

Forgotten Legacies of Sramana: A Glance Through The Local History Of Kerala

Sreekanth. K

Department of History, Baby John Memorial Government College, Chavara, Kollam, Kerala,
Corresponding Author: Sreekanth. K

ABSTRACT: *Sramana traditions were vibrant in the religious life of Kerala during ancient period. The reference about Buddhist viharas and mendicants were available from a lot of literary sources and archaeological records. Like in other parts of India, Buddhism became extinct in Kerala due to a number of reasons. Revival of Hinduism under Shankaracharya, the advent of Mahayanism, the promotion of Bhakti movement etc affected the fortunes of Buddhism and led to its decline. In spite of its decline Buddhism made a hallmark in the cultural life of Kerala people. Modern Hinduism carries many features of sramana traditions and this became an integral part of the cultural legacy of Kerala. The art, literature, religion, iconography, medicines and scientific contributions were made by sramana religion in Kerala. The religion of Buddhism came to Kerala along with trade routes and we have got a number of sculptures from central Travancore which attest the significance of Buddhism in Kerala. There is debate over the extinction of Buddhism and its cultural impact on modern Hinduism.*

KEYWORDS: *Sramana, vihara, mendicant, Shankaracharya, Mahayanist, iconography, sculptures, trade routes, debates, cultural impact, central Travancore.*

Date of Submission: 01-12-2024

Date of acceptance: 10-12-2024

I. INTRODUCTION

Sramana Gautama or Siddhartha hailed from Patrician stock of Kapilvastu and took to the worldly life at Lumbini park with seven steps to cross the vast ocean of existence. Buddhist canonical literature shows that he was many among the Buddhas including Pratyeka Buddhas. As a master of logic, with subtle and polemical arguments he shattered ritualism rampant in contemporary society. After the Great Renunciation he enunciated a middle path of life by avoiding extreme penances and gross sensualities. His healthy countenance and magnetic words attracted thousands of laymen in Bihar, U.P and M.P. by expounding vernacular language, he took delight in enlightening thousands of lay votaries. Hailing Aryasatyas, he, propounded a noble social code based on Ashtangikamarga. Buddha, Dharma and Sangha became the watchwords of this master. Taking no refuge in external power, Buddha attained Parinirvana at Kusinagara in 483 BCE. After the Mahaparinirvana, Buddhist Sangha popularised the concepts of Buddha in North India. They upheld purity, chastity and Ahimsa.

II. METHODOLOGY

The method adopted in the study is historical and descriptive. On certain points analytical method is used. Due consideration is given to analyse ethnological evidences and cultural aspects. Primary sources are few and far between. So, a thorough analysis of secondary sources is made. Scope and significance of the study: The scope of the study is vast and profound in nature. It covers a lengthy span of time marked by vicissitudes and finally saw the extinction. Regarding the nature of the subject, it is associated with all major features of modern Hindu social life and religious practices. As a cultural study it is worthy in showing the fact that we acquired diverse cultural elements amidst of apparent unity. I have analysed the ancient literary sources like Aryamanjusrimulakalpa and the works of Shankaracharya. The secondary sources of the study is conducted by analysing the works of Dr. P.C. Alexander, Dr. M.G.S. Narayanan, Dr. A. Sreedhara menon, Rhys Davids etc. The main objectives of the study are the following. a) To understand the cultural symbiosis of Kerala noted for its religious harmony. b) To know about the introduction of Buddhism in Kerala soil. c) To evaluate the cultural contributions of Buddhism to the cultural heritage of Kerala. d) To know about the debates about the decline of Buddhism in Kerala.

III. DISCUSSION

Southern Advent of Jainism and Buddhism.

