**Pre-history of Śramanism**

We have seen above that the older Upanishads are not earlier than the Buddha and that the non-Brahmanical ideas and ideals of the Upanishads and the Pali Suttas are not known to the Vedic Aryan culture. What then was the original source of the thoughts of the historic munis, *yatis* and sramanas? It would be absurd to think that Buddhism and Jainism or the Samkhya and Yoga or the anti-Vedic spiritual thoughts of the older Upanishads appeared suddenly in the sixth and fifth centuries BCE. The fashionable theories of “revolt” or “reaction” and “reform” within the Vedic Brahmanism are gratuitous, wholly conjectural and without any evidence. The Upanishads themselves prove that non-Vedic, non-brahmanical and non-Aryan influences were at work; the pre-Upanishadic Vedic texts prove that there were in pre-historic India non-Aryan and non-Vedic *munis* and *yatis* or “ascetics.” Finally, the archaeological remains of Mohenjodaro and Harappa prove that there were ascetics or *yatis* and yogins in India in the second millennium before Christ. There is thus literary as well as archaeological evidence to furnish the pre-historic background of the origins of the Upanishads, Buddhism, Jainism and other forms of sramanism. It is a well known fact that the older Upanishads are aware of the historic *sramanas, yatis, munis* and *mundakas*. [63]

Their evidence on sramanism, therefore, is of no value for the background of the origins of Buddhism. On the other hand, words such as *bhikshu, tapasa, nirvana*, *pratityasamutpada* are known neither to these texts nor to the older Vedic texts. But pre-Upanishadic Vedic literature contains some casual references to the *munis, yatis, vaikhanasas* and *vriatyas*. The references show that these sages or tribes with ascetics as their teachers were not of Vedic cultural stock but belonged to non-Aryan or non-Vedic cultures of India. It is most unfortunate that pre-Buddhist literature of the Śramanic culture has altogether disappeared. But it is most likely that there must have been some non-Vedic pre-Buddhist literature which is now lost forever. It is quite possible that this literature was destroyed partly through human violence and partly through the ravages of time. We must remember in this connection the story of the gradual disappearance of Pali, Sanskrit and Prakrit versions of Buddhist scriptures from the land of Buddhism. Let us briefly review the pre-Upanishadic Vedic evidence on the culture of the munis or Ascetics in pre-historic India.

The Rigveda (X. 163. 2–4) describes a *muni* who practised meditation and led an austere life. He is said to be “long-haired” and probably wore a beard. The *munis* either lived naked (*vatarasana*, windgirt?) or wore tawny-coloured or dirty (*mala*) garments and were experts in techniques of silent ecstasy. Macdonell and Keith say that the Rigvedic *muni* was “an ascetic of magic powers with divine afflatus, the precursor of the strange ascetics of later India.”

The *munis* must have been quite well known in Vedic times but they were probably not respected in Vedic circles. A *muni* was probably not approved by the priests who followed the ritual and whose views were essentially different from the ideals of a *muni*, which were superior to earthly considerations, such as the desire for children and Daksina.”  [64]

The Aitareya Brahmana (VI.33.3) mentions muni Aitasa who was also known for his strange “ecstasy” (or trances). We have seen above that this text (VII.13.7) refers to such ascetics who wore tawny robes, deer skin, wore beards and performed austerities and these practises are condemned as useless compared to the ideal of having a son. At one place the Rigveda (VIII.17.14) refers to Indra as the “friend of munis” (*muninam*), showing that there were many munis or ascetics. But the mention of Indra’s friendship with these ascetics is rather curious, for, in other texts Indra is the declared enemy of the *yatis* or ascetics. The Atharvaveda (VIL 74.a) refers to a “divine muni.” The Śatapatha Brahmanas (IX.5.2.15) also mentions a *muni* while the Pañcavimsa Brahmana (XIV.4,7) refers to a place called “ascetic’s death” (*muni-marana*) where the Vaikhanasa ascetics were killed, obviously by Brahmanical followers of Indra.

The Vedic literature knows persons called *yatis*. *Yati* means an ascetic. Modern scholars think that *yatis* were a tribe, real or mythical. In Vedic myths they are mythologised and connected with Bhriigus. [65] Indra is said to have caused the death of the *yatis*. In the Rigveda (VIII.3.9) Indra is hostile to them. In the Taittiriya Samhita (II 4.9.2; VI.2, 7, 5) and other texts Indra is said to have thrown the *yatis* to wolves or hyenas (*vyalavriikebhyah*)  [66] The yatis and munis of the Vedic age were non-Vedic ascetics. A third word denoting ascetics in the Vedic age was *vaikhanasa*. That a *vaikhanasa* was called a *muni* is clear from the Pañcavimsa Brahmana (XIV.4.7) which refers to the slaughter of these ascetics. The Taittiriya Aranyaka (I.23.3; IV.9.29) knows the Vaikhanasas and mentions a Vaikhanasa sage called Puruhanman.

