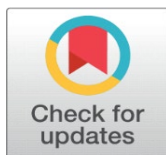


THE RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL TRADITIONS OF ANCIENT INDIAN PERIOD WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO BUDDHISM

Dr. Chintala Venkata Sivasai¹

¹ Assistant Professor, School of Buddhist Studies and Civilization, Gautam Buddha University, Greater Noida, U.P



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ABSTRACT

Though it is far more than just a standard moral instruction, Buddhist ethics includes a great code of ethics, including one for the Saṃgha (monks and nuns) and another for the general public. Śīla, or morality, is merely the first step and a means to an aim rather than an end in and of itself. Despite being very necessary, it does not bring about salvation or complete purity on its own. On the journey to purity, it is but the beginning. Wisdom (Paññā) is superior to morality. Buddhism's peak is wisdom, while its foundation is morality. These two complementing qualities are similar to a bird's pair of wings. Morality is like a person's feet, and wisdom is like his eyes. One of the Buddha's names is Vijjācaraṇasampanna, which means "endowed with wisdom and conduct." The first three of the Four Noble Truths, which serve as the cornerstone of Buddhism, stand for the Buddha's teaching philosophy; the fourth is the ethics of Buddhism, which is founded on that philosophy.

Keywords: Buddhist Ethics, Ancient India, Cultural Traditions, Religious Traditions etc



1. INTRODUCTION

According to Buddhist ideas, progress in science and technology has not in any way lessened the bad things that make people act badly, like greed, hatred, and delusion. It is impossible to imagine peace, harmony, happiness, and contentment in society until these causes of bad behavior are drastically cut down or kept within reasonable limits. Buddhism is important to modern society because it offers a philosophical middle ground that accepts the rules of scientific reason while rejecting both the extreme materialist view of modern science and the dogmatic fundamentalist beliefs of traditional religion. There is no way for modern science to tell us what is morally right or wrong, good or bad. It's not likely that social interactions between humans will be very different from those between brutes when people don't care about such things and don't want to live a morally good life. People want to live well, which is one of the most important things that sets human life apart from animal life. They look for meaning in their lives and try to reach moral ideals and goals that make sense. In this way, Buddhist morality has a lot to teach modern man. One way to see Buddhism is as a path to moral perfection. The whole path is made up of steps that get you cleaner morally.

Brahmanic Vedas

The *Rig, Sama, Yajur, and Atharva* are the four collections of the Brahmanas' Vedas. More modern Vedic categories include manuals for prayer and ritual & the *Aranyakas*, or texts for sacred hermits. The following is how these Vedas should be interpreted:

(1) RIG VEDA

The hymns of the *Rig Veda*, which are regarded as the oldest and most significant of the Vedas, were written among 1500BC as well as during the period of the great Bharata war, which occurred approximately 900BC. The 10 mandalas (circles) contain over a thousand hymns, with the earliest being the second via the seventh as well as the tenth being the most recent. Even the Vedas, according to Hindu tradition, were progressively condensed from much older and more comprehensive heavenly revelations, but they were corrupted during the current *Kaliyuga* period. They are regarded as the best source of information we have because they are the only texts from this ancient era of India; yet, the mystical *Upanishads* appear to have refined the ethical concepts from the old hymns.

