

Buddhism: A Religion of Practice

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Abstract: *This paper aims at the comparative study of Buddhism and other eastern religions proving Buddhism to be a proper religion. I have brought out the comparative studies of the major religions to show how Buddhism is similar to other religions and also to show how other religions are different from each other. All religions have a philosophy and when practiced all of them become a way of life just like, Buddhism. The existence of God(s) in religion is a controversial topic as almost all religions talk of an omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscience being. Often the absence of god-like reality, sidelines Buddhism from the organized religions groupings. Through this paper, I would be providing clarity on religion not existing only with a benevolent god and also would give a clearer idea about whether Buddhism is a philosophy or religion. Buddhism isn't just philosophy, it's a religion, and it deserves, the same significance any great religion of our world has. Also, this paper would set the wheel moving for further research on Buddhism as a religion.*

Keywords: Omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscience, superhuman, Dharma

1. Introduction

Oxford Dictionary defines religion as the belief in and worship of superhuman, a personal God, who is all knowing, all powerful and all present. [1] Religions that believe in God are Islam, Christianity and Hinduism. They worship and follow God and deities. According to them, God can't be replaced. He is the creator and the destroyer; therefore, he is the cause of everything. Son or an avatar of God has supernatural powers, be it forgiving the sins, or ending evil. No human can take God's place. He is the savior and the protector. Evil presence in us may encourage us to engage in bad deeds, but we need to fight it with God's help. Nothing can exist without God, neither the earth nor us. In all religions, it's important to know how God created the world. If there is a God, there will be heaven, and if there is evil, there will be hell; and it is true even if we don't perceive it. The teachings and stories written in the holy books are the word of God and remain unchanged by all means. All religious people believe in God; that God knows all and everything happens for the better. However, Buddhism does not advocate belief in God and Buddhists do not worship Siddhartha Gautama, though every Buddhist is grateful for his teachings. The birth of Buddha was quite miraculous as on the night that he was conceived; Queen Maya dreamt that a white elephant with six white tusks entered her womb, and ten months later Siddhartha was born. [2] To the Buddhists, he is not the creator or a prophet but a truth seeker. Siddhartha's teachings are revered and not him. Anyone can be Buddha as it is just a title given to the one who has attained enlightenment. In Buddhism, the origin of the universe is irrelevant. In Buddhism, suffering is considered to be the significant element of life; and it's caused by ego. The flexibility of Buddhist teachings and the freedom to express religious beliefs often question the viability of Buddhism as religion. All these qualities make Buddhism out of the picture when considering it a religion, as the rest of them fall under the same group in the belief system.

Early Buddhism

During the lifetime of the Buddha there was religious and cultural tumult in India. Teachers and sects proliferated, embracing varying philosophical views and religious practices. According to David N Snyder, [3] some of these sects derived from the Brahmanical tradition, while others opposed the Vedic and Upanishadic ideas of that tradition. Buddhism denied both the vigor of Vedic ritual and the plausibility of the caste system, and spread its teachings using local languages rather than Brahmanical Sanskrit. It was most successful of all the heterodox or non-Vedic systems. Buddhist tradition informs us how Siddhartha Gautama was born a prince and was raised in luxury, still rejected the world at the age of 29 and went in search for an ultimate solution for the suffering. After six years of discipline in spirituality he finally achieved the supreme enlightenment. After which he spent the remaining 45 years of his life establishing a community of monks and nuns, the sangha, teaching them what he learnt to continue his work. [4] After the death of Buddha his teachings were orally transmitted in Prakrits, Gandhore and Pali. The Theravada is known to be only one of many early Buddhist schools, its beliefs 'Knowledge of early differences is limited' [5] are generally accepted as representative of the early Buddhist doctrine. Early Buddhism was ideally the perfected saintly sage, arahant or arhat, who attained liberation by purifying self of all defilements and desires.