A very late Brahmanical commentator of *Gautama Dharmasutra* (on III.2), Haradatta by name states that Vaikhanasa and Bhikshu refer to the third and fourth stages (*asramas*) respectively. The term *bhikshu*, “mendicant monk,” a characteristic Buddhist term, is, however, “not found in the Vedic literature.”Likewise the term *asrama*, “resting place” or a stage of life, “does not occur in any Upanishad which can be regarded as pre-Buddhistic.” The word *sramana*, “mendicant monk,” “is first found in the Upanishads.” [67] The Buddha was known as a *mahasramana* before the Upanishads were compiled.

We shall note one more Vedic term which refers to non-Vedic people who had some ascetic ideology. This word is *vriatya* which occurs in the Vajasaneyi Samhita (XXX.8), Taittiriya Brahmana (III 4.5, 1), Atharva Veda (Kanda XV), Pañcavimsa Brahmana (XVII.1–4) and in the latest Vedic texts, the Śrauta Sutras, Katyayana, Latyayana and Apastamba. The Yajurveda (Vajasaneyi Samhita, XXX.8) includes the vri*atya* among the victims of “human sacrifice” (*purushamedha*). This evidence alone is enough to prove that the vri*atyas* were non-Aryan and non-Vedic people and that the Vedic Aryans of Brahmanical tradition were hostile to them.

The *St. Petersburg Dictionary* defines the term *vratya* as “belonging to a roving band (*vrata*), vagrants; member of a fellowship that stood outside the Brahmanical pale.” In the Brahmanical Sutras on Śrauta and Dharma, the son of an uninitiated man is considered a *vratya*; those who were not consecrated in accordance with the Vedic rituals were deemed to be “depressed” or “degraded” (*hina*). The Manusmriti regarded the Licchavis as *vratya-kshatriyas*. It has been suggested by older writers that the fifteenth book of the *Atharvaveda* represents the “idealisation of the pious vagrant or wandering religious mendicant.’ [68] This book is captioned *vratyakanda*.

The word *vratya* seems to be connected also with *vrata*, vow; the *vratyas* were possibly ascetics who kept certain pious vows. That they were wandering religious mendicants is quite in keeping with their tradition of ascetic life. It is not suggested here that all the people called *vratyas* were ascetics; but that ascetic or sramanic ideas were popular among the teachers of the *vratya* community admits of no doubt. The fact that Brahmanas or Vedic priests composed “*vratya stomas*” and prescribed formal ritual for the admission into the Brahmanical fold of persons who were of non-Aryan origin or belonged to a non-Brahmanical cultural stock confirms the fact that the *vratya* culture was different from the Vedic culture. According to J. W. Hauer, the Vedic *vratyas* were related to Kshatriya *yogins* or *yatis*. [69] It is generally believed that the *vratyas* were a people of eastern India, the region of Kosala and Magadha. It may be noted that the leader of the *vratya* community wore a head dress which is called “*ushnisha*,” one of the thirty two marks of a “great man” (*mahapurisa*) in the Pali and Buddhist Sanskrit texts. Keith and Macdonell admit that the principles of the *vratyas* “were opposed to those of the Brahmanas.” [70]

A synonym of *vratya*, “wandering religious mendicant,” is *parivrajaka* a mendicant monk, a religious wanderer. The word *parivrajaka* (Pali *paribbajaka*) is unknown to Brahmanical literature prior to the Nirukta of Yaska which is usually dated at 400 BCE. It must be observed that the mystical and ritualistic picture of Vratya culture recorded in the Atharva Veda (Book XV) is a Brahmanical version of a non-Brahmnical fact. Likewise, the information about munis, *yatis*, *vaikhanasas* and *sramanas* given in Vedic texts is coloured and reflects considerable mixing of non-Aryan and Aryan cultures. At any rate, the evidence discussed above shows that there was what may be called a pre-historic form of the culture of munis and there were before the sixth century BCE its teachers called munis, *yatis*, *vratyas, vaikhanasas*, etc. The texts of the Vedic age show that the Vedic Indo-Aryans had been deeply influenced by the non-Aryan and pre-Aryan culture of India at the time of the composition of the Samhitas and Brahmanas. The Upanishads reveal the profound and enduring impact on Vedic priests of the non-Vedic ascetics. Dr. H. Zimmer observes that “Following a long history of rigid resistance, the exclusive and esoteric Brahman mind of the Aryan invaders opened up, at last, and received suggestions and influences from the native civilization. The result was a coalescence of the two traditions”. [71]

Apart from this old Vedic evidence, there is the evidence of the literary traditions preserved not only in Pali and Sanskrit Buddhist sources, the Prakrit and Sanskrit Jaina sources, but also in some Brahmanical sources which are datable between the fourth century BCE and fourth century CE, which strongly suggest the existence of saints or ascetics such as are conceived in the traditions of Jainism, Buddhism and the Samkhya-Yoga.

