

Buddha  
&  
Buddhism  
*Beyond Nirwana*

Dr. Preeti Oza  
Dr. Gurudutta Japee

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Ramnirajan Kulkarni College,  
Ghatkopar (W), Mumbai-400086.



# Buddha & Buddhism

*-Beyond Nirvana*

*Editors*

*Dr. Preeti Oza*

*Dr. Gurudutta Japee*



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## IMPACT OF BUDDHA ON CREATIVE LITERATURE

— Sharmila Jajodia

### Abstract :

The prince Siddharth/ Gautama, who renounced this world to understand the cause of worldly sufferings, was later on well known as Mahatma Buddha when he got enlightened or awakened in Bodhgaya. According to Buddha, the world is full of sorrow. Desire is the root cause of all sorrow. Sorrow can be conquered by conquering desire. Desire can be conquered by following the eight-fold paths (Ashtangirka Marga) i.e., right understanding, right resolve, right speech, right action, right living, right efforts, right thought, right self-concentration. The ultimate goal of our lives is Nirvana i.e., liberation from this worldly cycle of sufferings, birth, death and rebirth. The Buddha also talked about importance of ethics, self-restraint, non-violence and meditation. He also denounced caste system and animal sacrifice. The Buddha points out how the various ups and downs-gain and loss, fame and disrepute, praise and blame, pleasure and pain, keep the world turning around and a noble person reflects on and understands the impermanence of these conditions. He refers to karma as intention so all thoughts, words and deeds derive their moral value from the intentions behind them. His philosophy has influenced the artists all

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over the world including literary personalities not only in ancient times but also in modern times such as T. S. Eliot, Anita Desai, Namita Gokhale and many others. Buddhism has contributed to women writing in India too. In the light of the above observations, this paper tries to study impact of Buddha on creativity in world literature from ancient times to modern times through the lens of historicism, formalism and reader-response criticism.

**Keywords:** Buddhism, creativity, formalism, literature, women

The seminal poetry by women in India could be attributed to the advent of Buddhism as the freedom, the way of life and the principle of equality offered and propagated by the religion allowed women to pen their constraints of domestic life which was a bigger cause in the rise of Indian women's literature in the early 6<sup>th</sup> century BC. The pioneering well known anthology of women's literature in India has been that of those belonging to the Therigatha nuns, the poetesses being contemporaries of Buddha.

One of the *Mutta*, expresses, "So free am I, so gloriously free, free from three petty things- from mortar, from pestle and from my twisted lord" (Rituraj 232). *Mutta's* works have been translated from Pali and it offers an explanation through their interpretations that religious escapism proved the only solution for many women who were facing frustration owing to domesticity. They chose to join the Buddhist sangha, religious communities, in their attempts to get rid of the socio-cultural worlds of tradition and marriage. Thus, the poems and songs written underline freedom from household chores and sexual slavery. Although the earlier writings were about personal freedom, yet the later poetry celebrated womanhood and sexuality.

The Sangam poets dominated the era between ca. 100 BC-AD 250 and wrote extensively about what it meant to have a female body. The translation of Venmaniputti-Kuruntokai's 'What she said to her girlfriend reads, "On the banks, shaded

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by a punnai clustered with flowers, when we made love my eyes saw him and my ears heard him; my arms grow beautiful in the coupling and grow lean as they come away" as quoted by Rituraj (232). The poem, bold for its time, is expressing a woman's pleasure in sex. Thus, the poems written around this age echo a sense of sexual liberation. According to S.S. Kalpana, the commentaries accompanying these poems mention songs sung by women while they transplant seedlings, draw water and husk paddy and women generally seems to sing to keep vigil on the ripening grain and to ward off spirits. These songs took the form of poetry in writing. A.K. Ramanujan, who translated most of the poems of the Sangam age, expresses that the disparities in gender are very clear the way women have written about their experiences. Some of the poems echo the need for bodily love and passion, the foolishness of war and the 'spears' that men left with to wage wars.

The ten anthologies and eight long poems of the Sangam age are the oldest and most prominent body of secular poetry extant in India. S.S. Kalpana opines that the absence of mythological references and Sanskrit words suggest the possibility that they were written before the Aryan took over the northern India, when the University of Nalanda was set up and opened its doors for women too on the basis of equality. Most of the university records though lost, yet it can be assumed easily that women scholars contributed to the expanding body of literature. Among these poets of the 12<sup>th</sup> century AD, the one well known, was the medieval Kannada poet, rebel and mystic, Akkamahadevi, whose life and writing challenged the patriarchal dominance of the world at large. She is supposed to have wandered naked in search of divinity.

