

CHAPTER 5

UNIQUENESS OF THE BUDDHA

Buddha was a historic person, an Eminent Teacher, who on proclaiming to the world as the "Awakened One" propagated the knowledge and wisdom that he discovered, during a period of 45 years and passed away in 543 B.C. at the age of 80 having established a system of religious philosophy which came to be recognized as "Buddhism" which is observed in many countries of Asia.

Buddha was a unique religious dignitary in human history who exercised a great influence on the life and thought of the people of India during his life time. This influence diffused to South, South East and East Asia with the propagation of his teaching by his disciples after his death. The uniqueness of the Buddha can be viewed from many standpoints.

Buddha as a Unique Personality

The spiritual and intellectual supremacy of the Buddha was of such eminence that He dominated the contemporary society in wisdom and morality like a tower. These qualities sufficed to elevate the Buddha to a super human level in the eyes of His followers. In his own words the Buddha declared that He was not an ordinary human being who is subject to human frailties, taints and defilements. The Buddha soon came to be recognized as an extraordinary human being possessed of super powers and special knowledges.

The special powers and knowledges of the Buddha according to texts are the following :

Tisso Vijjâ (Three fold knowledge)

1. *Pubbe nivasanussati òâna* - Retrocognition - Ability to recall one's own past births.
2. *Cutûpapâta òâna* - the knowledge of the passing away and re- appearance of others.

3. *Âsavakkhaya òâna* - knowledge regarding the total eradication of passions.

Chalabhiòòâ (six - fold super knowledge)

Three fold knowledge as above and the following

- iv. *Iddhividha òâna* - Psychic powers
- v. *Dibba sota* - Divine ear - ability to hear voices of distance
- vi. *Cetopariya òâna* - Ability to penetrate the minds of others

Dasa bala - Ten powers

Three - fold knowledge as above and the following :

- iv. *Thânatthâna òâna* - knowledge of what is causal and what is not causal
- v. *Kamma vipâka òâna* - knowledge of actions and their results
- vi. *Sabbattha gâmini patipadâ òâna* - knowledge of the course that leads to all planes of existence
- vii. *Anekadhâtu nânâdhâtu òâna* - knowledge of the world with its various diverse elements.
- viii. *Nânâdhimuttika òâna* - knowledge of the diverse characters of beings
- ix. *Indriya paropariyatti òâna* - knowledge of the spiritual nature of beings
- x. *Jhâna -vimokkha -samâdhi - samâpattin - sankilesam - vodânam - vutthânam nâna* - knowledge of all forms of contemplations and meditations.

Catu vesarajja - Four - fold self - confidence

- i. *Sabbadhammâbisambodhi* - *vesâraja*- Confidence in the Buddha's own Enlightenment
- ii. *Sabbâsavakkhaya òâna* - *vesarajja* - Confidence in his total eradication of passions

iii. *Antarâyika dhammanam yathâbhuta niccita - vyâkarana vesarajja*
-Confidence in his exposition of the hindrances of the path

iv. *Sabba sampadhighamâya - nesaggika patipada tathâ bhuta vesarajja*

Confidence in the path he has shown to attain the 'All Completeness' Other special attributes of the Buddha according to the texts are the following :

1. *Pânca cakkhu* - Five eyes
2. *Catuddasa Buddha nâna* - Fourteen items of Buddha Knowledge
3. *Catu Patisambidhâ* - Four Analytical Knowledges
4. *Sabbaòduta Nana* - Omniscience

(Details are left out in order to avoid excessive elongation of the text.)

By way of summation, it may be mentioned that the Buddha was an extraordinary human being possessed of a wide range of super - normal powers, super knowledges and superior wisdom.

Buddha as a Teacher

Buddha was undoubtedly a Great Teacher in the broadest sense of the term. The Buddha's prowess as a Teacher was manifestly the strongest factor that contributed to the rapid increase of the new converts many of whom abandoned their former faiths through conviction.

Buddha was possessed of a percipient sagacity to penetrate into the minds of listeners (many of whom were meeting the Buddha for the first time) and modulate the themes so as to suit their individual levels of understanding and their social background. Buddha's persuasive acumen was so sharp and appealing that many arrogant disputants who came vaunting to vanquish the Buddha in debate became the most faithful followers on being convinced regarding the fallacy of their belief after listening to the Buddha.

Buddha was indisputably a Model Teacher. The following special features of his teaching methodology are clearly evident in His teachings.

- I. Buddha had organised the discourses with meticulous care.
- II. The opening statements in discourses are so articulated as to be particularly striking
- III. Buddha had resorted to the use of similes, analogies and illustrations profusely and it is noteworthy that all of them had been drawn from day to day life of the people so as to facilitate understanding
- IV. Buddha had not over - rated brevity and had elaborated at length many themes with repetitions whenever such repetition proved to be an asset to understanding.
- V. Buddha listened to dissenting views with patience and controverted them when ever necessary without ridiculing them.
- VI. Buddha answered all questions so long as they were relevant and meaningful and remained discreetly silent when the questions were irrelevant or merely speculative.
- VII. Buddha was versatile in converting any situation to an occasion for teaching.