Most of the older writers have held the view that these systems arose within Vedicism as a reaction against Vedic sacrificial ritualism. Drs. G. C. Pande, H. Zimmer and H. L. Jain have pointed out that Buddhism, Samkhya-Yoga and Jainism were of non-Vedic and non-Aryan origin. John Marshall had demonstrated the non-Aryan and Harappan origin of Yoga while Dr. H. Jacobi had shown the great antiquity of the Jaina tradition. But the credit of making a detailed and critical study of the pre-historic background of the rise of Buddhism and suggesting Harappan influence in the culture of the *munis* and *sramanas*, goes to Dr. G. C. Pande. [72] However, none of these scholars seems to have taken into account the Buddhist tradition of six “past Buddhas” who are believed to have flourished before Śakyamuni Buddha in pre-historic ages.

The most important epithets of the historic founder of Buddhism, Gautama Buddha, were Muni, Śramana, and Tathagata. Although he is also called Yati, Jina, Angirasa, Adiccabandhu, etc. [73] and although the epithets Muni and Śramana are also given to many sages of the Jaina tradition, the epithet Tathagata, “One who came thus,” or “One who had arrived (at Truth; Bodhi) in the same way” is a peculiar epithet, the very meaning of which essentially implies the existence of the Buddhas before Gautama Buddha.

*Tathagata* (*tatha+ agata*) means “one who has arrived (*agata*) at the timeless Nibbana in the same way (*tatha*) just as the Enlightened Ones of former ages (*pubbakehi sammasambuddhehi*) had attained to it.”

In our opinion, it is in this context, with reference to the Buddhas of pre-historic India, the enlightened munis and *yatis* of pre-Upanishadic and non-Vedic Śramanic antiquity, that Gautama Buddha referred to himself as a Tathagata. It is not our view that all the Buddhas and Pratyeka-Buddhas known to Buddhist tradition (e.g. the Buddhavamsa and the Mahavastu know more than 25 Buddhas and in Mahayana myths they are numberless) were historical and human sages. But we strongly believe that the six Buddhas 1. Vipassi, 2. Sikhi, 3. Vessabhu, 4. Kakusandha, 5. Konagamana, and 6. Kassapa, mentioned in the Digha and the Samyutta Nikayas as immediate predecessors of Gautama, were most likely real human Śramanic teachers whose historicity has been shrouded in the myths and legends so universally found in the Buddhist literature and art of Asia. [74] Besides the evidence of the Digha and Samyutta Nikayas, the Majjhima Nikaya knows at least Kakusandha and Kassapa, while an inscription of Asoka mentions Kanakamuni or Konagamana. [75] Whatever be the Brahmanical theory of the mythical incarnation of Vishnu in the form of the historic founder of Buddhism, and whatever be the views of modern Buddhists and Buddhist scholars regarding the origin of Buddhism and the antiquity of the gospel of Śakyamuni, the latter himself and his ancient followers including the two most famous of them, Asoka and Hsuan Tsang, had a firm faith in the historicity of the six aforesaid “former” Buddhas. The present writer shares this faith of ancient Buddhists.

The famous *ipse dixit* of Gautama Buddha, which has been cited as an authority in support of their hypothesis of Hinduistic origin of the Buddha’s teachings by Drs. Radhakrishnan and P. V. Kane, has to be interpreted, in our view, in the context of the Buddhist tradition of the existence of the Buddhas before Gautama Buddha. The passage quoted by these scholars occurs in the Nagarasutta (SN 12:65). It has been wrongly employed to support the modern Hindu view that the Buddha himself claimed to teach the path of the ancient “Hindu” sages and to show that the Buddha did not feel that he was announcing a new religion. The word “Hindu” does not occur in the statement of the Buddha; nor does he refer to Vedic sages or Indo-Aryan seers or brahmanas or priests as the teachers of that ancient path which he followed and preached. It has been our contention that his teaching was connected with the ancient ideals of the munis, *yatis*, and *sramanas* who were neither “Hindu” nor Brahmanical or Vedic; nor even Indo-Aryan.

The antiquity of the Śramanic, as distinguished from the Brahmanic, path (*maggo*), affirmed by Śakyamuni, must be accepted as a fact. It is impossible to trace in the Vedas and Brahmanas any one single element referred to in that statement attributed to the Buddha which is quoted by these scholars and which should be summed up as follows: The Buddha gives an example of an ancient city (*nagara*) and an ancient road (*magga*) leading to that city. Just as a man wandering in a forest sees an ancient road and following that road arrives at an ancient city which was established by men in ancient times, in a like manner, the Buddha says, when he had been a Bodhisattva wandering in quest of the Supreme Peace, he saw and followed an ancient path and arrived at the highest goal. What was that path and what that goal?