The spread of Buddhism also forced to rethink caste system. Babasaheb Ambedkar and his follower Dalit writers contributed a lot to do away with the evils of casteism. The Dalit literature is today produced and/ or translated in almost all languages of the world owing to the Dalit literary

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movement pioneered in Marathi in Maharashtra. Ambedkar established People's Education Society and started Siddharth College in Bombay to enable more and more Dalit youths to follow his message- 'unite, educate and agitate'. Resultantly, Siddharth Sahitya Sangh and later on the Maharashtra Dalit Sahitya Sangh were set up. Another significant event was the literary meet held in Bombay in 1967 on behalf of the Maharashtra Buddha Sahitya Sabha as the first representative collection of Dalit poetry 'Akar' was published in it. Many poets and short story writers developed the literature during this period. During the same tumultuous period the Dalit literary meet held at Mahad by Maharashtra Buddha Sahitya Sangha and presided over by Baburao Bagul, a literary luminary, proved a revolutionary landmark in the Dalit literary movement. Bagul, an Ambedkarite Buddhist became popular with his second collection of short stories "Maran Swasta Hot Ahe" (Death is Getting Cheaper) (1969). During 1972-78, several collections of short stories, several books, autobiographical narratives, periodicals and special issues on the Dalit literature were published.

"Cry, the Peacock", Desai's first novel depicts how childless Maya is unable to overcome her emotions after the death of her pet dog Toto. Her husband Gautama, a lawyer and a very good friend of her father, however, tries his best to convince her that death is a fact of life but fails. Maya reacts, "Oh, Gautama, pets might not mean anything to you, and yet they mean the world to me." (19) She finds that both of them are poles apart. He is always busy and extremely insensitive to her needs. Gautama, a very practical man at times turns philosopher to pacify Maya but doesn't succeed. She is obsessed by a childhood prophecy of disaster by an albino astrologer who told her on reading the space between her eyes and her horoscope that either of the life partners will die of unnatural causes after four years of her marriage. This forecast is haunting her day and night after Toto's burial. She is also very much dissatisfied with her marital life and finds herself 'lonely' in the house as Gautam could never

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understand her. He has no time to spend the summer with her. He always asks her to go to her father and spend summer with him anywhere she wants. She feels, "No one, no one else loves me as my father does" (43) That is why Gautama reacts to her once, "You have a very obvious father-obsession - which is also the reason why you married me a man so much older than yourself. It is a complex . . . , since passion of this sort is almost always self-consuming..." (122-123) Gautama labels Maya as a neurotic because life is still a fairy tale to her; she hasn't learnt the realities of common existence - living, dying and working, all that constitutes life for ordinary human being. She has dreams of dead. She feels that all order is gone out of her life, all formality. There is no plan, no peace, nothing to keep her within the pattern of familiar in her life. Thus, she has lots of delusions and hallucinations. At the extreme stage of her destructive instincts, thantos, she pushes her husband from the terrace of her house as she finds him as an obstacle. Maya expresses: "... Gautama made a mistake - his last, decisive one...thus coming between me and the worshipped moon...'Gautama!' I screamed in fury, and thrust out my arms towards him, out at him, into him and past him, saw him fall then..." (173) He dies. Later on, she also commits suicide.

This novel appears to be influenced by Buddhist philosophy and Gautama certainly resembles Gautama Buddha in many respects. The concept of prakriti constituted of three gunas - sattva (luminosity, peace and knowledge), rajas (dynamism, passion, attachment) and tamas (inertia, darkness and ignorance) is also considered in Buddhist philosophy. Every child is handicapped by these rajas and tamas gunas since birth so is Maya, the protagonist in the novel. She is ruled by pleasure principal and unable to conquer the sensual attachment and is psychotic at the end while her husband Gautama is trigunatita as he is free from passions, cravings, moods of elation, excitement and depression unperturbed by the disturbance of mind and physical phenomena and finally no attachments and infatuations. He

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is described by Anita Desai as Buddha as quoted by Rajeshwar: He looked very much the mediator beneath the bo tree, seated upon a soft tiger skin, too fastidious to touch the common earth, with those long, clean-cut hands of his...(30)

Gautama professes selfless work and non-attachment to Maya through his practice as he opines: Yet we do have our work – our vocations each one of us, and so far, I must say, it appears to have brought us a certain amount of serenity. Not the complete ideal peace . . . but perhaps a larger amount of it than most people have (Rajeshwar, 30).

