... one, that of borrowing from or being influenced by the Upanisadic thought where absolutism and theism are such dominant features; the other hypothesis would deny external influence and see the account for the revolution as the result of an inner dynamism in Buddhist thought itself. These two views are not exclusive, and perhaps the truth lies somewhere between the two (ibid.: 169).

The first view, according to which the

Upanisadic Brahman is obviously the model from which the *Tathatā* or *sūnyatā* has been drawn. Competent scholars, like Kern, Keith, Stcherbatsky and Radhakrishnan among others, have drawn pointed attention to the probable influence of the Upanisadic thought on the emergence of the Mahāyanā (ibid.: 169).

Murti, on the other hand, gives more importance to the second view. He writes, 'I attach somewhat greater importance to the dynamism inherent in Buddhism itself which engendered the revolutionary change' (ibid.: 169). While holding internal reasons responsible for the changes in Buddhism, Murti does not wholly discount the influence of external reasons. Pointing out another example of influence of the Upanisads on Buddhism he says:

The dialogues of Buddha, as preserved in the Pāli Canons, are suggestive; they are as little systematic as the Upanisadic texts. Buddhist systems grew out of them much in the way the Brāhmanical systems grew out of the Upanisads (Murti, 2010: 14).

Later in the same work he claims that:

There were lively interchanges between the Buddhist and the Brāhmanical logicians for centuries. The Madhyamika and Aupanisada schools were not enclosed in water-tight compartments (ibid.: 113).

After elucidating the influence of the Upanisads in systematising Buddhism, Murti turns his attention to highlighting the influence of Buddhism on subsequent philosophical activity in India. Thus, Buddhism has drawn from the Upanisads for its methodology of systematising the dialogues of the Buddha, and Advaita has incorporated the Buddhist dialectical technique. The important point in Murti's argument is the dialectical relation between Hinduism and Buddhism. However, while there are many political dimensions to Murti's critique of Radhakrishnan, which are close to Ambedkar's analysis, Murti either does not perceive these or stops short of relating his work to them.

Thus, we have in Radhakrishnan a philosophical engagement wherein his attempt to claim Buddhism as part of Hinduism he denies or explains away, although less than convincingly, the differences between Buddhism and Hinduism. However, Radhakrishnan does concede, though only in passing, the fact that Buddhism threatened to change the social system of Hindus, and he leaves it at that. Subsequently, we have in Ambedkar a different effort, in sharp contrast to Radhakrishnan, wherein he highlights the differences between Hinduism and Buddhism, and claims the Buddha as being outside the Hindu fold. Murti takes a moderate position, keeps the discussion at a philosophical level, and challenges Radhakrishnan on many counts. But Murti's engagement is confined to Radhakrishnan's claims and conclusions and does not refer to his arduous arguments and strategies. This, in a way, bypasses the academic protocols and academic bureaucracy essential in philosophical engagement.

While denying the difference in order to project unity and cultural continuity as a defence against colonialism may be understandable, the manner in which the denial is executed may not be justified. What independent India requires is not mere unity or mere difference, nor even unity in diversity. We need to go much beyond these. There is a need to identify and nurture the differences that are available. There is a further need to debate these differences on reasonably objective and common grounds. Arguments are one aspect of a debate. In a debate, the participants only claim what is truth. What is truth is adjudicated not by the participants but an outsider. An outsider could be an expert or, as in a democracy, it could be the common person. So what is suggested here is not mere identification of difference, as was the preoccupation of the

Orientalists; nor is expressing ideas in isolation; not even dialogue between two cultures or schools of thought which largely remains less rigorous; not mere arguments, but rigorous and relentless debates. Modern India provides several complex debates for philosophy to rejuvenate itself. The scholarship that focuses on the conformity aspect fails to recognise those foundational structural features crucial to the formation of religions.

More importantly, the instance of this happening in the visible sites of textbooks—that too authored by a well-known philosopher who was also a statesman, a president of India—eluded the attention of philosophers. Most, if not all, universities in India have a paper, or papers, on Indian Philosophy. *Indian Philosophy* by Radhakrishnan is a prominent prescribed textbook in these courses. Surprisingly, it eluded the attention of scholars working on Ambedkar. If philosophers have not worked on Ambedkar, then that needs to be addressed.



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