The answer is contained in these lines: “Even so (*evameva*),” says the Buddha, “Monks, I have seen an old path, and an old road, traversed by the Supremely Enlightened Ones of yore. What, monks, is that old road, traversed by the Supremely Enlightened Ones of yore? Just this noble Eightfold Path, to wit, Right Views, Right Aims, Right Speech, Right Actions, Right Livelihood, Right Endeavour, Right Mindfulness, Right Concentration. This, monks, is that old path, that old road, traversed by the Supremely Enlightened Ones of yore. Along that I have gone. Going along that I have fully known old age and death; I have fully known the end of old age and death; I have fully known the path leading to the end of old age and death? I have fully known birth, I have fully known becoming (*bhava*)? I have fully known the path leading to the end of volitional formations (*sankhara*).” [76]

In this statement the “Eightfold Path” is called an “Ancient Path” (*puranam maggam*). Nobody can maintain that the Eightfold Path is known to the Vedic literature; it is unknown even to the Upanishads. In later Yoga texts a theory of “eight limbs” of Yoga was advanced apparently after the old Buddhist theory of an eightfold way. Likewise, the theory of “Four Truths” concerning the origin and end of ills (*dukkha*) is unknown to the entire range of Vedic literature, though the Buddha says that it also belonged to antiquity.

In later texts on medicine and Yoga we find that a similar view of four facts concerning origin and end of disease is expounded, obviously on the model of the Buddhist theory of the Four Truths. Not only are the “Eightfold Path” and the “Four Truths” related to antiquity but also the doctrine of “conditioned origination (*paticcasamuppada/pratityasamutpada*)” is said to be ancient. This doctrine is quite unknown to the Vedas, Brahmanas and Upanishads. The idea of *nirodha* of samsara, i.e. the conception of Nibbana or Nirvana, the highest goal referred to here, is quite unknown to the Vedic tradition. Yet the Buddha was quite right in saying that these cardinal doctrines of his Dhamma or Buddhism belonged to antiquity. They belonged to the Buddhas of former ages, to the Supremely Enlightened Ones of ancient times. The six “Seers” (*isis, rishis*) or “Past Blessed Ones” (*pubba bhagavanto*), namely, Vipassi, Sikhi, Vessabhu, Krakucchanda, Kanakamuni, and Kasyapa, are called “Supremely Enlightened Ones of Yore” by the Buddha. Śakyamuni trod their ancient path and arrived at the highest “Sphere (*ayatana*)” or “City (*nagara*)” known to these ancient seers. Hence he referred to himself as Tathagata, and hence also he was called “the seventh Seer among the Seers (*isinam isi sattamo;* SN 8:8).”

The six seers or Buddhas of Yore must have belonged to the tradition of munis and *yatis* whose existence in pre-historic India is attested by the Vedic Samhitas and Brahmanas. Nothing, more than their names, is known to us. Their biographies in extant sources are quite mythical but there seems to be some historical basis of facts underlying so ancient and so universally accepted a Buddhist tradition as that concerning these past Buddhas.

A. S. Geden observes, while commenting on the evidence of the Nigalisagar pillar inscription of Asoka referring to the stupa of Kanakamuni Buddha, that “of the numerous Buddhas whose names are recorded in the Buddhist books as predecessors of Gautama, it would seem therefore historically probable that a real basis of fact underlies the name and personality of Kanakamuni; and also of his successor Kasyapa.” [77]

Confirming the interpretation offered here of the Samyutta Nikaya passage quoted above, the *Mahavastu Avadana* [78] records the following relevant lines addressed to Bodhisattva Siddhartha:

Yena gato krakucchando kanakamuni ca kasyapo Etena tvam gaccha vira adya buddho bhavishyasi.

These lines obviously refer to that path which had been traversed by former Buddhas called Krakucchanda, Kanakamuni and Kasyapa, and Siddhartha is being advised to go along that path so as to become a Buddha soon.

It may be noted that the Jaina tradition also seems to be older than is generally believed. It will be difficult to maintain that all the twenty-three Jinas whose legends are found in Jaina books as predecessors of Nigantha Mahavira were historical teachers. But the historicity of some of them, [79] for example, of Parsvanatha, is now an acknowledged fact. The *sishnadevas* or naked teachers known to Vedic literature may have been pre-historic predecessors of historic ascetics of Jaina and Ajivika traditions. Dr. Jacobi, relying on Jaina sources, placed Parsvanatha in cir. 750 BCE.