The scattered inscriptions and evidences from literary sources point out the stories of conversion and migration. Like its twin sister Jainism, Buddhism spread to other parts of India including the Southernmost part of the continent. "Once the fact that Chandragupta was or became a Jain is admitted the tradition that he abdicated and committed slow starvation in the approved Jain manner becomes readily credible. The story is to the effect that when Jain saint Bhadrabahu predicted a famine in Northern India which would last for 12 years, and the prophecy began to be fulfilled, the saint led 12000 Jains to the South in search of more favoured lands. King Chandragupta abdicated and accompanied the emigrants, who made their way to Sravanabelgola (the white Jain tank) in Mysore where Bhadrabahu soon died." Like the Jain pattern of exodus, Buddhists also chose the Southern route. The Ceylonese chronicles like Dipavamsha and Mahavamsha, refer to this migration. They were composed in 4th or 5th century AD. These literary sources were supported by the inscriptional evidence available from different parts of the country lying between the Himalayas in the North and a region called Mahishamandala in the South. This place is identified with the Southern portion of Mysore state. Even before the advent of Mahayanism, Buddhist missionaries came to South India along with traditional trade routes. The second urbanisation, the centralised nature of the Mauryan administration might have helped the development of Buddhists and Jain settlement in the South. "Further evidence of trading activity comes from a set of label inscriptions dated between the 3rd and 1st century BC, with an important concentration occurring on a route linking Madhurai and Thiruchirappally. These record donations mainly to Jain monks and nuns and the donors mentioned include Panitha vanikan (toddy merchant), Koluvanikan (iron plough share merchant), Ponvanikan (gold merchant), Aruvaivanikan (textile merchant) and Uppuvanikan (salt merchant). As ancient Tamizhakam is considered to be the land of Muvendars, the assumed Jain settlements referred in the last paragraph shows the possibility of Jain and Buddhist settlements in Kerala during the time of the Chera kings. The story of Pattini devi and Sittailai Sattanar show the prevalence of religions like Jainism and Buddhism in Kerala. The Jain and Buddhist ideology came to Kerala through trade and they made their own settlements in Kerala like Kodungalloor. There may be a chance of close trade activity with Malabar coast and Kaveri delta via the Palakkad gap. The emergence of trade and handicrafts is visible from inscriptional evidence and literary sources. But the real sources of Jain, Buddhist and Brahmana settlements in Kerala started after 5th century AD. Brahmana gramas and their location point out river valleys as their favourable settlements.

Buddhist settlement in Kerala and its remnants

According to the opinion of expert scholars, Brahmanas pioneered agricultural process in Kerala. Their deep knowledge in astronomy and agricultural practises helped them to play a pivotal role in the organisation of agriculture in Kerala. The location of Brahmana gramas in river valleys of Bharatappuzha, Periyar and Pampa affirms this theory. Agriculture was very much suited in the river valleys which provided a high yield. But in Central Travancore we can point out a strong presence of Buddhist remnants which force us to believe that agriculture was pioneered by Buddhists monks in this region. The Buddhists statues at Pallikkal, Marunnurkulangara, Mavelikkara and Ambalappuzha suggest that Buddhist influence was strong in this region. The idol of Karimadikkuttan was found from Ambalappuzha. People offered their prayers in this locality to the Karimadikkuttan for better fortunes, a practice that prevailed in ancient agricultural societies. The concept of Pallikkal Putherachan also evoked local admiration and played a significant role in moulding the local ethos of an agricultural community. The Buddha at Mavelikkara was found in a Puncha or paddy field near to Mavelikkara. The place names and local traditions of Central Travancore region clearly proves the fact that Buddhism had a majestic role in moulding the culture of this region. The Kettukazchas or processions from Chiryankeezhu to Ambalappuzha is certainly a Buddhist practice which prevailed in North India also. The foreign Chinese travellers like Fahien referred about such kind of processions at Padaliputhra. The nature and cultural traditions of rituals like Kettukazcha is very much different from other religious rituals like Theyyam and Padayani. The nature of social participation and organisation of such festivals are certainly needed to be analysed. These processions mark the culmination of agricultural processes in a season. The regions like Ambalappuzha, Mavelikkara, Pallikkal, Marunnurkulangara, Neelamperur and Kiliroor suggest strong evidence for Buddhism in Central Travancore. The constitution and structure of society in Central Travancore clearly show the fact that Buddhist leanings were strong in Central Travancore region. The cosmopolitan nature and egalitarianism found in the Oachira temple may be a remnant of this culture. The ethnological studies based on place names and local traditions conducted by eminent scholars proved the fact that the term 'Palli' is a term derived from Pali language, which means a place or educational institution. "The other categories of sources such as Tamil Brahmi inscriptions are confined to these centres, where the sarmanic religions had their palis or