Hymns that praise the Aryan gods for their conquests and wealth gained via war from the local Dasas predominate in the *Rig Veda*. According to reports, the Aryans used their better weapons and fighting abilities to subdue the tribal along with agricultural peoples of the waning Harappan culture. Horses and spoked chariots are mentioned in many hymns, which must have greatly benefited their warriors. There are additional references to iron weapons, bows, arrows, and spears. Warrior-dominated patriarchy households as a new social framework and, later, by priests as well, were developed by this nomadic and pastoral culture that glorified combat. The meetings mentioned in the *Rig Veda* were most likely of the military elite, who may have exerted some power over the monarchs and the purohita, a type of tribal priest. The deities worshipped were similar to Indo-European deities as well as has been under the command of the powerful Indra, who is frequently given credit for demolishing ninety forts. Agni, the fire god regarded as a divine messenger, was also well-liked. The Persian Mithras and the Greek *Uranos* have been compared to *Varuna and Mitra*, the night sky gods. *Dyaus*, who has been linked to the Greek Zeus, is not nearly as often referenced. Ushas the dawn is the wife or daughter of Surya the sun a deity, also known as the eye of Varuna and the son of Dyaus, who rides through the sky in his chariot with his twin sons, the Asvins, who stands in for his rays. Rudra, one of the few indigenous deities that the Aryans might have embraced, shaped the storm-gods known as Maruts. The 33 gods are mentioned in the *Rig Veda*, same as in the Iranian Avesta.¹

(2) SAMA VEDA

Almost all of the phrases in the *Sama Veda* can be connected to *Indra, Agni, or Soma*, while almost all of them are traced back to the eighth and ninth books of the *Rig Veda*. The songs or tunes for the chants used in the sacrifices are taken from the *Rig Veda* and are found in the *Sama Veda*. They are credited with giving rise to Indian music and most likely inspired extraordinary craftsmanship to justify the sacrifices made by the priests' supporters. The *Sama Veda* served as a songbook for the religious ceremonies and aided in the training of the musicians. Agricultural festivals as well as soma rites, which required transporting a plant having intoxicating as well as hallucinogenic abilities from the highlands to the central region of India, made extensive use of Sama chants, although they were not utilized in animal sacrifices. As the number of professional singers and musicians grew, the priests began to specialize in various aspects of the sacrifices. Similar to the Greek chorus's antistrophe, strophe, as well as epode, 7 European tones were used during singing. Trade with Babylon and other near-eastern countries resumed when the Aryans conquered most of northern India by the ninth century BC. The priestly class utilized the more intricate sacrifices to strengthen their position in society. This musical section was regarded by many as the most significant part of the *Vedas*.

(3) YAJUR VEDA

Although it contains most of the songs of the *Rig Veda*, According to *Yaja*, the *Yajur Veda* differs greatly from the original book in that it gathers the ritual formulas that the priests can utilize while performing sacrifices. It describes how to build altars for events such as full moon as well as fresh sacrifices. White and Black are the names of the two *Samhitas* (collections) in the *Yajur Veda*; the connotations of the latter are less certain.

The most significant was the soma sacrifice, which might go on for up to twelve years. The soma plant had to be bought because it was imported from far-off mountains. Following the transaction, the buyer was shown in a ceremonial performance reclaiming the calf that had been purchased for the soma plant, reenacting this business and hostile Aryan past. After that, the soma plant was loaded into a cart and presented before the sacrifice as a king and honored guest. In the rituals, animals were killed and dismembered before their meat had been consumed. After several offerings & additional rites, the soma juice is spilled as well as toasted to many gods. Finally, the sacrificial items—usually cows,

¹Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, "*The Rig Veda*", Penguin Books, New Delhi, 1994.