We should now briefly consider the origins of the Samkhya and Yoga. In later Brahmanical tradition these two systems are generally mentioned together. Yoga as a way of religious perfection is older than the Yoga system of thought now associated with Patañjali’s *Yogasutras* (cir. 300 CE). Yoga as a way was an essential element of Śramanic culture. Yoga is therefore of non-Brahmanical and non-Aryan origin. The munis and *yatis* of Vedic age practised Yoga and *dhyana*. This is clear from the Rigveda (X.136.1–3) and the Aitareya Brahmana (VII.13.7). The early Yoga was possibly identical with Buddhist Yoga or the way of meditation. As it belonged to the non-Vedic Śramanic tradition, the early Yoga was possibly non-theistic and ascetic. Even in the Yoga system of Patañjali, God (Isvara) does not seem to be an essential element in the system.

In later Brahmanical myths known to the Mahabharata and the Puranas, Yoga is said to be of divine origin and is usually interpreted on theistic lines. The older Upanishads were deeply influenced by Yoga. From the time of the Svetasvatara Upanishad onwards, Rudra-Śiva seems to have been associated with Yoga. Śiva is now known as Yogisvara. Krishna in the Bhagavadgita is called Yogesvara. It is characteristic of this text to praise not only Yoga but also the Samkhya, and the two are identified as one.

There is strong evidence to prove the great antiquity of Samkhya and its non-Vedic or Śramanic origin. This system remained anti-Vedic, non-theistic, dualistic and ascetic till as late as the *Samkhyakarika* of Isvarakrishna (cir. 300 A.D). The Upanishads and the Mahabharata including the Gita, have been greatly influenced by the Samkhya system. It is wrong to suppose, as Dr. R. Garbe has done, that the Samkhya originated as a reaction to Upanishadic idealistic monism. [80] The system is almost certainly of pre-Upanishadic origin. The Brahmajala Sutta “probably refers to the Samkhya dualism at one place when it refers to the view that the soul and the world (*attanam ca lokam ca*; cp. *purusha* and *prikriti* or matter) were held to be real by certain sramanas.” [81] From other Buddhist sources we know that Alara Kalama, a contemporary and teacher of Siddhartha, was possibly a Samkhya teacher. The partial similarities between early Samkhya and Theravada theories are due, in our view, to the fact that the Samkhya belonged to the same tradition to which early Buddhism belonged and the practise of Yoga was a common bond between these two sister traditions of non-Brahmanical origin.

The founder of the Samkhya system was, according to all accounts, Kapilamuni or Rishi Kapila. He was a historical teacher and may be placed in the 9th century BCE. So many are the legends in the Great Epic and Puranas woven around his name that he was completely mythologised and deified. But before the Brahmanas or Vaishnavaite Hindus accepted him as an Avatara of Vishnu, his doctrine as a way to the Highest Good, and his institution of the ascetic stage as the fourth Asrama, he was held to be a “demon” (*asura*), and his teachings were treated as heterodox. [82] For old Brahmanism, Kapilamuni was as good or bad as Śakyamuni; in Hinduism, however, both are revered as Gods.

The Mahabharata (*Vanaparva* 221.26) as well as the Samkhyakarika (verses 70–71) recognise Kapila as the founder of the Samkhya; Asuri and Pañcasikha were the two most important teachers after Kapila. The Śvetasvatara Upanishad (III.4, IV.12, V.2, VI. 13) knows the Samkhya, Yoga and Kapila and identifies the latter with the Golden Germ (*hiranyagarbha*). The Atharvaveda (X.8.43) knows three “qualities” (*gunas*) and the Ait. Upa. (III. 3), the Prasna Upa. (VI. 4) and the Katha Upa. (III.15) refer to five great elements and their five qualities. The Mahabharata mystifies Kapila with Vasudeva, Agni and Prajapati but gives a detailed account of the Samkhya doctrine and the ascetic culture called Yoga. The great Samkhya teacher Pañcasikha is called in the Epic a “*bhikshu*,” “*kapileya*” and is said to have belonged to Parasarya gotra. It is important to note here that Panini (IV.3.110) seems to attribute a text called “*Bhikshu Sutra*” to a Parasarya. Thus two sources tell us that Kapila and his pupil, Pañcasikha, were associated with the institution of *samyasa* and its organisation or rules. We have already noted that Baudhayana makes Kapila responsible for the introduction of the stage called *pravrajya* or *samyasa*. This authority refers to Kapila as “Asura” and asks people not to respect his teaching. This is clear proof of the non-Vedic origin of Kapila, his Samkhya and his fourth Asrama.

