Chapter Three

Jainism and Buddhism

Jainism

The Jain philosophy is concerned with individual perfection. Our effort is quite different. We want to bring down the Supermind as a new faculty. Just as the mind is now a permanent state of consciousness in humanity, so also we want to create a race in which the Supermind will be a permanent state of consciousness.

* Why cannot one love or experience \(\textit{the Cosmic Divine or the Transcendent Divine}\) concretely? many have done it. And why assume that He is immobile, silent and aloof? The Cosmic Divine can be as close to one as one’s own self and the Transcendent as intimate as the closest friend or lover. It is only in the physical consciousness that there is some difficulty in realising it.

The Jain realisation of an individual godhead is all right so far as it goes — its defect is that it is too individual and isolated.

Buddhism

Buddhist teaching does not recognise any inner self or soul — there is only a stream of consciousness from moment to moment — the consciousness itself is only a bundle of associations — it is kept moving by the wheel of Karma. If the associations are untied and thrown away (they are called sanskaras), then it dissolves; the idea of self or a persistent person ceases; the stream flows no longer, the wheel stops. There is left, according to some, Sunya, a mysterious Nothing from which all comes; according to others a mysterious Permanent in which there is no individual existence. This is Nirvana. Buddha himself always refused to say what there was beyond cosmic existence; he spoke neither of God nor Self nor Brahman. He said there was no utility in
discussing that — all that was necessary was to know the causes of this unhappy temporal existence and the way to dissolve it.

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Buddha, it must be remembered, refused always to discuss what was beyond the world. But from the little he said it would appear that he was aware of a Permanent beyond equivalent to the Vedantic Para-Brahman, but which he was quite unwilling to describe. The denial of anything beyond the world except a negative state of Nirvana was a later teaching, not Buddha's.

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If Buddha really combated and denied all Vedantic conceptions of the Self then it can be no longer true that Buddha refrained from all metaphysical speculations or distinct pronouncements as to the nature of the ultimate Reality. The view you take of his conception of Nirvana seems to concur with the Mahayanist interpretation and its conception of the Permanent, dhruvam, which could be objected to as a later development like the opposite Nihilistic conception of the Shunyam. What Buddha very certainly taught was that the world is not-Self and that the individual has no true existence since what does exist in the world is a stream of impermanent consciousness from moment to moment and the individual person is fictitiously constituted by a bundle of sanskaras and can be dissolved by dissolving the bundle. This is in conformity with the Vedantic Monistic view that there is no true individual. As to the other Vedantic view of the one Self, impersonal and universal and transcendent, it does not seem that Buddha made any distinct and unmistakable pronouncements on abstract metaphysical questions; but if the world or all in the world is not-Self, anātman, there can be no more room for a universal Self, only at most for a transcendent Real Being. His conception of Nirvana was of something transcendent of the universe, but he did not define what it was because he was not concerned with any abstract metaphysical speculations about the Reality; he must have thought them unnecessary and irrelevant and any indulgence in them likely to divert from the
true object. His explanation of things was psychological and not metaphysical and his methods were all psychological, the breaking up of the false associations of consciousness which cause the continuance of desire and suffering, so getting rid of the stream of birth and death in a purely phenomenal (not an unreal) world; the method of life by which this liberation could be effected was also a psychological method, the eightfold path developing right understanding and right action. His object was pragmatic and severely practical and so were his methods; metaphysical speculations would only draw the mind away from the one thing needful.

As to Buddha’s attitude towards life, I do not quite see how service to mankind or any ideal of improvement of the world-existence can have been part of his aim, since to pass out of life into a transcendence was his object. His eightfold path was the means towards that end and not an aim in itself or indeed in any way an aim. Obviously if right understanding and right action became the common rule of life, there would be a great improvement in the world, but for Buddha’s purpose that could be an incidental result and not at all part of his central object. You say, “Buddha himself urged the necessity to serve mankind: his ideal was to achieve a consciousness of inner eternity and then be a source of radiant influence and action.” But where and when did Buddha say these things, use these terms or express these ideas? “The service of mankind” sounds like a very modern and European conception; it reminds me of some European interpretations of the Gita as merely teaching the disinterested performance of duty or the pronouncement that the whole idea of the Gita is service. The exclusive stress or overemphasis on mankind or humanity is also European. Mahayanist Buddhism laid stress on compassion, fellow-feeling with all, vasudhāva kutumbakam, just as the Gita speaks of the feeling of oneness with all beings and preoccupation with the good of all beings, sarvabhūtahite ratāḥ, but this does not mean humanity only but all beings and vasudhā means all earth-life. Are there any sayings of Buddha which would justify the statement that the object or one object of attaining to Nirvana was to become a
source of radiant influence and action? The consciousness of inner eternity may have that result, but can we really say that that was Buddha’s ideal, the object which he held in view or for which he came?