Gautama tells her that attachment is her weakness while Maya considers his non-attachment and knowledge as his weakness which results in marital disharmony. Desai's usage of Buddhist philosophy has made the novel appealing aesthetically.

T. S. Eliot's "The Waste Land" (1922) is about physical, psychological and spiritual degeneration in the backdrop of World War I as the poet has depicted the loss of life and property, the frustration, depression, the prevailing silence and disconnect in human relations as the aftermaths of war. The poem is obscure and fragmentary, incorporates varied voices, multiple points of view, abrupt shifts with the motif of moral degeneration being prevalent throughout in the poem the way it is seen in the European life of that time, obsession with novelty, trends, materialism, and instant gratification, lack of the faith and substance to re-establish the sense of order and stability. These images of ceremony and tradition are set against bleak images of modern life and the ashen landscape reflects a barren world void of transcendental value. Describing a series of failed encounters between men and women and the meaninglessness of relationships, Eliot underlines that the world is filled with "a heap of broken images" where "the dead tree gives no shelter." The only salvation appears to be in personal responsibility, self-control, and a faith in cultural continuity based on common Western European values. There are no heroes or heroines, and there

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is no narrator telling readers what to think or how to feel. Instead, Eliot allows multiple voices to tell their individual stories. Many of the stories portray a sordid society without values. In the first part, "The Burial of the Dead," the speaker is an old Austro-Hungarian noblewoman who recollects the golden period of her life—her youth before the calamities of World War I. Clearly, her life has been materially and culturally rich. Now in old age, thoughts of the past seem to embitter her, and she spends much of her time reading. It begins with the lines 'April is the cruelest month, breeding / Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing / Memory and desire, stirring / Dull roots with spring rain'. The usage of word 'desire' reminds the Buddha who advocated that desire is the root cause of all sorrow. Next, the poet writes, "I was neither / living nor dead, and I knew nothing, / Looking into the heart of light, the silence" The refrain dead and the phrases 'neither living nor dead', 'knew nothing', 'the heart of light, the silence' hints that the ultimate goal of our lives is Nirvana i.e., liberation from this worldly cycle of sufferings, birth, death and rebirth. The second part, "A Game of Chess," is set in the dressing room of a fashionable Englishwoman. It describes the sensual surroundings of a wealthy woman's bedroom—the ornate chair in which the woman sits, the room's marble floor and carved fireplace, her glittering jewels and heavy perfumes. She is bickering with a man, her husband or her lover, and complains that her "nerves are bad to-night." Then a contrasting setting appears: a London pub. Two women are gossiping in Cockney English about a friend's marriage gone bad. This part reveals that this world is full of sorrow. Sorrow can be conquered by conquering desire. Desire can be conquered by following the right approach as it starts with "The Chair ... like a burnished throne, / Glowed on the marble,..." and then "The glitter of her jewels ... strange synthetic perfumes, Unguent, powdered, or liquid—troubled, confused / And drowned the sense in odours... still she cried, and still the world pursues, / ... we are in rats' alley / ... "What is that noise?" ... noise now? ... Nothing again nothing. / ...

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know nothing?... see nothing?... remember / "Nothing?"... alive, or not?... nothing in your head?" / But / O O O O... and ends with HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME/ Goodnight." The third, "The Fire Sermon," mixes images of Elizabeth's England, the Thames and Rhine rivers, and the legend of the Greek seer Tiresias. The narrator juxtaposes the pretty stream that Renaissance poets saw with the garbage-filled canal of the twentieth century. Most of the section tells the story of an uninspired seduction. The speaker, ironically, the Greek sage Tiresias in legend was changed from a man into a woman. In this androgynous mode, Tiresias can reflect on both the male and the female aspects of the modern-day affair between a seedy clerk and a tired typist. This section ends with snippets of past songs about the Thames and the Rhine. Here Eliot writes in the beginning, "The river's tent is broken: . . . and further notices . . . Departed, have left no addresses. . . . I sat down and wept . . . / . . . I end my song, / Unreal City . . . Nothing with nothing. / . . . and then ends with Burning burning burning burning/ . . . burning. So, he continues with the idea that a noble person reflects on and understands the impermanence of worldly conditions. The fourth, "Death by Water," is a brief portrait of a drowned Phoenician sea-trader. The tone is elegiac because the speaker imagines the bones of the young trader washed by the seas and advises the listeners to consider the brevity of life. It precisely states how the various ups and downs—gain and loss, fame and disrepute, praise and blame, pleasure and pain, keep the world turning around as it reads, "Phlebas the Phoenician, a fortnight dead, / Forgot the cry of gulls, and the deep sea swell/ And the profit and loss./ . . . A current under sea/ Picked his bones in whispers. As he rose and fell/ He passed the stages of his age and youth/ Entering the whirlpool./ Gentile or Jew/ O you who turn the wheel and look to windward,/ Consider Phlebas, who was once handsome and tall as you." The fifth, "What the Thunder Said," combines the above themes with that of religious peace. It is set in a barren landscape, perhaps the Waste Land itself, where heat lays its heavy hand on a