BUDDHA AS A SOCIAL REFORMER

Buddha had clearly declared His spiritual mission in the words, 'I am awakened; I awaken others. I am liberated; I make others liberate themselves.' But the Buddha did not confine the mission to the spiritual task of enabling the worldlings to liberate themselves from the bonds of existence. Buddha deliberately directed considerable attention to the task of uplifting the society in ethical standards, and reducing the evils of inequalities, discriminations and repressions that plagued the society of the day.

One social malaise that engaged the immediate attention of the Buddha was the institution of caste according to which an individual's position in society, his privileges and even his occupation were determined by birth. Buddha used the medium of discourses to enlighten the society regarding the evils of the social stratification based

on caste. Buddha emphasised in the *Vâsettha Sutta* the equality of humankind. In the *Vasala Sutta* Buddha gave a new interpretation to the concept of the outcaste. *Esukari Sutta* and *Assalâyana Sutta* are two other discourses where Buddha had denounced the caste system.

Teachings of the Buddha have contributed to a significant degree to elevate the position of women in the contemporary society. Buddha saw the innate potential of women, whom he called mother-folk (*mâtugâma*) to play a dynamic role as character builders for the young generation. Buddha sought to bring women out of the seclusion to which they were confined by the weight of Brahmanic conservatism so that they could play a more meaningful role in society. The establishment of the order of Nuns (*Bhikkunis*) was a bold step taken by the Buddha in recognition of the spiritual potential of women notwithstanding the prevailing social antipathies towards such a measure.

UNIQUENESS OF THE BUDDHA AS A RELIGIOUS PHILOSOPHER

Arising in a society teeming with a multitude of divergent religious ideologies, some of which had matured over centuries, and having proclaimed a religion which radically differed from the prevailing faiths and cults whose followers became the new disciples of the Buddha, it became a formidable task for the Buddha to maintain cordial relationships with contemporary religious groups and their leading proponents. Buddha's attitude to other religions has been described as one of "critical tolerance"

Buddha states thus in the *Brahmajâla Sutta* (D.N.I.) addressing the monks :

" If any one were to speak ill of me, my doctrine or my Order, do not bear any ill-will towards him, be upset or perturbed at heart; for if you were to do so, it would only cause you harm. If, on the other hand, any one were to speak well of me, my doctrine and my Order, do not be overjoyed, thrilled or elated at heart; for if you were to do so, it would only be an obstacle in the way of forming a realistic judgment as to whether the qualities praised in us are actually found in us."

This is a clear indication of Buddha's attitude of tolerance and equanimity towards others' comments concerning the Buddha, Buddha's Teaching and the order either in denunciation or commendation.

Buddha states (in *Samyutta Nikaya*) that the law of conditionality exists at all times and the "*tathâgata* only discovers, comprehends, teaches, analyses and clarifies" it. Buddha never claimed monopoly of the Truth. Buddha cautioned against bigotry and dogmatism. He warned the Bhikkhus against asserting in respect of their beliefs "This alone is Truth; rest is fallacy" (*Idameva saccam - mogohamañdam*).

Buddha encouraged open investigation of his teachings. In the *Maha Parinibbana Sutta*, Buddha exhorted the Bhikkhus to accept the truth of a doctrine heard from a source, however venerable, only if it conforms to the parameters of Dhamma and Vinaya.

Buddha did not demand of the disciples, servile loyalty on implicit faith. In the *Vimansaka Sutta* (M.N. 47) Buddha enjoined the Bhikkhus to investigate even Buddha's own accomplishment of Enlightenment (*Vimansakena bhikkhave bhikkunâ parassa cetopariyayam ajânantena tathâgate samannesanâ kâtabbâ sammâsambuddho vâ no va iti vinnânayâni*).

When householder Upali, a prominent patron of Nighanta Nataputta being convinced of the truth of Buddha's teaching supplicated to be a devotee of the Buddha, Buddha cautioned him to 'investigate before taking a decision (*Anuviccakaram kho gahapati karohi - Upali Sutta M.N. 56*)

Another unique feature of Buddha's religious mission is the happy balance between the weightage given to spiritual objectives and to mundane considerations. While keeping foremost the spiritual objective of propagating the sublime teaching to the humankind so as to promote their liberation from the woes of existence Buddha devoted considerable attention to promote the material welfare of the people which He considered to be an indispensable requisite for spiritual progress, if achieved righteously.

Buddha as a religious teacher avoided actions that served self glorification. He reduced his image to a nonentity and highlighted the sanctity of His teaching. Buddha practiced what He preached and preached what He practised (*Yathâ vâdi tathâ kâri yathâ kâri tathâ vâdi*)

Buddha played a role as a conciliator of political disputes, a pacifier of wars, a promoter of conjugal harmony, equalizer of social disparities and a sedator of social turmoil.

QUESTIONS

1. Identify the special qualities, abilities and aptitudes that contributed to make the Buddha a great Teacher.
2. Discuss the role of the Buddha as a Social Reformer.
3. Identify the supernormal Intellectual Powers of the Buddha.
4. What lessons can you draw from the life of the Buddha to achieve efficiency in the management of your daily affairs?
5. Indicate how the Ministry of the Buddha served to elevate the status of women in society.
6. What was the attitude of the Buddha to the social institution of caste?