pallis, which were not huge monastic organisations, but merely retreats-Vassa or Vasa for wandering mendicants.” As Buddhists were the pioneers of education in Kerala, we can assume the fact that Buddhism played a prominent role in restructuring the society in ancient days. Their role of educating the public to a refined sphere is certainly a point to reckon with.” In Travancore, Buddhism secured a large following and became the prevailing religion from one end of the country to the other during the time of Ashoka.”

The development of Mahayanism and the emergence of structural temples

With the advent of Mahayanism, Buddhism may be suited for the needs of local people to a great extent. The beginning of structural temples and idol worship may have coincided in ancient Kerala. “The worship of Siva and Avalokateswara in a close manner in Onattukara. The findings like sculptures of Buddha from Kandiyoor and Maraturkulangara proves the same”. The Buddhist icons got from Kerala is marked with features like Ushnisha, Jvala, Padmasana, Drapery through left shoulders and Meditative posture. Probably they belong 4TH or 5TH century AD. This indicates an elaborate iconographic feature allied with Buddhism and there may have the presence of Buddhist Viharas even in ancient period. There is reference about Buddhist Vihara in literary works like Manimekhalai. Strong evidence for Buddhist cultural elements were present in Kerala during the early centuries of Christian era. But the development of Buddhist iconography and the beginning of structural temples occurred after the fifth century A.D. Some of the temples like Nilamperoor and Kiliroor contain Buddhist idols. Like North India, Buddhism acted as a pioneer of temple movement in Kerala also.

In the earlier period, the nature of Hindu worship was simple and free from extreme ritualism. The simple form of worship was changed in the later period. The extraction of agricultural surplus, growth of Feudalism and the conversion of the temples as the redistribution centres of agricultural surplus raised the status of temples as social institutions. With the advent of feudalism structural temples began to evolve in Kerala. Probably the concept of structural temples may have coincided with the advent of Mahayanism. The Buddhist Viharas and veneration of holy relics encouraged the Hindus of North India to construct huge temples. Similarly in South also Buddhist influence paved the way for the origin of structural temples. The nature of Sastha idols proves the same. The vegetarianism and cosmopolitan nature of Sabarimala is certainly notable as a Buddhist vestige. Amarasimha identifies the word Sastha as synonymous with Buddha. The non-sectarian background of the people of Kerala might have helped the evolution of the cult like Sastha. The emergence of Saiva and Vaishnava saints helped the consolidation of Hinduism on sectarian lines. “Most of the appurtenances of modern Hinduism, such as temples, worship of images, Ulsavams (religious festivals) and religious processions were all borrowed from the Buddhists. The doctrine of Ahimsa which was an essential feature of Buddhist scriptures was admitted to Hindu pantheon.

Emergence of Bhakti cult and temple-oriented Bhakti.

