

BUDDHA, THE SOCIAL REFORMER

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THE Vesak Day is regarded as a very important day in the history of mankind, on account of the birth of the Great Sakyamuni, the Buddha, whose teaching brought about a revolutionary change in the spiritual thinking, and subsequently the social changes in India and the world.

It was his enlightened teachings, which shattered the chains of Brahminic ideals, which held sway in the society of the day. The social order denied ordinary man, the right to work out his salvation, both in economical and spiritual spheres. Only Brahmins and Kshatriyas were privileged to do everything possible to be happy in this world and the next. The scriptures, the 'Vedas' were taught only to a selected few, very secretly. But the Buddha, the Enlightened One, did not make any distinction between the high and low, rich and poor, wise and dunce. He preached the sublime truth, which he realised under the Bodhi tree, at Buddha Gaya, after purifying his mind and developing his thoughts through meditation. He propounded the Golden Mean, the Middle Path to everybody irrespective of one's caste, clan, creed, social status etc. So not only great Brahmin teachers like Janussoni and Pokkharasati and powerful monarchs like Bimbisara and Kosala were benefited by his teachings, but also untouchables like Sunita and Sopaka too.

Womenkind, who were denied freedom, both at home and in society attained the highest gift from the Buddha, when the permission for ordination was granted. According to Brahminic teachings, she had to obey her parents during her childhood, to husband when married and to son or sons when husband died. Sometimes, she was forced to jump into the funeral pyre of her husband. But according to the Buddha's teachings, she was the supreme friend of her husband. She should be entrusted with the responsibility of running the home and looking into the needs and education etc. of the children.

The Buddha did not make any attempt to impose his views upon his followers in any way. He did not advocate prayers. "Be refuge unto yourself", he declared, "Ones real refuge is he himself and not anybody else". And ultimately, it is by developing one's own thoughts and insight that one will be able to attain highest bliss, realising the truth. One need not pray to anybody, even to God or Brahma to be free from the sufferings of the world. It is something up to one to work out one's salvation, independently. Thus, He safeguarded the freedom of thought of man. "Do not accept," He declared, "even what I preach without giving sufficient thought to it." Not any other religious teacher has made such a

bold statement to safeguard the disciples' free thinking. Thus, it is quite evident, that the Buddha demands no blind faith of his followers. Verification before acceptance was what He advocated. That attitude of Buddhism towards the solution of its problems is scientific. Therefore, it is quite explicit that even in this age of space flight, the Buddhistic teachings survive, enlightening the intellect of man more and more.

The Great Compassionate One, devoted most of His time for the welfare of others. He spent, not more than three hours a day for sleeping. He did not take any notice of others, regards and rebukes, praises and condemnations. His compassion indeed was unique and universal. He spread thoughts of compassion to very wicked demons like Alawaka, to His own ruthless rival Devadatta and to His only son Rahula equally.

What the Buddha appreciated very much was the practice of virtues and not offerings, rites and rituals. So, it is our prime duty, to live up to the ideal of His noble teachings. It should not be limited to Poya Day only, but should be practised throughout life.

MAY ALL BEINGS BE WELL AND HAPPY.