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THE OUTSTANDING CHARACTERISTICS OF BUDDHISM

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Abstract:-The outstanding characteristics of Buddhism are the fundamental features of Buddhism to understand clearly what Buddhism is. There is no secret doctrine in Buddhism. Everything Buddha taught is open to the public for investigation or for understanding. Buddhism allows not only freedom of thought but also tolerance. Buddhism is self-reliance and self-responsibility without relying on any other. There is no caste system and distinction in enlightenment between men and women in Buddhism.

Keywords: Therav,da Buddhism, some important features of Buddhism, the law of Kamma (action).

INTRODUCTION

Many scholars extensively study on the Buddhism. They should understand the essence of Buddhism and outstanding characteristics of it. Some scholars state that The Buddha was a God and a messenger of God. The Buddha was not God and a messenger of God. He was a human being but not ordinary human being. He was an extraordinary human being. The freedom of thought allowed by the Buddha is unheard of elsewhere in the history of religions. The freedom of thought is necessary because, according to the Buddha, man's emancipation depends on his own realization of Truth, and not on the benevolent grace of a god or any external power. Not only the outstanding freedom of thought, but also the tolerance allowed by the Buddha is the feature of Buddhism in the history of religions. Buddhism is different from other religions in *Kamma* (action) theory and women's right. Therefore, this article will focus on outstanding features of Buddhism extracting from Buddhist literatures.

The Buddha or A Human being

The Buddha never said that he was a God and a creator. Also he never said that he was a human being, but we know that he was a human being because he was born of human beings, he lived as a human being and he passed away as a human being.

Once he said to an ascetic he met on his way to Benares that he was an Arahant. That means he was a perfect being in the world. And he said: "I am the best of the teachers. I am the only one who has correctly known all there is to know all by myself. I have become cool from passions or mental defilements and I have exhausted all mental defilements." So the Buddha had eradicated all mental defilements and he was cool.

NO SECRET DOCTRINES

There is no secret doctrine in Buddhism. Everything Buddha taught is open to the public for

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investigation or for understanding. The Buddha said that there was nothing hidden in the 'closed-fist of the teacher' (*cariya-mutthi*), there never was anything 'up his sleeve'. So there is no teaching only for the inner circle of disciples.

Once, two monks who came from a high Brahmin caste asked the Buddha to record the teachings in Vedic Sanskrit language. They thought that when low caste people learned the teachings of the Buddha, they were destroying the teachings of the Buddha. That is why they wanted the Buddha's teachings to be accessible only to high class Brahmins and educated people. The Buddha rejected their request and said that should not be recorded in Vedic Sanskrit language. It is not easily understood by all people. Then the Buddha said: "I allow you to learn each in his own dialect". That means you can study the teachings of the Buddha in your own language. Therefore, the Buddha's teachings are for all people and not for a few selected elite.

Freedom of Thought and Inquiry

The Buddha allowed freedom of thought, freedom of inquiry. We can investigate his teachings. We have the right to doubt his teachings. We must get rid of this doubt by study and discussion.

The Buddha once visited a place of people called *Kalama*. When he was there, the people came to him and said to him: "Bhante, many religious teachers came to our place. They said that only their teachings are true and the others' teachings are false. Then come other teachers, and they also in their turn said that only their teachings are correct and the others' teachings are wrong. Therefore, we are confused as to which is correct and which is wrong. What we have to do? The Buddha said: "*Kalamas*, it is proper that you have doubt about the teachings because many teachers have come and then told you that their teachings alone are correct and the others' teachings are wrong.

The Buddha said: Do not accept it as correct just because you hear it from someone. Someone tells you that this teaching is correct and you take it to be correct." The Buddha said "no, do not take it just by mere hearsay.

Do not accept something to be true simply because it has been carried down through tradition or it has been with us through tradition

of rumors. Sometimes people say something is like this or it is like that. Rumors are mostly, not correct. Rumors are mostly, not correct. So do not accept something to be true simply because it is rumored by people.

Do not accept anything to be true just because it occurred in your religious books. We will only accept that which is in accordance with our religious books. Now, is what we accept it right? That is you are to be blindly accepting anything. You have to investigate about it.

You think that it is this way or that way. You think about it and you think it must be true. Therefore, just by mere thinking about something, you should not accept it to be true.