The emergence of Bhakti cult in Kerala is a major reason for the absorption of Buddhism by Hinduism. The earlier primitive patterns of worship along with Jain and Buddhist features were assimilated to Hindu fold in a flexible manner. The non-sectarian attitude of the people in Kerala during the Sangam period accentuated such a situation. The ownership of property in Kerala suggests such a possibility. With the advent of feudalism, most of the lands were converted into Brahmaswam and Devaswom land. The rights of these lands were protected. Temples had high and powerful status in the social redistribution process. Brahmins got privileges in the society. They offered the ideological foundations for having a characteristically feudal society based on agriculture. Even in Sangam days, Brahmins enjoyed powers and privileges. “There were significant changes in the social structure and social relations. The caste system or Chaturvarnya was introduced in Kerala society by the Brahmin settlers. “But during the feudal period, they acted as the controllers of the entire system and they provided the ideological basis for a hierarchically organised social setup. The element of decentralisation was very high in the Kerala society. Though the king played a pivotal role in controlling the entire administration, the popular bodies like Munnuttuvar and Arunnuttuvar played a major role in organising the entire administrative process. The Kachams like Kadamkattukacham, Muzhikkulamkacham, Shanakramangalathukacham and Pattazhi copper scroll prove the ascendancy of the Brahmin feudal class in Kerala. In the medieval period, temples acted as Sanketham which maintained exclusive privileges within the precincts of the temple. ” By such arbitrary conduct of the Devaswom people the sovereign power was overshadowed, and the king became indifferent to the mode in which affairs were administered within the jurisdiction of Devaswom and Brahmaswom lands.” All this shows the development of agriculture and the development of feudally organised hierarchical society guided by the Brahmanas. Ancient communities like Paanas lost their privileges in the later Sangam period. Similarly, Buddhists also lose their power and prestige with the evolution of structural temples and the rise of the Brahmanas. The Sankaracharya tradition of 9th century AD shows organised philosophical pattern for countering Buddhist logic and ideology. He led a crusade against the logic of Buddhism and he himself was called as Prachanna Buddha. Such a religious ideology helped

the Hindu religion to consolidate its power and prestige on a national level. So, during the 9th century AD, a strong ideological framework was provided to the Hindu society by Sankaracharya. The echo of this movement took the wind out of the sails of Buddhism. This period is also marked as the period of structural temples and the growth of agricultural practices in the society. Sankaracharya was in fact provided an ideological framework for strengthening the orthodox Hindu philosophy and in that way, he helped a revival of Hindu religion and ensured the assimilative process of incorporating Buddhist features within the fold of Hinduism. The Buddhism which lost its early purity and structural organisation now failed to counteract the inroad of Hinduism. The philosophical speculations prevailed in the period gave birth to a cultural synthesis which helped the Hindu religion to assimilate the features of Mahayan Buddhism with its elaborate iconography and philosophical speculations. That is why, lot of Buddhist Gods got Hindu garb and began to be accommodated within the fold of Hinduism. The Shasta cult, Avalokateswara cult, the temples of Nilamperur and Kiliroor, etc: proves such a thesis. This assimilation process may be non-violent in nature. The broken Buddha statues at some places suggest the chance for a violent persecution. But the literary evidences do not support such a theory.

Absence of chances for a violent persecution.

Ideological warfare existed, there is no reference to a violent clash between Hindus and Buddhists in Kerala. Buddhists were given privileged positions in ancient period. But unlike Brahmanas, they failed to begin settled life by supporting institutions like family and such a wise decision helped the Brahmanas to play a major role in organising the society. While the Buddhists failed to develop institutions like family, the evolution of Mahayanism reduced the cleavage between Hinduism and Buddhism. “When first initiated, the Avasa and the Arama were in the nature of encampments strictly temporary in character: residence in them being limited strictly to the three rainy months.” With the evolution of time, Buddhism became a part and parcel of Hindu society. The history of Kerala is noted for its religious toleration, the Kerala rulers were very much benevolent to religions like Christianity and Islam. There is not at all any kind of persecution in any of the literary records. So, there may not be any persecution against Buddhism or Jainism.