clothes, goats, gold, & food—are mentioned in the scripture. King's inaugurations were aided by coronation ceremonies. However, by worshiping Soma as the ruler of the Brahmins, the priests attempted to maintain their position above the warrior caste. The monarch was sprinkled with water from many rivers to represent the boundaries of his realm, and he walked in each direction to represent his authority. In a ritualistic raid on a kinsman's cattle, the royal priest anointed the king, gave his son, the chosen prince, some water, and reaffirmed their history of conquest. For the priest, the drinkers, and the original owner, the loot was separated into three sections. The king was permitted to win in a ceremonial dice game that was played. After riding out in his chariot, the monarch was hailed as a celestial ruler by the populace. At certain festivals, chariot racing was undoubtedly popular, and agricultural rites were frequent and routine. The Purusha² (person) sacrifice symbolized human sacrifice, it can allude to the period when a pastoral and hunting tribe forbade their adversaries from surviving due to a lack of food. But more work was required and may yield more food in an agricultural civilization. 184 professional crafts and guilds were acknowledged by the Purusha sacrifice.³ Lastly, the *Sarvamedha*, in which the sacrificer sacrificed all of his belongings as payment at the conclusion of the ritual, was regarded as the highest sacrifice. The *Isha Upanishad*, which expresses the mystical belief that the divine spirit penetrates all, is actually the final chapter of the *Yajur Veda*. Because men frequently married non-Aryan women, women's standing fell in this strongly patriarchal society. Women were not allowed to inherit property on their own and were not allowed to attend public gatherings. While polygamy, adultery, and prostitution were largely permitted, with the exception of specific ceremonies, polyandry was discouraged. When the sacrificial fire initially began, a sacrificer was prohibited from seeking a prostitute; on the second day, he was prohibited from seeking the wife of another; and on the third day, he was prohibited from seeking his own wife. Because they oversaw a religion that the majority of people could not comprehend without them, the priests occupied the highest rank in the caste hierarchy. Utilizing the *Atharva*, *Sama*, *Yajur*, and *Rig Vedas* along with their helpers, a minimum of four priests were required for every sacrifice after the Atharva Veda was adopted, one on each side of the fire. Priests were necessary to maintain societal order after the conquering wars were over and the warrior caste had established themselves as the dominant group. Although it is stated that one should not inquire about the caste of an educated man, the caste system is considerably more lenient these days. Priest caste members, or Brahmins, had 3 debts to pay back over their lifetime: they paid the gods by making sacrifices, their fathers by having a family, and the seers by learning the Vedas. The Aryan warriors, like their European forefathers, believed that they were superior to working for food and established a society in which they would be fed. Taking care of refugees was one ethical obligation that was later discovered in the epics, most likely because the characters had frequently been refugees themselves while on the raid. Priests were able to ensure their livelihood by making religious ceremonial penance a basic social value.

(4) ATHARVA VEDA

Only roughly a sixth of the *Atharva Veda* comes from the *Rig Veda*, and it is far lengthier than the *Sama and Yajur*. It mostly consists of incantations and magical spells. Typically, ethical considerations create the distinction between white and black magic, as well as between prayer and magic. Fever, leprosy, jaundice, dropsy, and other illnesses are treated by the *bheshajani* using herbal remedies. Presumably, because the locals were more adept at these than they were, the Aryans denigrated physicians and medicine. There were also more beneficial spells for virility, fecundity, passion, and a successful birth. Known as *abhichara*, the negative or manipulative spells sought to inflict illness or injury on adversaries; they were frequently directed at demons and serpents. One of the authors, Angiras, is credited with the magic. He is named after the celestial messenger Agni (Latin ignis), which may be a distant variant of the Greek word angel, which means messenger. The ancient Iranian term atar, meaning fire, is the source of the name of another author, Atharvan. The Rig Veda claims that the 3rd author, *Bhrigu*, had been a tribe's name that participated in the War of the 10 Kings and fought against the Sudas. A Greek word meaning fire is also associated with his name. The fourth author is the priest from Atharvan, who earned the title Brahmin, which later gained such a high regard that it belonged to both the priestly caste and God the Creator.

(5) ARANYAKAS

The *Jnanakanda*, which deals with knowledge, is made up of the *Aranyakas* and the *Upanishads*. The *Karmakanda*, which pertains to sacrificial rites, comprises the 4 Samhitas: *Yajur*, *Atharva*, *Rig*, as well as *Sama*, along with their respective

²Purusa means "man", "person" and also "spirit", "world-spirit".

³Bhattacharji, Sukumari, "Literature in the Vedic Age", Vol. 2, p. 109.