Sometimes you use inference. You infer something from some other thing. Then you arrive at the conclusion that it is true. We always use this inference when we cannot get a direct knowledge. What is arrived at by inference may be true or may not be true. Therefore, do not accept it to be true just because it is according to

You look at something and it appears this way, and so it must be true. It is something like that. Therefore, you do not take it to be true just by seeing the good appearance. Something may lie beneath that appearance. Therefore, do not take it to be true just by considering the appearances. **to be true**

You may have some notions about something. When something is said in accordance with your preconceived notions, you jump to the conclusion that it must be true. But the Buddha said that you are not to take it to be true

Sometimes we think that something is acceptable and so we take it to be true. But the Buddha said you are not to take it to be true merely because it seems acceptable. You have to investigate it. You have to know truly through

your own observation whether it is true or not.

That means I respect my teacher and so what he says must be true. Do not take it to be true simply because you think that your teacher is a respected teacher and so what he said must be true. You have to check with other teaching. You have to check with books. Only when you find it to be conducive you should accept it.

What are we to accept then? The Buddha said:
blameworthy, censured by the wise, and
you should reject them.” That means you have to find out
yourself whether these things are immoral, blameworthy, censured by the wise, and are conducive to
ruin and sorrow when they are practiced. If you find so, then you should not accept
yourself that these things are moral,
live and act accordingly.
The Buddha’s emphasis is on acting and on practice once you know something to be conducive
Here, the Buddha allowed freedom thought or freedom of inquiry to his
disciples.

SELF-RELIANCE AND SELF-RESPONSIBILITY

You know the Buddha taught the law of *kamma* (action). The law of *kamma* is good *kamma* brings good results and bad *kamma* brings bad results. That means if you do good *kamma*, you will get good results and if you do bad *kamma*, you will get bad results. Therefore, you have to rely on yourself to get good results. You alone are responsible for these good results or bad results. You should not blame other people for the bad results. You should not thank anybody for getting good results. In Buddhism, self-reliance and self-responsibility is an important factor.

The Buddha declared that his teachings are going to upstream, against the stream, and not going with the steam. Therefore, we have to rely on ourselves for our own salvation in the Buddhist sense. Not so long the Buddha passed away, he advised his disciples with these words: “live with yourself as an island. Live with yourself as refuge and have no other as refuge.” Then he continued: “live the Dhamma as your island. Live with Dhamma as your refuge and have no other as refuge.” That means to practice Dhamma. When we practice Dhamma, we are living with ourselves as refuge. We are relying on ourselves and not on any other. Therefore, the Buddha said in effect, I cannot save you. You must save yourselves. Purity and impurity depend upon oneself. No one purifies another.

DID NOT ACCEPT CASTE SYSTEM

Buddha appeared in a society where human beings were divided into four castes, namely the warrior caste, Brahmin, merchant, and low caste. The Buddha did not accept the caste system. Among his disciples, especially monks, the Buddha was able to abolish caste distinction. Anybody who joins the Order becomes equal with other monks.

According to the Buddha, one becomes an outcaste or a Brahmin not by birth but one’s own deeds. If one performs good deeds, then he is as good as a Brahmin. And if one performs evil deeds, then one is an outcaste whether he was born as Brahmin or not. Therefore, what determines a person to be low or high is not his birth but his deeds. The deeds are important factor in determining a person to be a lowly person or a high person.

WOMAN EQUALITY IN ENLIGHTENMENT

Dispensation.

Sex is no barrier for purification or service. On one occasion while the Buddha was conversing with King Kosala, a messenger came and informed the King that a queen was delivered of a daughter. Hearing it, the King was naturally displeased. But the Buddha comforted and stimulated him, saying: Therefore,

Women are also considered as capable of enlightenment as men are. In the teachings of the Buddha, women have as right to enlightenment as men. Whether you are a man or woman, if you

follow the teaching of the Buddha and practice, then you can become enlightened. Therefore, women are regarded as equally capable of enlightenment as men are.

TOLERANCE OR HARMLESSNESS

Actually tolerance or Harmlessness is loving-kindness (Metta). In Buddhism tolerance is not only for human beings but for animals as well. The first precept for lay people is abstention from killing living beings. The Buddha was not in favor of sacrifices where many human beings and animals were killed. He actually prevented many such sacrifices during his time. Therefore, Buddhist tolerance or Harmlessness is for both human beings and animals.

Asoka, the greatest king, wrote on rock and monolith, saying: **“The living must not be nourished with living. Even chaff with insects must not be burnt.”** To the Buddhist there because of universal love from source of understanding.

CONCLUSION

There are many more characteristics of Buddhism that are worthy of note, but I think I have mentioned enough outstanding characteristics of Buddhism to understand. As Buddhist we are free to doubt. We are free to investigate. As Buddhist we are our own master. We are the architect of our own future. And we are those who rely on our self for our own good. Therefore, a Buddhist can become responsible and good citizen who will contribute to the welfare of human society, as well as doing whatever he can for his own benefit which is the avoidance of evil deeds and getting rid of mental defilements.

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