

BUDDHIST POLITICAL THINKING

Buddha was born in 6th century BC in Lumbini, Nepal. He was brought up in princely states, when he encountered old man, sick man, a dead man he decided to renounce his worldly life in search of truth at age 29. After wandering for some years he attained enlightenment. The Buddhist traditions present multiple path of liberation.

Early Buddhism was based on empirical evidence gained by the sense organs (ayatana). Buddha focus over practical question of end of suffering. He did not engage in metaphysical debate and religious scriptures.

Basic teachings

Buddhist tried to address basic problems of human life. Interpretation of Buddhism appears more scientific. It tells about suffering, causes and solution. It is not related with enquiry of God, soul. Aim of Buddhism is not search for religious scripture and orthodox practices. The Teachings of Buddha aimed at liberating human beings from sufferings. Some basic assumption of Buddhism includes.

- (a) The four noble truths
- (b) Eightfold path

Four Noble Truths

Buddha tried to explore human suffering and gave following theory about it: -

- a) **Dukkhha (suffering exists):** Suffering is real and universal. Suffering has many causes: loss, sickness, pain, failure and the impermanence of pleasure.
- b) **Samudaya (There is cause of suffering):** Suffering is due to attachment. It is desire to have control over things. It can take many forms cravings of sensual pleasures, the desire for fame and the desire to avoid unpleasant sensations, like fear, anger, joy or jealousy.
- c) **Nirodha (there is an end to suffering):** Attachment can be overcome. Suffering ceases with final liberation (nibanaa).
- d) **Magga: (In order to end suffering):** you must follow eight fold paths, for end of suffering.

The eight fold path -

The Buddha's eightfold path consists of:

1. Right view
2. Right resolve
3. Right speech
4. Right conduct
5. Right livelihood
6. Right mindfulness
7. Right meditation
8. Right effort

Political Ideas

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- According to professor, **V. R. Mehta**, Buddhist tradition lack political thinking. Primarily Buddhism is a **religious tradition**. Politics is not subject of Buddhist tradition. Nevertheless we can infer some political thought from **Buddha Charita** written by **Aswag Ghosh**. We can draw some political teachings from **Jatak stories**. Term Sammat refer to contract. Sammat is term of Pali literature- Jatakas stories, related to previous birth of Buddha. Apart from that Sutta-Pitak is also source of few political ideas.
- Professor V.R. Mehta pointed out two paradoxical ideas, mentioned in **Buddhachrita**:
 1. Politics is similar to treachery, opportunism and deceit. It is said that Buddhist monks should keep themselves away from kings and prince.
 2. On the other hand, Buddhist traditions also hold politics as an important activity to manage society. Morality dominated in thoughts of Buddha's tradition.

SOCIAL CONTRACT

It is clear that the origin of state is result of social contract:

- Earlier individual conduct was moral and they abided by principle of Dharma. There was peace and harmony in society. Later people became selfish, egoistic and hence anarchy emerged in society and for maintaining social order, state became necessary. It is result of contract among the people.
- The functions of state were similar to those of **Arthshastra** and **Dharmashastra**. Buddhist traditional too believes in **welfare state**. Primary objective of state is the well-being of the people.

Morality Centric

Like **Dharmashastra** Morality occupies highest pedestal in **Buddhist tradition**. King is also **subject to morality**. If moral principles are neglected by the King. Automatically people will not follow moral path. This lead to the development of anger in nature. Subsequently there will be no rain, no crops. People will die due to hanger. It means diversion from moral path will result in destruction of community. Politics becomes, secondary to morality there is a cosmic moral order in the universe.

Form of government

Buddha, Dharma and Sangha are three basic elements of Buddhist tradition. Evolution of Sangha refers various form of government.

- A. Buddha was himself a leader of Sangh. He alone decided **initiation** in Sangh. There was no consultation with other monks. Sangh was not based on any formal rulers and regulation. Sangh is fully controlled by Buddha. Politically, it is considered as **monarchical form of government**.
- B. With increase in size of Sangh functions of Sangh is also transferred to monks. (Bhikkus) Training and supervision of monks is given to **senior monks**. Power of Sangha lies in group of monks. Relation between senior monks and junior monks were like relation between father and son. Politically it can be described as **aristocratic form** of Government.
- C. Now Sangh became more organised, like admission of monks and training belong to the entire community. Community stands for Sangh. In the first phase of evolution of Sangh division making power belong to Buddha, only. Few monks were given the decision making power in second stage. But in **third phase** entire power and decision-making is given to entire community. This is very similar to **republic or democratic** form of government.