

CHAPTER 2

The Environment of Buddhism in a Socio-Religious Perspective

Though scholars differ as to the exact date of the Buddha's birth it is generally accepted that it occurred sometime in the sixth century B.C.¹ This great Buddha-event initiated a new epoch in the religio-philosophic history of India. According to Kashyap,

"The coming, twenty five hundred years ago, of Gotama the Buddha was an epoch-making event in the history of Indian Civilization and culture. He was the first historical figure to make a profound impression on the Indian mind, to challenge the thought processes of all India. So great was his influence that even though Buddhism no longer exists as an organised religious institution in India his message and personality are still a living reality in the life of India and will long continue to be a source of strength. Indeed, it was the Buddha's role to recast and revitalize for mankind a way of life which can be applied universally, regardless of time or place or prevailing culture."²

The origin of Buddhism is so important in the history of Indian thought that Murti writes:

"Buddhism profoundly influenced the philosophy and religion of India for over a thousand years. It was a challenge to complacency and a call for renouncing dogmatism. It adopted the method of critical analysis (Vibhajjavāda) from the very outset. (M.II.19) Buddhism occupies the central position in the development of Indian philosophy. Brahmanical and Jaina systems grew under the direct stimulus of Buddhism. Schools and sub sects sprang up without number. Doctrines were systematised and details were worked out under this pressure. Great attention came to be paid to logic and epistemology. Precise terminology was evolved, and an immense Sastra literature came into

1. Hajime Nakamura, "Unity and Diversity in Buddhism" in *The Path of the Buddha*. Ed. Morgan, p.365f.

2. J. Kashyap, "Origin and Expansion of Buddhism" in *The Path of the Buddha*. Ed. Morgan, p.3.