Indeed, Kapila is mentioned in the Rigveda (X 27.16: *dasanam ekam Kapilam samanam tam hinvanti kratave paryaya*) as one among the ten (*Angirasas*). The Angirasas were connected with the *yatis*. The Buddha is sometimes called an Angirasa. In a Sri Lankan tradition Kapila is known as “Isuru-muni” which is identical with Kapila-muni who is called an Asura. Dr. G. C. Pande thinks that Kapila in Baudhayana Dharma Sutra (II.6.29–31) “may be merely eponymous for the Kapilas or the tawny-clad ascetics.” This should not mean that a Kapila was not a real teacher called Kapilamuni. Dr. Zimmer says that “Kapila, who stands outside the traditional assembly of Vedic gods and goddesses as an Enlightened One in his own right? must have lived before the sixth century BCE.”

Something should be observed about the term *arya* (Pali: *ariya*) It will be argued that the word Arya or Ariya is of such frequent occurrence in Buddhist literature, both Pali and Sanskrit, that to trace Buddhist origins to a non-Aryan and pre-Aryan source is rather difficult to appreciate. The word *arya* or *ariya* means “noble,” “honourable,” “respectable,” “one who is faithful to the religion of his country,” etc. Modern researches have shown that there was no human race called the Aryan race. Archaeologists and philologists now use the word *aryan* for those peoples who spoke a dialect belonging to the family of Indo-European, Indo-Aryan and Indo-Iranian group of languages. In ancient India the word *arya* or *ariya* was a word of common use among educated people. It was often used to show respect for a person or a group of persons or a doctrine. We have used the word Aryan for the Vedic or Brahmanical culture following this convention.

The word perhaps originated among the victorious barbarians, who came from beyond the north-western border of India in about 1500 BCE and who referred to the autochthonous people in contemptuous terms such as *dasa*. We have a similar case in later Buddhist history when the followers of the Mahasanghikas and Sarvastivadins coined the word Mahayana for their own doctrine and described the older schools as belonging to the Hinayana. The word *arya* or *ariya* has no racial or linguistic sense attached to it, in Buddhist literature. *Ariya-puggala* means “a noble person’; *Ariya-sacca* means “noble truth” and so on.

Before we conclude this section we must say a few words about the ascetics of the pre-Vedic culture of the Indus Valley. Archaeological evidence is more reliable and authentic than literary evidence. It has been rightly acknowledged by antiquarians like Marshall, Mackay, Piggot and Wheeler that some of the basic elements of the historic religious beliefs and practises of India go back to the Harappan culture or Indus civilization of the third millennium BCE [83] For example, we find the holy animals like deer, lion, horse, elephant, bull, rhinoceros and the sacred snake represented in the plastic art of Mohenjodaro and Harappa. These creatures are often given an important place in Buddhist art and literature of historic times. The sacred *Ficus religiosa*, the *Asvattha* or the Pipala tree is already a religious article in this pre-historic civilization. In Buddhism this becomes the symbolic *Bodhi-rukkha*, the Tree of Enlightenment. More significant than these is the discovery of at least four sculptures which show ascetics or munis in ascetic and meditative posture establishing thereby the existence of Yoga and those who practise it, in pre-Vedic India.

A steatite seal from Mohenjodaro, discovered by E. Mackay, and described by John Marshall as the prototype of historic Śiva, “Trimurti,” and “Pasupati,” deserves special mention. Long before the ideas of Śiva, Mahadeva, Trimurti and Pasupati had come into existence in historic Brahmanism and Hinduism, there had been in pre-historic India and in Buddhism and Jainism what are called *munis*, *yatis* and *sramanas*. The Indus seal therefore should be looked upon as the figure of an ascetic of pre-Vedic Indian culture. The figure shows a human ascetic, seated cross-legged on a pedestal, around him are figures of a lion and an elephant on his right, and a buffalo and a rhinoceros on his left while below the pedestal are figures of a pair of deer. The ascetic wears a head-dress resembling the symbol of the Buddhist *Triratna* as found in the art of Bharhut and Sañchi. The figure is probably four-faced.

Another figure on a seal is supposed to be that of a “priest.” This human figure shows only the upper half of the body, the eyes are almost closed, seemingly in meditation; he wears a beard and long hair; the cloth on his body is thrown in a peculiarly Buddhist monk’s manner, keeping the right arm uncovered. Here is the prototype of a historic *bhikkhu* or monk in concentration. There is then a stone figure of a man clearly seated in meditation, dating from the second millennium BCE. Last, we may mention the figure of another *muni* or ascetic found on a steatite seal from Mohenjodaro, depicting a man seated in a cross-legged yogic posture. He is flanked by two human worshippers with raised and folded hands apparently in adoration: behind each of these worshippers is a snake (*naga*) in half-rearing posture. [84] There are some more Harappan figures depicting ascetics which have not been considered here due to lack of space.