Why Buddhism became extinct in Kerala is a question and the answer to the same question is difficult. It became extinct in India due to a number of reasons. Lack of patronage, stray incidents of violent persecution, Hindu revivalism and natural downfall may be some of the causes. The rejuvenation of Hinduism under Shankaracharya instilled a new life to Hinduism. “And yet the same person was responsible for the Dakshinamurthi Stotra ,the Soundaryalahiri, the Anandalahiri and other clinging fervid, passionate stotras and for all those manifestation of the divine in language as impassioned ,as lyrical as fall of rapture and personal devotion as the outpourings of the Christian and Mohammedan religions ,and of our great men like Tukaram, Kabir and those wandering generations of singers who even today are one of the glories accompaniments of Northern Indian life “ Ideologically the same provided a settled life and family which gave the Brahmanas innumerable prestige and power in the society. While the Buddhists renounced worldly life Brahmanas engaged in clever marriage relationships and was able to control the social hierarchy. They possessed a temple-based ideology which controlled social redistribution of resources. Brahmanas possessed exclusive property privileges and such community naturally became the harbingers of medieval society. The bhakti movement in the South India was temple oriented and exclusively patronised by the ruling class. Brahmins as a class had close ties with Nair caste, which in turn helped them to possess power over the rest of communities at will. An alliance with a martial class might have helped them to maintain their power on the rest of the society in a practical manner. “The decline of Buddhism started about 8th century AD when the Namboodiris began to acquire ascendancy in the public life of Kerala.” Whether there occurred a violent persecution is a much-debated question.

The number of Brahmanas in Kerala is very few and an organised persecution by them is a distant possibility. Some of the members of Nair caste and other upper castes embraced Buddhism in earlier period. In such a context, the chances of violent persecution had a remote possibility. But the chances of a peaceful accommodation are a legitimate alternative for this problem. The amalgamation of aboriginal worship like Kali, Antimahakalan, Ayyappa, Pambu etc to main Hindu fold was clever and assimilative. Certain gods have no entry within Nalambala, but they are being worshipped within the temple premises. This adoption was possible among a group of people who maintained non-sectarian attitude in their religious life. The emergence of Mahayanism and the growth of the temple-oriented ritualism helped the Brahmanas to have a peaceful adoption of the Buddhist features also. “The protagonist mentions seeing symbolic images of Buddha, such as his footprints, seat or throne under the Bodhi tree. “An excellent example for such a thesis is visible at Sabarimala. The deity in its posture and details had Buddhist leanings. But the same deity is accommodated within the Hinduism in a peaceful manner. When Hieu-T-Sang visited India many Buddhist centres became desolate. If Malkuta is identified with Malabar such a natural downfall occurred to Buddhism during the period of Hieun-T-Sang itself. By the time of Shaik Sainuddin, the Buddhist influence in society was completely disappeared. Probably the deterioration occurred in a slow manner extending over two or three centuries. During this period Brahmin ideology and higher philosophical concepts crept to the framework of Hindu society and the absence of

any literary records referring about persecution is a point to ponder over. There was no physical assault or violent persecution occurred during that period, but a sound ideological fermentation propounded by the Brahmanas helped them to evolve as the fore runners of Kerala society in a clever manner. In India, there are examples for the violent persecution of Buddhists. But the non-sectarian attitude of the Kerala people proves the point that no violent persecution occurred in Kerala. "Conversions from one religion to another could take place with remarkable ease during this period. Hence, they were a common occurrence. But conversions never created any difficulties in social or family life."