Brahmanas. *Aitareya*, *Kausitaki*, and the *Taittiriya* are the only three *Aranyakas* that share the titles of the Upanishads they had before and the Brahmanas they followed. The final is connected to the Yajur Veda, whereas the first two are connected to the Rig Veda. At the end of Brahmanas were the Aranyakas and the Upanishads. The Aranyakas are named the "forest books" because ascetics retired into the woods to converse with their followers about spiritual concepts. This led to a decrease in the importance of the sacrifice rites that were still carried out in the city. They served as a bridge between the Brahmanas and the Upanishads since they included the early conjectures and scholarly debates that blossomed in the *Upanishads*, as well as magical material, drab lists of formulas, and a few Vedic hymns. The Brahmins in the towns who catered to aristocrats and other rich clientele were far wealthier than the sages who housed pupils in their forest retreats.

The idea of *Prana*, the breath's vital force, is exalted as the foundation of the entire soul. In ascending sequence, *prana* can be found in people, animals, and trees. The soul (*atman*), not the body, is said to be the source of human immortality. Hell remains apprehensive, but by practicing austerity (*Tapas*)⁴ to acquire information in the hopes of being freed from reincarnation or born into a better planet after death. Additionally, *Vairagya*, or non-attachment, cleanses the body and defeats death. The fundamental nature of the Vedic individual had been named *Brahman*, whereas the cognizant individual or inner self was called the soul (*Atman*). *Brahmavadins* (those who discourse Brahman) were the community's stewards of its spiritual resources. A son went up to his dad and asked him what was most important. "Truth, *tapas*, self-control, charity, dharma (duty), and progeny," the father retorted.⁵

UPANISHADS AND THEIR TEACHINGS

Another literary work was the Upanishads. It isn't found in the Vedas. It isn't canonical. Nevertheless, they did appear in religious writing. There are quite a few Upanishads. Some significant, some not at all. The Brahmin priests and Vedic theologians were the targets of some of them. They were all in agreement that Vedic learning was a study of ignorance or nescience (*avidya*). The four Vedas, the Vedas, and Vedic science were all regarded as the lesser knowledge by all of them. They were all in agreement that the Vedas' divine origin was questioned. They were all in agreement that sacrifices, funeral oblations, and priestly gifts—all of which are central to the Brahmanic philosophy—were ineffective.

2. CONCLUSION

The Buddha rejected their claim that the Vedas are unchangeable and that no one may ever dispute their authority. He believed that nothing could be definitive and that nothing was flawless. Everything needs to be available for reexamination and reconsideration. Man needs to be aware of the actual truth. He believed that the most important thing was freedom of thought. He also believed that the only path to truth was freedom of opinion. The Vedas' absolute infallibility meant that intellectual freedom was completely denied. He found this Brahmanic philosophy's argument particularly offensive for these reasons. He was also against the Brahmanic philosophy's second thesis. The Buddha acknowledged that a sacrifice could have any virtue. However, he distinguished between genuine and fraudulent sacrifice. He defined true sacrifice as self-denial made for the benefit of others. He considered it a false sacrifice when an animal was killed as an offering to God for his own gain. In order to appease their gods, animals were typically offered as Brahmanic sacrifices. He denounced them as fictitious offerings. Even when they are carried out with the intention of obtaining soul salvation, he would not let them. Those who opposed sacrifices used to make fun of the Brahmins by stating: "Why shouldn't one sacrifice one's own father if one can enter heaven by offering an animal as a sacrifice? That would get you to heaven more quickly. The Buddha was a strong supporter of this viewpoint.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

⁴Tapas may here have its original meaning of "heat" (some "creative heat" analogous to the heat by which the broodhen produces life from the egg) or it may mean the 'fervour' of austerity; or, as Deussen thinks, both meanings may be implied in the word.

⁵ Mautice Winternitz, "The Vedas in A History of Indian Literature", (VI), Delhi, 1996, pp. 47-157.

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