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group of speakers. The opening stanza's description of confused "torchlight on sweaty faces" in a garden and an "agony in stony places" tends to suggest that hope, however, has fled the holy man's followers, who wander through the desert listening to thunder that is never followed by rain. Now the thunder crashes over an Indian jungle while the speaker listens and "translates" the thunderclaps. The thunder speaks three words in Sanskrit, an ancient Indian language, which is also the language of Buddhist scriptures. The first word is "Datta", the second is "Dayadhvam", and the third is "Damyata". Eliot concludes that the solution to these cyclic problems lies in right understanding, right resolve, right speech, right action, right living, right efforts, right thought, right self-concentration. He also talks about importance of ethics, self-restraint, non-violence and meditation as he writes in the end, "Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata. / Shantih shantih shantih". Datta refers to giving/offering, Dayadhvam to compassion, Damayata to control and Shantih to peace-essentials for the welfare of the world. In this message from the natural world, which tells of God's gifts, compassion and self-control, the speaker finally finds cause for "peace"—the "shantih" of the closing line.

The title of the poem and that of its five parts indicate impact of Buddhism explicitly and implicitly as Eliot too refers to karma as *intention* and *opines that all thoughts, words and deeds derive their moral value from the intentions behind them*. Thus, the poem suggests that there is an ocean of emptiness, pain, suffering, desolation and despair in human beings' immediate surroundings. One should not forget that life is not static, it's dynamic and transitory and material conditions are ephemeral, short lived. The poem represents the Buddhist doctrine of samsara.

Eliot, as a student, got exposure to several schools of Buddhism including the Kegon, Shingon, and Tendai, characterized as "descendants of the Madhyamika School" and founded in the second century A.D. by N?g?rjuna, the Indian Buddhist philosopher, the most influential after

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Siddhartha Gautama and the leading proponent of the Mādhyamika ("Middle Way") philosophy. The central teaching of Nāgārjuna was the doctrine of śūnyatā, or "emptiness".

"For Mahāyāna Buddhists, all things are totally empty of any defining essence. Thus, all things are void of any fixed identity or inherent existence and remain in a constant state of impermanence, change, and flux. This is the fundamental premise of Mahāyāna Buddhism. Only through the realization of this emptiness in material things can one achieve Buddhahood. According to one standard text, "the real knowledge of Buddha nature is empty of empirical content, and it is the discovery of that emptiness or void, śūnyatā, of the true Buddha nature that is to become the way to Nirvana." (Dash)

It's very much applicable in present scenario too when the world is facing the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to world wide lockdown announced all of a sudden life came to a halt and the most intelligent creature, the human being found itself locked inside the house without being locked from outside. Those who didn't follow the right approach towards life became victim to disease, infection, death, hunger, suicide, physical and psychological disorders due to low immunity, domestic violence, loss of employment, job, business, hunger, socio-economic, digital divide and lack of confidence while others survived due to discipline, strong will power and self-control by following COVID guidelines and protocols.

To sum up, the Buddhist philosophy has influenced the artists all over the world including literary personalities not only in ancient times but also in modern times and will do so in future too as the writers do not write for one age but for all ages.

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## About the Book

Across religious and cultural boundaries, Buddhism has responded to new opportunities and difficulties in recent years. This has been particularly true when considering Buddhism's place in the global environment. Every society's dream is to have its members enjoy a long and healthy life. Most people's priorities are skewed toward physical well-being and possessions rather than spiritual development, making it impossible to achieve this state. Our understanding of karma is aided by Buddha's words, which we may apply to our own lives. We must let go of our clinging to material possessions and things in general if we want to lessen the pain that comes from holding on to them, as stated in the Buddhist "four noble truths". An "eleventh-fold route" is required to reach Nirvana, which is a state of complete freedom from suffering, and this can only be achieved by the practise of eight different practises. All Buddhists want nirvana, the cessation of desire and the cessation of suffering. This book is an attempt to get the divergent views about Buddha and Buddhism together.



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