Lack of spirit for survival

The ancient statues of Buddha were found from a number of localities in Central Travancore. Some of these statues were half broken. So, some scholars raised the chances for a violent persecution of Buddhists in Kerala. The ethnological traditions did not refer to such incidents. The fact that Buddhism never challenged the basic ideology of Hindu religion or they never fought violently against cast ridden Hindu society. The lay followers of Buddha maintained cast distinctions and they kept their caste identities also. The same case is applicable to Jainism. The lack of proper understanding about the difference between caste system and religious belief forced many to suggest the existence of a violent persecution in Kerala. During the period of second Chera emperors, privileges were given to minor communities like the Christians and Jews. In the feudal period, Arabs got concessions from the rulers like Zamorin. Christian or Islamic religion never records any organised persecution against their religion in Kerala. Then why Buddhism, a religion which maintained close affinity with Hinduism being persecuted? The works of Shaik Zainuddin clearly points out the religious persecution conducted by the Portuguese. Christians as a community refused to accept the social stigma associated with Savarna Hindu religion. Their men wore dress and carried swords and shield even in religious institutions which became an embarrassment to foreign missionaries. Still no adverse measures were adopted against crushing Christian religion. Rather the changing circumstances demanded the rise of new communities like the Christian, Islam and the Arabs. A section of these communities wielded much prestige and power achieved through the gains of foreign trade. The Buddhists failed to evolve or control maritime trade in Kerala. They developed maritime empire in distant parts of the world at that time. That was before the arrival of Arabs on Indian waters. With their obsolete social role, Buddhists were marginalised from the main stream of the society. Once Buddhism got abundant donations from emperors like Vikramadithya Varaguna. He richly contributed to protect Sreemoolavasa from sea erosion. "Vikramaditya Varaguna(AD885-925) the successor of Karunanthakkan was very liberal towards Buddhist Missionaries. The Paliyam Copper Plate says that he made gifts or extensive landed property to the Buddhist Vihara at Sreemoolavasam." But such royal patronage was absent for Buddhism in later days. The only story of royal patronage is the alleged story of conversion of the last Chera ruler, Cheraman Perumal to Buddhism. According to the story, he abdicated and left the country. Scholars like P. C. Alexander believes that he had converted to Buddhism. The second Chera emperors and the Naaduvazhis of Swaroopam protected and professed Brahminic ideology and this resulted in the lack of patronage for Buddhism. The lack of royal charters, the records of donations, etc: were absent during this period. According to the great scholar Arnold. J. Toynbee, civilizations are not being murdered but they are committing suicide. The same philosophical statement is correct in the case of Buddhism in Kerala. Having lost their early vitality and missionary spirit, Buddhism became a formal religion. After the advent of Mahayanism, they maintained close resemblance with Hinduism and the same point helped the Hinduism to adapt and acquire the main philosophical concepts and social agencies of Buddhism. So, like in other parts of India, Buddhism had a natural extinction in Kerala. But still the remnants of Buddhist culture richly contributed to the enrichment of the cultural legacies of Kerala. A rethinking about Buddhism happened only in 19th century when the context of history and historiography widely changed. Even the desolation of a site like Sreemoolavasa is absent in almost all narrations of the ancient world. The term Dakshinapatha Sreemoolavasa occurs in Ashta sahasrika Prajnaparimitasasthra of 11th century. But the continuation of this legacy is absent from subsequent narrations. In such a context, we have to believe that the Brahmanas following a clever and astute role in the society began to take the reign of administration in their own hands. The obscene rabbles in some temples are identified with the persecution stories. Such festivals exist in Kodungallur and Cherthala. But the same do not highlight a violent persecution. These are the methods of expressing Bhakti in a peculiar manner. The social psychology of a mob is to be analysed; the process of sublimation is to be analysed here. We can better consider it as a subaltern pattern of expressing Bhakti. Satiric obscenities and sensually narrative poems are visible in Manipravala poems. These are all the representations of a highly erotic society which prevailed in the Manipravala age. They didn't narrate any socially or historically relevant issues. Similar stories were propagated against Tipu Sultan. But very few incidents can be identified. The absence of violent social tensions is a peculiar feature of the Kerala society. More exactly saying the pattern of hegemonization in Kerala was silent and assimilative rather than violent or eruptive. The demise of Buddhism in Kerala is a forgone conclusion. The Buddhists cannot face the tactical steps adopted Brahmin elites and fell in to oblivion.

The Legacy of Buddhism after its eclipse.

Though Buddhism became emaciated in Kerala, it gave a lot of contributions for the cultural legacy of Kerala. Its main contributions are the following

1. It contributed to the development of vegetarianism in Kerala. The present Hindu religion owed its vegetarianism from Buddhism. The strict vegetarian code allied with almost all the holy rituals of present-day Hinduism was taken from Buddhism. Hinayana Buddhism observed a strong code of vegetarianism. They abstained from killing all kind of animate objects. They followed the principle of Ahimsa, which means non-injury to living beings. At the same time, it had a positive aspect of showing kindness and love to all living beings. The Buddhist God of Avalokateswara showed deep kindness to all living beings. The worship of Avalokateswara in Kerala is identified by some scholars. Siva and Avalokateswara were worshipped in close similarity in Onattukara.