**Concluding Remarks**

We have seen that Jainism, Samkhya and Yoga constituted Śramanism, which was an altogether different culture from Brahmanism. Śramanism means that culture of ancient India in which spiritual and moral “exertion (*srama*)” was the dominant ideal; its teachers were ascetics called sramanas or munis who believed in moral karma and practised concentration and austerities. It was a mixture of atheistic, anti-ritualistic, ascetic and pluralistic ideologies. Buddhism was more nearly related to this Śramanic stream of thought which had its origin in pre-historic times. In later day India this Śramanic culture and Buddhism were assimilated by the Brahmanical culture and the result was what is now called Hinduism. Thus Brahmanism, plus elements from Buddhism, Jainism, Yoga and Samkhya make the Hindu religion.

What we have discussed above is primarily intended for students of the history of Indian religious ideas but it also has a practical importance for those who are followers of Buddhism today. The comparative or synthetic study of different religious traditions should not lead us to overlook the different origins and distinctive elements of the different religious thought-currents.

With respect to the question of comparison between Buddhism and Hinduism raised by Dr. P. V. Kane, it should be observed that nobody has made “unfair comparisons between the original doctrines of the Buddha with the present practises and shortcomings of Hindu society.” His “protest” against such comparisons is therefore quite uncalled for. His view that a comparison between “the later phases of Buddhism” and “modern phases and practises of Hinduism” will be a “fair comparison” is untenable. In such a comparison one should compare early Brahmanism with early Buddhism, Mahayana Buddhism with Puranic Brahmanism (Vaishnavism and Śaivism), Tantrika Buddhism with Tantrika Brahmanism, and modern Buddhism with modern Hinduism. What he has called the “hideous practises” of “degraded Buddhism” should be compared with similar practises of the Śaktas, the Śaivas, the Kaulas, Kapalikas and the Kalamukhas of early mediaeval Hinduism.

A scholar of early mediaeval Indian religious practises and beliefs will not find any difference between the Tantrika Buddhists and the Tantrika Hindus. The contents of the *Śaiva-Śakta-Vaishnava Tantras* are quite as bizarre as those of the *Vajrayana* and *Sahajayana Tantras*. [85] The strange rites of early mediaeval Hindu sects of Śaivasa Śaktas and Bhagavatas will be found also in the *Puranas*, the *Agamas*, the *Harshacarita*, the *Gaudavaho* and the *Rajatarangini*. These texts do not belong to a degraded phase of Hinduism, for Tantricism has been an essential element of Hinduism or Puranic Brahmanism from the earliest times.

In fact, Brahmanism rarely declined; it went on growing with the growth of centuries, and it retained its original Indo-Aryan character in some form or another even when it had been refined and transformed by non-Brahmanical doctrines and practises. The divinely ordained system of *varna* (castes and classes) and their *dharmas* (duties, vocations and privileges), the gospel of producing many sons, the doctrine of untouchability, the customs of *devadasi, sati*, etc.,—these features which have been criticised by some educated and advanced modern Indian leaders as well as by European scholars—have been regular features of Brahmanism and Hinduism right from the days of the Vedic Dharma Sutras and the Mahabharata. They are present even now.

Neo-Brahmanism or Hinduism is, in the present writer’s opinion, superior to the Vedic Brahmanism from which it came; there are many points of agreement between this Neo-Brahmanism or Hinduism and Buddhism. But there are also some vital differences. The differences are due to the persistence of Indo-Aryan Brahmanism while the agreements come from the fact that something of Buddhism survives in Hinduism. A comparison between the two would be the task of another essay.

Notes:

*63.Brihadaranyaka Up.* III. 4 1; iv, 3.22; iv. 4.25; *Taittreya Aranyaka*, II. 71, IT. 20; Svet. Up. is full of reference to yatis and ascetics; likewise the Mundaka Up. is a creation of monks. Cf. Tait. Upa. I. 9.1.

64A. A. Macdonell and A. B. Keith, *Vedic Index of Names and Subjects*, Vol. II, Delhi 1958, pp. 167–68.

65Ibid., Vol. II. p 185; Macdonell, *Vedic Mythology*, (Varanasi 1963) p. 140; P. V. Kane, op. cit., Vol. V. Part II, p. 1386.

66For details see *Vedic Index*, II p. 185.

67Ibid., Vol. II, pp. 104, 401; Vol. I, p. 68; P. V. Kane admits op. cit. Vol. II, Part 1. p. 418, that the word *asrama* does not occur in the *Samhitas* and the *Brahmanas* and that there is nothing in the Vedic literature corresponding to *vanaprastha*.

*68St. Petersburg Dictionary*, VI. 1503; W.D. Whitney, *Atharva Veda Samhita* Vol. II, HOS, VIII, pp. 769–770; cf. *Vedic Index*, Vol. II. pp. 343–44; A. Weber, *History of Indian Literature*, p. 112; R. R. Bhagavat in JBBRAS, Vol. XIX. p. 357.