*Buddhism is the turning away from duḥkha and its causes to the peace of Nirvana. The duḥkhavāda did not exist in India, except in the theory of the Vaishnava viraha; otherwise it was not considered as a means or even a stage in the sadhana. But that does not mean that duḥkha does not come in the sadhana — it comes and has to be rejected and overcome, overpassed — excepting the psychic sorrow which does not disturb or depress but rather liberates the vital. To make a vāda or gospel of sorrow is dangerous because sorrow if indulged becomes a habit, sticks and few things, if once they stick, can be more sticky.

Buddhist Nirvana

The Buddhist Nirvana and the Adwaitin’s Moksha are the same thing. It corresponds to a realisation in which one does not feel oneself any longer as an individual with such a name or such a form, but an infinite eternal Self spaceless (even when in space), timeless (even when in time). Note that one can perfectly well do actions in that condition and it is not to be gained only by Samadhi.

*It [the Nirvana of Buddha] is the same [as the Nirvana of the Gita]. Only the Gita describes it as Nirvana in the Brahman while Buddha preferred not to give any name or say anything about that into which the nirvana took place. Some later schools of Buddhists described it as Sunya, the equivalent of the Chinese Tao, described as the Nothing which is everything.

*The feeling of the Self as a vast peaceful Void, a liberation from
existence as we know it, is one that one can always have, Bud-
dhist or no Buddhist. It is the negative aspect of Nirvana — it is
quite natural for the mind, if it follows the negative movement
of withdrawal, to get that first, and if you lay hold on that
and refuse to go farther, being satisfied with this liberated Non-
Existence, then you will naturally philosophise like the Buddhists
that Sunya is the eternal truth. Lao Tse was more perspicacious
when he spoke of it as the Nothing that is All. Many of course
have the positive experience of the Atman first, not as a void but
as pure unrelated Existence like the Adwaitins (Shankara) or as
the one Existent.

* They [those who have had the experience of Nirvana] do not
feel as if they had any existence at all. In the Buddhistic Nirvana
they feel as if there were no such thing at all, only an infinite
zero without form. In the Adwaita Nirvana there is felt only
one vast existence, no separate being is discernible anywhere.
There are forms of course but they are only forms, not separate
beings. Mind is silent, thought has ceased, — desires, passions,
vital movements there are none. There is consciousness but only
a formless elemental consciousness without limits. The body
moves and acts, but the sense of body is not there. Sometimes
there is only the consciousness of pure existence, sometimes only
pure consciousness, sometimes all that exists is only a ceaseless
limitless Ananda. Whether all else is really dissolved or only
covered up is a debatable point, but at any rate it is an experience
as if of their dissolution.

* I don’t think I have written, but I said once that souls which
have passed into Nirvana may (not “must”) return to complete
the larger upward curve. I have written somewhere, I think, that
for this Yoga (it might also be added, in the natural complete
order of the manifestation) the experience of Nirvana can only
be a stage or passage to the complete realisation. I have said
also that there are many doors by which one can pass into the
realisation of the Absolute (Parabrahman) and Nirvana is one of them, but by no means the only one. You may remember Ramakrishna’s saying that the Jivakoti can ascend the stairs, but not return, while the Ishwarakoti can ascend and descend at will. If that is so, the Jivakoti might be those who describe only the curve from Matter through Mind into the silent Brahman and the Ishwarakoti those who get to the integral Reality and can therefore combine the Ascent with the Descent and contain the “two ends” of existence in their single being.

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The realisation of this Yoga is not lower but higher than Nirvana or Nirvikalpa Samadhi.

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In our Yoga the Nirvana is the beginning of the higher Truth, as it is the passage from the Ignorance to the higher Truth. The Ignorance has to be extinguished in order that the Truth may manifest.