2. The Shasta cult in Kerala originated from Buddhist influence. The cosmopolitan nature of Sabarimala is a Buddhist idea. While the Hindu temples were strictly regulated by caste and untouchability, all people were admitted as the votaries of Sabarimala. Such an abroad and liberal view was a direct influence of Buddhism. Buddhism had no caste distinctions or untouchability. They admitted all kind of persons into their Sangha. Such aspects clearly point out the fact that Sabarimala was a Buddhist shrine. The vegetarianism and Ahimsa are to be strictly observed during the period of pilgrimage to Sabarimala. Vegetarianism and non-violence were upheld by Buddhists in ancient days. Strict observants of vegetarianism and Ahimsa during the Vrischika month proves the impact of Buddhism on Sabarimala cult. The seekers after truth in Sabarimala were never allowed to take refuge outside themselves. Similarly, Buddhism gave at most importance to the concept of Sathya and ordered his followers not to take any refuge outside themselves. The people going to Sabarimala chanted Sharana mantra. The same Sharana mantra was observed by the Buddhists and they made Sharana in Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. The followers of Sabarimala had to observe celibacy advocated by the Buddhists in ancient period. Women were regulated to the entry of Sabarimala. Such kind of a policy was followed by the Buddha in earlier periods. He was hesitant to admit women folk into the Sangha. Buddha feared that the admission of the female in the Sangha will break the strength of the Sangha. Only after the advice of Mahaprajapathi Gautami that Buddha allowed his followers to admit women into the Sangha. A similar hesitation is visible in Sabarimala. This may be due to the impact of Hinayana Buddhism. The iconography of the Sabarimala temple and the mudra of the deity of Sabarimala had close resemblance with the Buddhist idols.

3. Not only the Shastha cult at Sabarimala but also the Shastha cult in Thrikkunnappuzha, Thakazhi and Chamravattom had strong Buddhist leanings.

4. The Buddhists were the pioneers of education in ancient Kerala. Like in other parts of India, their Chaityas and Viharas acted as great centres for learning. They provided basic learning in reading, writing and arithmetic. The term "Palli" is derived from Pali language and the term "Ezhuthupalli" means that education was organised by the Buddhists in Kerala. Their viharas contained many books and they produced a number of great scholars who had an illustrious career in the cultural field of Kerala.

5. Ayurveda was a direct offshoot of Buddhism in Kerala. The story of Vagbhatananda proves the fact that Buddhism clearly influences the development of Ayurvedam in Kerala. For example, the Thakazhi Shasta temple is famous for its oil which have medicinal values. "From the Early Vedic period, medicine and healers were excluded from the core of the orthodox Brahmanic social and religious hierarchy and found acceptance among the heterodox traditions of mendicant ascetics, or Sramanas, who became the repository of a vast storehouse of medical knowledge".

6. The Kettukazhchas and Ulsavams in Central Travancore regions is a direct improvisation of Buddhist processions. Large scales processions and Kettukazcha is very common from Chirayankeezhu to Ambalappuzha. The carrying of huge idols in processions was very popular in Central Travancore region. These processions were derived from the Buddhist processions of ancient days. The Chinese travellers record about the processions at Padaliputra organised by Buddhists. The Buddhists helped to socialise with the primitive way of religion existed in the country. The aboriginal form of worship was integrated to main streams of worship by the Buddhists. They contributed very much for the development of art, architecture and literature of the country. Many fine treatises on Ayurveda, Jyotisha and Vyakarana were published by them.

7. Buddhists architectural works were perfect. It was after the advent of them that large scale temples were constructed in India. In Kerala also, the advent of Mahayanism marked the beginning of structural temples in Kerala. We have discovered a number of statues of Buddha from Central Travancore region. They are noted for their architectural features. A number of words and terms in the present-day language is due to the influence of Buddhism.

