

CHAPTER 1

The Historical Inheritance of Buddhism

Almost everywhere in the Buddhist scriptures we find 'Samaṇa Brāhmaṇa' (Sk. Śramaṇa Brāhmaṇa) as a very interesting compound term used to refer to the background of Buddhism. This is a key word in coming to an understanding of the religio-philosophic milieu of the Buddha's time. Samaṇa and Brāhmaṇa represent the two main traditions of Indian thought; Brāhmaṇa the orthodox, Samaṇa the heterodox. The latter includes religious movements like Jainism, Ājivakism and various other Paribbājaka movements. The orthodox religion was Brāhmanism which included Vedic and Upaniṣadic thinking.

To which of these groups Buddhism belongs is a problem to many scholars. Scholars like Sir Monier Williams¹, Radhakrishnan², Coomaraswamy³, suggest that Buddhism was a protestant school to the Vedic-Brahmanic tradition. Williams writes,

"... a careful examination of the two systems proves that they were not only closely related in their origin, but that the separation and antagonism which afterwards took place between them were never so great as to exclude the prospect of their ultimately drawing towards each other again by mutual sympathy and attraction, and even actually blending; the result of this final union being, in my opinion, the production of the later forms of Vaiṣṇavism and Śaivism. Indeed, the worshippers of the god Viṣṇu, in their ideas of liberty, fraternity and equality, in their abstinence from injury, and benevolence towards all creatures, in their hero-worship, deification of humanity and fondness for images, have always seemed to me to be more than half Buddhists."⁴

However, Pande writes to the contrary that Jainism and Buddhism were not the fruit of anti-ritualistic tendencies within the religion of the *Brāhmaṇas*, but that the

1. "On Buddhism in its relation to Brahmanism" in *J.R.A.S. (N.S.)* XVIII, Pt. II, pp. 127-56.

2. *Indian Philosophy*, pp. 361 ff.

3. *The Buddha and the Gospel of Buddhism*, p. 220f.

4. Williams, *op.cit.* p. 129.