69See A. B. Keith, op. cit., Vol. I. p. 148 note I; Vol. II. p. 337 note 2.

70See *Vedic Index*, Vol. II. p. 343.

71H. Zimmer, *Philosophies of India*, ed. by Joseph Campbell, Meridian Books (1960) p. 281 cf. G. C. Pande, op. cit p. 261.

72G. C. Pande op. cit., pp. 251 f; Zimmer, loc. cit.; H. L. Jain, Bharatiya Sanskriti Main Jaina Dharmaka Yogadana,” Bhopal, 1962, pp. 1–18; John Marshall (ed) Mohenjodaro and the Indus Civilization, Vol. I, London, 1931, pp. 48f.; H. Jacobi in ERE, Vol. VII, p. 466; ibid., Vol. II, p. 799; SBE, XLV, pp. XXI f.

73See *Mahavyutpatti* edited by Sasaki (1928), first section where 80 names of the Buddha are listed.

74Editorial Note: According to Buddhist tradition, only the last three Buddhas of the past (Kakusandha, Konagamana, Kassapa) belong to the present world period (*kalpa*, Pali *kappa*) which is called a fortunate one (*bhadda-kappa*) as five Buddhas appear in it. In addition to the afore-mentioned three, the Buddha of the present age, Gotama Śakyamuni, is the fourth to be followed by Metteyya (Maitreyya) Buddha in a distant future. But also the appearance of the Buddhas within a single Kalpa has to be thought to be separated by cataclysmic changes which entirely interrupt cultural continuity so that the characteristic Teaching of all Buddhas (i.e. the Four Truths) is entirely lost to the age of a subsequent Buddha who has to rediscover it by his own effort. The Buddhas prior to Kakusandha are said to belong to different Kalpas. Śramanic sages of the past who had not the knowledge of the Four Truths, however spiritually advanced they may have been otherwise, would never be called Buddhas in any Buddhist tradition.

75Vide Mahapadanasutta, DN 14; Nidanasamyutta, SN 12; Maratajjaniyasutta, MN 50; *Nigalisagar Pillar Inscription of Asoka*; T. Watters, *Yuan Chhwang’s Travels*, Delhi, 1961. Vol. I. p. 400; Vol. II, pp. 1–9, 58, 124, 141.

76Mrs. Rhys Davids and F. L. Woodward, *The Book of the Kindred Sayings*, (*Samyutta Nikaya*), Part II, PTS, London, 1952, pp. 74–75. We have modified the translation in our text.

77A. S. Geden on *Kanakamuni* in ERE, Vol. VII. p. 644; cf. V. Smith, *Asoka*, Oxford, 1901, p. 146; J. J. Legge, *Fa-Hian Records of Buddhist Kingdoms*, Oxford, 1886, p. 64; H. Jacobi on *Ages of the World* in ERE, Vol.I, p. 202.

*78Mahavastu Avadana*, ed. by R. G. Basak, Vol. II. Calcutta, 1964, p. 541 verse 5; see also pp. 366–367, 413, 415; Vol. I, Calcutta 1963, pp. 377, 411–412, 468.

79See H. Jacobi, *Mahavira and His Predecessors*, *Indian Antiquary*, Vol. IX, Bombay, pp. 158 f.; H. Zimmer, op. cit. pp. 181–182, 281.

80ERE, Vol. XI. p. 189.

81DN 1; cf. T. W. Rhys Davids, *Buddhism, Its History and Literature*, 2nd ed. (1901) pp. 24–26.

82Cf. *Baudhayana Dharmasutra*, II. 629–631; Badarayana treats Samkhya as a heterodox system, *Vedantasutra*, I.1.5 and II.I.1 and II.21–10 with Samkara’s commentary; Alara Kalama, a Samkhya teacher, is found criticising Vedicism in *Buddhacarita* XII, 30–32.

83John Marshall, op.cit. Vol I, pp.44 ff.; Mortimer Wheeler, *The Indus Civilization,* Cambridge, 1953, pp 78– 80, 95; Stuart Piggott, *Prehistoric India*, pp 957 f., 286 ff.

84See the figures of ascetics of pre-historic India in *Mohenjodaro and the Indus Civilization* Vol. I. (1931), plates XIII, 17a; XVI. 29; CXIVII. 11; H. Zimmer, *The Art of Indian Asia*, Vol. II (1955) plate 2e; for E. Mackay’s views on Indus statuary see Marshall, op. cit. Vol. I, pp. 356–357.

85Cf. L. M. Joshi, *Studies in the Buddhistic Culture of India* (1967), pp. 153 note 223

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