Teachings of Buddha

To find one's own path, to become undaunted, to take small steps toward one's goal, to work hard,
To think positively, to embrace one's failures, to not compare oneself to others, to get the right friends, to live a balanced life and it's about the journey. [6]

The Five Moral Precepts

The Buddhist texts discuss five precepts to be followed by its adherents. They are the following-
First, to abstain from taking life. Second, to abstain from taking what is not given. Third, to abstain from sensuous misconduct. Fourth, to abstain from false speech; and Fifth, to abstain from intoxicants as tending to cloud the mind. [7]

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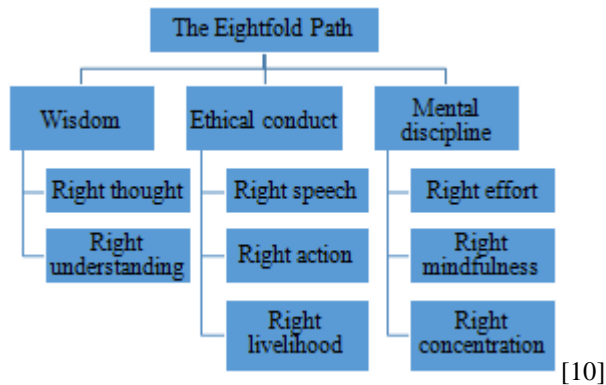
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Four Noble Truths

Buddhism is a belief system of the four pillars of truth. They are the following-

The first pillar, the truth of suffering (*dukkha*). The second pillar, the truth of the cause of suffering (*samudaya*). The fourth pillar, the truth of the end of suffering (*nirhodha*). The fifth pillar, the truth of the path that frees us from suffering (*magga*). [8, 9]

The Noble Eightfold path



Forms of Buddhism

There are three types of Buddhist practices and they are not bound by geographical boundaries-

Theravada Buddhism: Most prevalent in Thailand, Sri Lanka, Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar. **Mahayana Buddhism:** Most prevalent in China, Japan, Taiwan, Korea, Singapore and Vietnam. **Vajrayana Buddhism:** Most prevalent in Tibet, Nepal, Mongolia, Bhutan, and parts of Russia and northern India. [11]

Comparative study of major religions with Buddhism

Islam and Buddhism

Both the religion doesn't stress on afterlife. Both Islam and Buddhism share a faith in their originator. Both religions also feature a set of ethical standards - the Buddhist Eightfold Path and the Muslim Sharia. Both preaches avoiding alcohol and drugs. [12]

While Muslims shape their entire lives around God whereas Buddhists are detached with the notion of a god. While a Muslim can pray to God and look to him for peace, a Buddhist can only rely on himself, wisdom and the teachings of the Buddha. A Muslim's goal is to live on, but a Buddhist's goal is to halt the cycle of life. In Buddhism statues are used as meditation objects, and revered as they reflect the qualities of the Buddha. Whereas in Islam images of God or prophets not permitted. Art takes the form of calligraphy, architecture etc. [13]

Christianity and Buddhism

Neither the Buddha nor Jesus Christ wrote down their own teachings, their teachings were written down many years after they had left the world. Both Jesus Christ and the Buddha sought to amend the existing social and religious

practices which had disparaged into conventional forms with no spiritual meaning. Both taught through the use of simple analogies. Both taught to overcome the forces of hate through the power of love. The Buddha '*hatred cannot be overcome by hatred*'. The Christ '*Love your enemy*'. Both seek to surpass the material world. [14]

Buddhists do not believe in one all-powerful God. In Christianity, the concept of God looms large. Meditation and mindfulness are at the heart of Buddhism. Christianity places greater stress on prayer. Buddhism places greater emphasis on personal effort, Christianity places greater emphasis on Grace. Christianity teaches that we have only one life. Buddhism believes in the concept of Samsara which refers to the cycle of life. Buddhists believe that an individual has to work for his personal liberation – a discipline that may take several lifetimes to attain the state of enlightenment. Salvation comes through the acceptance of Jesus Christ as the savior. Christians believe that they will gain everlasting life in heaven. [15]

Jainism and Buddhism

Both religions believe in reincarnation. Both religions believe in the concept of karma. Both Buddhism and Jainism believe a person can reach enlightenment. Neither Buddhism nor Jainism believes in a god as the creator of the universe. [16]

Buddha is the founder of Buddhism, but there is no such person for Jainism. The means of salvation in Buddhism is by reaching Enlightenment. In Jainism the goal is to unshackle the soul from bondages of karma. [17]

Hinduism and Buddhism

Both Buddhism and Hinduism was originated and evolved on the Indian soil. In Buddhism, desire is the cause of suffering and elimination of desire results in the termination of suffering. Upansihads (Isa) and the Bhagavadgita consider doing actions prompted by desire and attachment would lead to suffering and that performing actions without desiring the fruit of action would result in liberation. Both Buddhism and Hinduism believe in the concept of karma, transmigration of souls and the cycle of life. Both emphasize on compassion. Both believe in the existence of several hells and heavens. Both Buddhism and Hinduism believe in the existence of deities. In Hinduism the Advaita philosophy is similar to Buddhism. Both believe in detachment, repudiation of worldly life as a precondition to enter to spiritual life. Both consider the chief cause of suffering as a person's attachment to desires. [18]

Buddhism was founded by the Buddha whereas Hinduism is not founded by any particular prophet. Hinduism believes in the potency and ascendancy of the Vedas. The Buddhist do not believe in the Vedas. The three cardinal requirements of the Noble Eightfold Path are to refuge in the Buddha, the Sangha and Dhamma. Hinduism offers many choices to its followers on the path of self-realization. The Buddhist deny any Hindu god either as equivalent or superior to the Buddha whereas Hinduism accepts the Buddha as an incarnation of Mahavishnu, one of the gods of Hindu trinity.

Hinayana Buddhism do not worship images of the Buddha nor believe in the Bodhisattvas. The Mahayana sect considers the Buddha as the Supreme Soul worships him in the form of images and icons. Buddhists consider the world to be full of sorrow and the chief aim of human life is to end the sorrow. The Hindus consider that there are four chief aims in life which every being should pursue. They are dharma, artha, kama and moksha. Hindus believe in the four ashramas or stages in life. Buddhism doesn't follow this and people can join the order any time. Hinduism is basically a religion of the individual whereas Buddhists organize themselves into a monastic Order (Sangha). Hinduism does not believe in the concept of Bodhisattvas which are belief of Buddhism. Although Buddhism acknowledges the existence of gods and goddesses of Hindu pantheon, it gives them a rather inferior status. [19]

There are lots of differences between all religions, in Islam God isn't a father, in Christianity God exists in three eternal co-equal partners, father, the son and the Holy Spirit; Jainism believes in no creator or destroyer whereas, Hinduism believes in many gods. Christianity and Islam are monotheistic, whereas, Hinduism is polytheistic and Jainism is nontheistic. Christianity believes in one life, unlike, Hinduism and Jainism who believe in reincarnation. As in Christianity and Islam forgiveness must be sought, in Hinduism and Jainism, there are karmic consequences. However, Jainism says we keep account of our karma but Hinduism says God keeps the account. [20, 21, 22, 23]

2. Conclusion

In conclusion, after comparing all major religions of the world (Islam, Christianity, Buddhism) which are very different from each other in their concepts of worshipping, festivals and traditions. To be specific, in Islam God isn't a father, in Christianity God exists in three eternal co-equal partners, father, the son and the Holy Spirit; Jainism believes in no creator or destroyer whereas, Hinduism believes in many gods. Christianity and Islam are monotheistic, whereas, Hinduism is polytheistic and Jainism is nontheistic. Christianity believes in one life, unlike, Hinduism and Jainism who believe in reincarnation.

As in Christianity and Islam forgiveness must be sought, in Hinduism and Jainism, there are karmic consequences. Jainism says we keep account of our karma although Hinduism says God keeps the account. It's true that all the religions have lots of differences among them; however, each religion shares lots of similarities with Buddhism too. In Islam and Buddhism, it is not recommended to consume alcohol and drugs. Christianity and Buddhism both say that the power of love can defeat forces of hatred. Jainism and Buddhism both believe that a person can reach enlightenment. Hinduism and Buddhism the belief is that the chief cause of suffering is a person's attachment to desires.

Non-violence or do no harm and peace are promoted in all religions; none of them say to create distress. Speaking the truth is taught by all religions too, meaning one should not lie. Committing adultery is prohibited in all religions. All the religions tell us to abstain from taking what is not given, i.e., not to steal from anyone. All religions tell us to honor our

parents as they are the reason we are born. They also tell us to respect everyone, lower or higher than us. All of them teach us to love our enemies. 'You reap what you sow' is another lesson taught by the religions along with 'Be slow to anger.' All religions share a sense of community, i.e., one belongs to a community; and one should follow their rituals and practices.

Majority of the people may see Buddhism as a philosophy because unlike any other religion, Buddhism does not have an almighty God. However, Buddhism shares lots of similarities with other religions in respect with their ethical and moral beliefs. All the religions differ from each other in some aspects, and that is necessary because these little differences give an identity to religion. Every religion teaches us the way of life, which involves participation and practice. It is like a guide to us, telling us how to alter our actions in this world; to be good and strive to find peace within us. Buddhism is a perfect example of how one can find peace and be good during his life. Therefore, just like any other religion, although different Buddhism is also a religion.

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