

Contribution of St. Thomas to the development of Indian Religion & Philosophy

St. Thomas and India

The advent of St. Thomas in India is well reckoned and established by the scholars as 52 A.D. in the Malabar coast in India. The recent studies reveal that he journeyed to North India in 49 A.D. prior to his Malabar visit. St. Thomas' association with King Gondaphorus of Taxila is well attested by noted scholars and the numismatic evidences acknowledge the rule of Gondaphorus and the large amount of the coins of Gondaphorus excavated in the Taxila region has shattered the theory of Gondaphorus as a mythological figure.

His second visit to Cranganur and his establishing seven churches across the Malabar coast and a half church at Thiruvithancodu near Nagercoil in Kanyakumari district his mission across the Choramanda (Coramandal) Coast in Little Mount, St. Thomas Mount and San Thome, Mylapore are regarded by the scholars as some important historical sites connected with St. Thomas' propagation of Christian doctrines in the Indian soil.

At the time of St. Thomas' visit to India, the name "Christian" was not given to the followers of Christianity and therefore St. Thomas was unaware of this name. This name was given to the followers of Christianity only in Antioch according to the Act of the Apostles. Moreover he would not have carried the Bible with him to India, because it was canonized at a later date. All that he carried to India was the message of Jesus Christ, the message of Salvation.

Vedas and Sanskrit :

The historicity of the Vedas is challenged by the finding of the earliest epigraphical evidences to Sanskrit which dates back to 2c. A.D. – a panygeric verse at the site of the repair of a dam built by Chandragupta Maurya at Girnar unveils the truth that the classical Sanskrit materials be it scriptural or literary, or other materials were written after the above period mentioned. The Aryan Vedas are supposed to contain the sacrificial worship of the Aryans, the mantras to be recited during the time of the performance of the 'Yajnas', the ritualistic aspects, the mantras pertaining to the black

magic etc. The recent studies reveal that the Vedas are not the source materials for the development of the Indian religion of the Hindu Religion.

Origin of Bhakti Movement

Bhakti movement began to gather momentum around 5c. A.D. in Tamil Nadu and as a result of Bhakti movement two major religions viz. Saivism and Vaishnavism developed. These two religions gave birth to Saktam, Ganmaram, Ganapatyam and Sowram and subsequently emerged the name sixfold religion which is otherwise known as Hindu Religion. It would be a historical inreality to call Hindu Religion a religion of the glorious past prevalent before Christ – the facts remain that the world ‘Hindu’ was coined much later and it was during the period of Sankara in the 8c A.D.

The atheistic religions of Buddhism and Jainism were well rooted in India as early as 6’c. B.C. The minor god-worship, King-Workship, Hero-Worship, nature worship, polytheism, henotheism, sacrificial worship of the Dravidians and such worship of the Aryans etc. were prevalent in India at the time of the advent of St. Thomas.

‘Dravide Utpanna bhakthi’

is a well known saying in Sanskrit which means, ‘Bhakti originated in Dravida country’. Hymns of praise of Lord Siva and Vishnu are plenty in Tamil literature. Hundreds of Thousands of Tamil Songs sung in praise of Siva by the Nayanmars (Panniru Thirumurai) and the songs sung in praise of Vishnu by the Alwars (Nalayira Thiviyap Prabhandam) are considered to be the treasure trove of the heritage of the Tamil religions.

Chrisian doctrines in Indian Religions,

The fundamental doctrines of Christianity have penetrated in the sixfold religion (Hindu religion) and it is evidenced by the following basic ingredients, found it the scriptured of Saivism and Vaishnavism.

1. The Doctrine of Trinity.
2. The Doctrine of Avatar.
3. The Doctrine of the fulfillment of Sacrifice.
4. The Doctrine of Salvation by faith (surrender).
5. The Doctrine of Eternal Life & Saranagathi.

Saivism and Vaishnavism are the two fundamental religions which has given birth to the sixfold religion.

Saiva Siddhanta was developed in Tamil Nadu between 12th and 14th centuries of the era of Christ. Among the fourteen sastras, Sivagnana bhodam of Meikandar is highly regarded as the basic sastra for which Christian commentaries and comparative studies have been done by a few scholars. They critically explain that Christian doctrines are the source materials for the development of Saiva Siddhanta, Likewise the philosophical treaties in Sanskrit are also harmonious with Indian religions.

Vedanta – Emergence new system of thought

The jungle texts or the Upanishads, Brahma Sutras and Bhagavad Gita are the sources of Vedanta. These three works are commonly termed as 'Prasthan Thrayi'. Indian philosophy has emerged from the Upanishads which is the obverse of Aryan Vedas and they were the ideologies, of the Dravidians. Hence Indian philosophy may be rightly called as Dravidian Philosophy.

The commentaries for the 'Prasthan thrayi' only are called by different philosophical terminologies, viz. Advaita (Sankara), Visistadvaita (Ramanuja), Dvaita (Madhva), etc. These three schools along with Saiva Siddhanta are regarded as the four major systems of Philosophics, Sankara and Madhava had written their commentaries to refute the propositions developed by Sankara. Most of the commentaries for the 'prasthan thrayi' explore the ideologies of Vaishnavism.

Vedanta and Christianity :

The major systems of thought in the Dravidian philosophy were developed from the Upanishads and these Upanishads oppose the sacrificial system of thought propounded by the Vedas, Brahmanas etc. Vedanta is not the end portion of the Vedas but it is a portion which puts an end to the Vedas. Hence the name Vedanta. The fundamental principle of Vedas is sacrifice whereas the fulfillment of sacrifice is the foundation of Vedanta. The Vedanta Sastra or Brahma Sutras attempts to Systemetize the tenets of Vedanta in which the Christian doctrines have been enumerated in the form of aphorism texts which are very difficult to decipher barring the background of Christianity. In Vedanta

- 1) the corporeality of Brahman (avatar)
- 2) the trinity of Brahman
- 3) the fulfillment of sacrifice
- 4) the bondage, release & salvation
- 5) the philosophy of saranagati (salvation by faith)
- 6) the doctrine of Mukti
- 7) the eschatological aspects of heaven and hell
- 8) the negation of caste stratification
- 9) the negation of cycle of birth, etc., are emphasized. These are the basic doctrines of Christianity.

It is understood that Vyasa school of Thought has compiled the oral traditions of the Upanishads into the written form of classical Sanskrit only in the era of Christ.

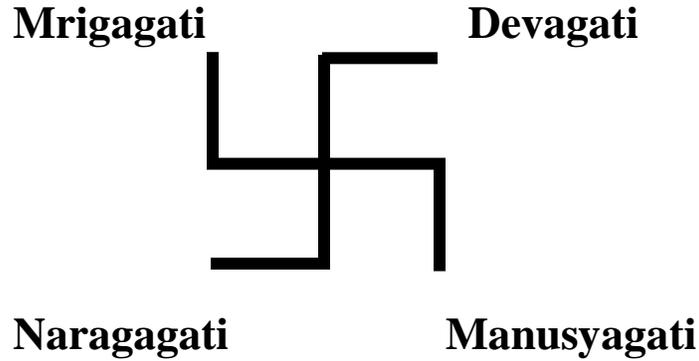
It is because of the mutilations, destructions, misinterpretation and distorted commentaries, the original meaning of the 'Prasthanas' could not be understood because Sankara's Commentaries were tending towards the destruction of Vedantic doctrines (New Testament) through cunningly devised scholastic approach. For example, the atheistic philosophy of the cycle of birth and the stratification of caste system had been philosophized and blended into the stream of Vedanta as if they are the constituents of Vedantic doctrine.

Diacritical marks –

● Arhat
—

Tusitaloka

● ● ● Tri Ratnas



Cycle of Birth

Cycle of birth is an atheistic proposition propounded by Buddhism and Jainism in particular four states of birth are earmarked by Jainism – state of animal, demon, sacman or god – according to one's own action shall decide one's future birth. It is an ever-revolving cycle, a mechanism that a man's action good or bad shall propel him to take the next birth according to his merit. Therefore, this cycle shall never be broken and hence the Jains advocate the penence of '**salehara**', a suicidal attemp by which he shall neither eat nor drink, and he shall desist from any action, subsequently he shall die and thus he shall not be entangled in the cycle of birth which shall enable him to attain the apex state of arhat. This is supposed to be the supreme state that an ardent Jain longs for in his life time.

There is no cycle of birth theory in the theistic religions. That's why Manickavasagar Sings this ;

'Pirapparukkum Pignahan',

and in Saiva Siddhanta, Porrip Pahrodar' mentions,

‘Varum Pirappai Aruthu’

(The Lord cut off the future birth)

The atheistic religions had proposed this theory of cycle of birth of rebirth because they don't have the faith that God shall intervene in one's life and shall bestow upon him, His grace so that he shall be saved. Since the aspect of 'His saving Grace' is absent in these atheistic religions, they go on professing the theory of cycle of birth.

Karma, Dharma to Grace

The real meaning of 'Karma' is the offering of animal sacrifice. That's why the Vedic ritualistic portion is known as 'Karma Marga'. Later on one's own course of action, good or bad, is taken to mean to decide about his attaining Mukti or Moksha. The scriptures (Saiva Siddhanta in particular) do emphasize that one's evil deeds shall never be compensated by his meritorious deeds. If that is the case, there is no need for a saviour to descend and save him from the state of **mire** or bondage. So the theory of Karma is untenable.

Next comes the proposition of 'dharma'. This is known as Varnashrama dharma. Every person has his dharma, his law of the mode of life preordained from on high. For instance, the dharma of Brahmins performing religious ceremonies and that of the Ksatriyas consists in ruling society, implementing state power. The duty of the Vysyas is keeping the Brahmins, the ksatriyas and themselves, they must till the soil, breed cattle, and practice crafts and commerce. The dharma of sudras consists in serving the members of the upper three Varnas and practicing the handicrafts. Deviation in any such duties from performance of dharma may result in that person's soul being reborn in the bodily integument of an animal or even an insect. If dharma is followed faithfully, the soul may be reborn in a person of a higher social standing. The social orientation of this doctrine is quite obvious.

The interrelations between 'Karma' and 'dharma' is thus misinterpreted as religious sanctions by the Aryans to subjugate the Dravidians using their own philosophies.

Spirituality does not advocate this type of devised, corrupted and amended rules of fascism and hierarchy of stratified society. Everybody, irrespective

of race, or colour or creed shall be saved by the ever abounding grace of God. It is quite apparent that Karma and dharma cannot lead to salvation but it is the grace, of God that matters which shall lead anybody in the path of salvation.

The impelling factors which had given rise to the Tamil Bhakti Movement, Sixfold religion etc. could not be traced in the Vedic literature because Vedic worship is a sacrificial worship, a worship of the basic elements of nature etc. and to be precise, it is a worship which pivots around the glorification of the Brahmin supremacy. But the sixfold religion (Hindu Religion) is a religion of the fulfillment of sacrifice – the sacrifice was fulfilled by the Supreme Sacrifice of God Incarnate, which propagates the universal humane love and equality.

It is not the Hindu religion above which was founded on the doctrine of the fulfillment of sacrifice, but the Indian Philosophy also falls in the same line of the philosophy of the fulfillment of sacrifice.

The sacrifice of the ‘historical avatarin’, Isa (Isan > Iswaran = Jesus) for the remission of sin was the message that St. Thomas had propagated in India and it had permeated into the Indian religion and Indian philosophy and had developed as doctrines.