**Different Kinds of Buddhism**

Buddhism is of many kinds and the entirely nihilistic kind is only one variety. Most Buddhism admits a Permanent as beyond the creation of Karma and Sanskaras. Even the Sunya of the Sunyapanthis is described like the Tao of Lao Tse as a Nothing which is All. So as a higher “above mental” state is admitted which one tries to reach by a strong discipline of the consciousness, it may be called spirituality.

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There are elements in most Yogas which enter into this one, so it is not surprising if there is something in Buddhism also. But such notions as a Higher Evolution beyond Nirvana seem to me not genuinely Buddhistic, unless of course there is some offshoot of Buddhism which developed something so interpreted by the author. I never heard of it as part of Buddha’s teachings.
— he always spoke of Nirvana as the goal and refused to discuss metaphysically what it might be.

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About the One [of the Buddhists] there are different versions. I just read somewhere that the Buddhist One is a Superbuddha from whom all Buddhas come — but it seemed to me a rehash of Buddhism in Vedantic terms born of a modern mind. The Permanent of Buddhism has always been supposed to be Supracosmic and Ineffable — that is why Buddha never tried to explain what it was; for, logically, how can one talk about the Ineffable? It has really nothing to do with the Cosmos which is a thing of sanskaras and Karma.

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There is no reason why the passage about Buddhism [in an essay of the correspondent] should be omitted. It gives one side of the Buddhistic teaching which is not much known or is usually ignored, for that teaching is by most rendered as Nirvana (Sunyavada) and a spiritualised humanitarianism. The difficulty is that it is these sides that have been stressed especially in the modern interpretations of Buddhism and any strictures I may have passed were in view of these interpretations and that one-sided stress. I am aware of course of the opposite tendencies in the Mahayana and the Japanese cult of Amitabha Buddha which is a cult of bhakti. It is now being said even of Shankara that there was another side of his doctrine — but his followers have made him stand solely for the Great Illusion, the inferiority of bhakti, the uselessness of Karma — jagan mithyā.

**Buddhism and Vedanta**

The impressions in the approach to Infinity or the entry into it are not always quite the same; much depends on the way in which the mind approaches it. It is felt first by some as an infinity above, by others as an infinity around into which the mind disappears (as an energy) by losing its limits. Some feel
not the absorption of the mind energy into the infinite, but a falling entirely inactive; others feel it as a lapse or disappearance of energy into pure Existence. Some first feel the infinity as a vast existence into which all sinks or disappears, others, as you describe it, as an infinite ocean of Light above, others as an infinite ocean of Power above. A certain school of Buddhists felt it in their experience as a limitless Sunya, the Vedantists on the contrary see it as a positive Self-Existence featureless and absolute. No doubt the various experiences were erected into various philosophies, each putting its conception as definitive; but behind each conception there was such an experience. What you describe as a completely emptied mind substance devoid of energy or light, completely inert, is the condition of neutral peace and empty stillness which is or can be a stage of the liberation. But it can afterwards feel itself filled with infinite existence, consciousness (carrying energy in it) and finally Ananda.

* The universe is only a partial manifestation and Brahman as its foundation is the Sat. But there is also that which is not manifested and beyond manifestation and is not contained in the basis of manifestation. The Buddhists and others get from that the conception of Asat as the ultimate thing.

Another meaning given is: Sat = the Eternal, Asat = the Temporary and Unreal.

* The ego and its continuity, they [the Buddhists] say, are an illusion, the result of the continuous flowing of energies and ideas in a determined current. There is no real formation of an ego. As to the liberation, it is in order to get free from duhka etc., it is a painful flow of energies and to get free from the pain they must break up their continuity. That is all right, but how it started, why it should end at all and how anybody is benefited by the liberation, since there is nobody there, only a mass of idea and action — these things are insoluble mysteries. But is there not the same difficulty with the Mayavadin also, since there is
no Jiva really, only Brahman and Brahman is by nature free and unbound for ever? So how did the whole absurd affair of Maya come into existence and who is liberated? That is what the old sages said at last: “There is none bound, none freed, none seeking to be free.” It was all a mistake (a rather long-standing one though). The Buddhists, I suppose, could say that also.