IV. FINDINGS

Buddhism was patronised by the tolerant emperors of Kerala in ancient days showing the fact that Kerala had a liberal varied cultural legacy. Like in other parts of India, Brahmanism, Buddhism, and Jainism came as missionary religions and inaugurated settled life in Kerala which contain diverse cultural elements. Buddhism became extinct in Kerala in medieval period due to the revival of Brahmanism. The Bhakti movement, the advent of new religions, resemblance of Mahayanism with Hinduism etc paved the way for the decline of Buddhism. In spite of its decline Buddhism made permanent legacies which became a part of the cultural legacy of Kerala. The impact of Buddhism is visible in iconography, Kettukazha, the beginning of structural temples etc. There is no evidence for a violent persecution of religion in Kerala as far as the literary sources and archaeological evidences are concerned.

V. CONCLUSION

Buddhism and Jainism became an integral part of the religious life of ancient Kerala. Both religions came to Kerala as a part of the missionary work, extension of empire and due to trade relations. They played a great role along with Brahmanism to refine and for socialising culture among natives. The Buddhist statues from central Travancore, reference about Buddhist Viharas and ethnological evidences point out the degree of their influence in ancient Kerala. By eight century A.D, their influence declined in Kerala. The state formation, the temple-oriented Bhakti, rise of Brahmins, beginning of structural temples feudalism, advent of Mahayanism etc adversely affected the fortunes of Buddhism. Now Buddhism is not a living force in the country. But, their contributions in religion, medicine, architecture, sculpture and ethical values had a great impact on Kerala society.

Suggestions

Include the legacy of Buddhism in the syllabus of students of Kerala for analysing and promoting diverse cultural elements that contributed to Hindu culture. Carefully estimate the role of ancient religions in promoting socialisation process and to organise settled life and institutions like family. Buddhist contributions in education, medicine and popular cultural beliefs should be carefully assessed by promoting ethnological and anthropological studies. Organise and conserve the living traditions of Buddhism with the assistance of local public and scholars by the government of India. Assess the impact of Pali language in Kerala and identify its origin. Archaeological excavations should be organised to find out the legacy of Sreemoolavasam an ancient site associated with Buddhism in Kerala. To inaugurate a new academic culture by completely freeing from the shackles of identity politics and divisionism.

REFERENCES

- [1]. ALEXANDER. P. C. (1949), *Buddhism In Kerala*, Annamalai Nagar: The Registrar, Annamalai University.
- [2]. ARTHUR VINCENT SMITH. AND GEORGE THOMAS PERCIVAL SPEAR. (Ed). (1981), *The Oxford History of India*, University of Michigan: Oxford University Press..
- [3]. Census Report of Travancore. (1931).
- [4]. DUTT SUKUMAR. (1962), *Buddhist Monks And Monasteries of India*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers.
- [5]. GOYAL SARKAR. (Ed). (2015), *Early India-Historical Probing*, Jodhpur: Kusumanjali Books.
- [6]. MAHADEVAN IRAVADAM. (1995), *Studies in History.Vol.11(2) (From Orality to Literacy)*, Sage: University of Michigan.
- [7]. MENON SHANGOONNY. (1878), *History of Travancore from Earliest Times*, Madras: Higgin Botham and Co Publishers.
- [8]. MENON SREEDHARA. A. (1982), *The Legacy of Kerala*, Kottayam: D.C. Books.
- [9]. MENON SREEDHARA. A. (1987), *Kerala History and Its Makers*, Kottayam :D. C. Books.
- [10]. NAMBOODIRI. M.N. AND SHIVDAS. P.K. (2022), *Kerala Charithrathinte Nattuvazhikal*, Kottayam :D. C. Books.
- [11]. RAJKUMAR. (Ed). (2003), *Essays on Indian Religion*, New Delhi: Discovery Publishing House.
- [12]. SADASIVAN. S.N. (2000), *A Social History of India*, New Delhi: A.P.H. Publications.
- [13]. VARIER RAGHAVA. (2016), *Jainamatam Keralathil*, Trivandrum: N.B.S.
- [14]. YADAV SIGH. J.N. (2001), *Yadavas of South India*, The University of Michigan: Yadava Publications.
- [15]. ZYSK. G. KENNETH. (1991), *Asceticism and Healing in Ancient India*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers.