

Oral Tradition Focusing on Hinduism and Buddhism beyond the border

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Abstract: The oral form of literature is very much important because it reflects the tradition and culture of a particular group of people or a particular society. It is also showing the memorization ability of the ancient people, because they just transmit their tradition and culture generation to generation without write it down.

This Oral form of literature is one of the major sources of spreading religious beliefs. ‘*Jataka*’ is the short story collection, which reflect the society and teaches the moral values and how to lead life, on the other hand in Japan they have their own collection of Buddhist short stories, that is the ‘*Nihonryōiki*’.

In Japan Buddhism was mixed up with their own native religious belief, which is known as *Shinto*. Therefore, the Buddhist deities also started worshipping in the *Shinto* shrines. We all know about the *Benzai-ten*, *Daikoku-ten*, *Bishamon-ten* etc., but this paper is focused on some fewer known deities, who were worshipped in Japan.

Key Words: Oral Literature, Hinduism, Buddhism, Jataka, Nihonryōiki.

1. INTRODUCTION:

Dharma is a Sanskrit word, and it has various meaning like, *Karma*, Law, Tradition and also Religion. The concept of *Dharma* is written in the one of the oldest *Hindu* text called *Rig-Veda*¹. In *Prakit* language and *Pali* language the word *Dharma* is pronounced as ‘*Dhamma*’, also in some dialects and regional people pronounced as ‘*Dharm*’. Whenever, we talk about ‘*Dharma*’ another word always come in mind, that is ‘*Adharma*’, which means not *Dharma* or unethical.

Hinduism is known as one of the oldest religions in the world. There are so many sacred texts are written in long back, but the founder of the Hinduism is still unknown. The Hindu religious concept about *Dharma* is ‘*Karma*’ or ‘duty’, and Hinduism always asked to avoid the Greed, Pride, Attachment, Jealousy, Anger and Lust, because these things are always creating burden to walk in the path of *Dharma*.

We can also find the class divisions of people; this is known as *Varnas*. Specially we can see four types of classes, these are the *Brahmans*, *Ksatriyas*, *Vaisyas* and *Sudras*. The *Brahmans* are basically teachers, scholars and priest, the *Ksatriyas* are rulers, warriors and administrator, the *Vaisyas* are merchants or farmers, and the *Sudras* are laborer or those who provide services to all the upper classes. These divisions are made by their *Karmic Gunas* or Duty qualities, so one person of any class can uplift him or herself by their work, for example once upon a time, *Maharishi Valmiki*² was a robber he killed many people and robbed them but later he became a great *rishi* and wrote *Ramayana*³, on the other hand, *Ravana* was a *Brahmin* but his *Karma* made him *Rakshasa* but his own brother *Vibhishana* is not known as a *Rakshasa*. This is not the only example there are many more examples, which explains that, how *Karma* can change one’s class.

In Buddhism the foundation of *Dharma* is the teachings of *Sakyamuni* Buddha. Buddhism is also describing the *Dharma* similar to Hinduism and say, if you want to follow the *Dharma*, you have to follow your *Karma* and it is a universal law. In the teachings of *Sakyamuni* Buddha, we always find that, he said to avoid ‘*Adharma*’ or unethical deeds to escape from the suffering.

Buddha demolish the concept of class division and make all the people in same class. This is one of the major reasons that people started accepting Buddhism, and also Hinduism is very difficult because that time all people were don’t have the knowledge of Sanskrit language and customs are also expensive so it was difficult for common people to perform the rituals. So, that time people accepted Buddhism widely because it is a very simple in language because it was in *Pali* and *Prakit* language and these languages are familiar to the common people, and also rituals was not expensive.

The sacred collections of books of Buddhism is *Tripitaka*⁴. The last text is known as *Abhidharmapitaka*. This is one of the oldest texts of Buddhist philosophy, principles and disciplines. The *Anityata*, the *Dukkha*, and the *anatman* are the three *Dharma* seals, these helps to overcome from the desire. This can also be considered as the basic fundamental theories of Buddhism.

¹ The *Rig-Veda* hymns were composed and preserved by oral tradition of *Bharata* (India). 10,600 verses divided into 10 books. The *Rig-Veda* is the oldest Sanskrit Vedic text.

² *Maharishi Valmiki* is the author of the epic *Ramayana*. He was a great poet of Sanskrit literature; he is also known as *Adi Kavi*.

³ *Ramayana* is lord *Rama*’s life narrated in Sanskrit, almost 24,000 verses divided in seven *Khand* (Volume).

⁴ *Tripitaka* is the traditional term for Buddhist scriptures. The three *Pitakas* are, *Suttapitaka*, *Vinayapitaka*, *Abhidharmapitaka*. In Japanese *Tripitaka* called *Sanzo*.

2. Oral Tradition :

Oral Tradition is one kind of communication, by this method people transmitted their culture, knowledge, concepts of law etc. generation to generation in form of folklores, songs, verses etc. without writing. Oral tradition or Oral literature helped religious beliefs to spread among the common people. In other word, a group of people handed down their traditions, cultures and believes to their next generation without not in a form of writing but orally.

As people transmitted verbally everything, so some time the original content changed slightly, and we can find two or more different things. Sometimes, for easy understanding few things changed by the speaker for the audience. Folk beliefs are basically based on good and bad luck, traditional rituals, weather prediction, harvesting, superstitions etc.

Oral form of education is very much important for children to understand his or her own tradition and culture. It is one of the easy methods to give the moral educations without any pressure to the kid.

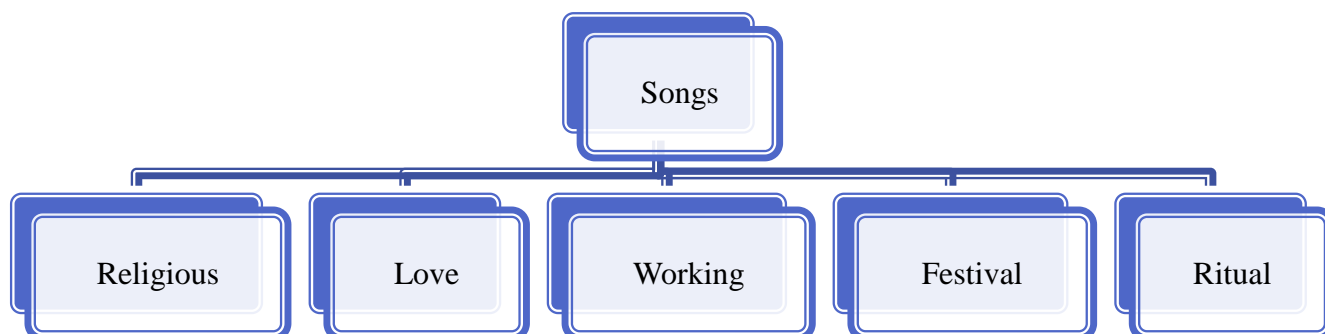
2.1 Transmitters of the Oral Tradition

Family: In every society, when a child born his parents and grandparents usually tell stories before sleeping. These stories are basically moral teachings, ethics, sometimes stories from their childhood and experiences. So, since childhood one can started understand their traditions, cultures moral values from their family through stories.

Professionals: There are some people in every society, those who telling stories. Group of children and aged people gathered in a temple or in such kind of place where one person telling stories with moral values. The story teller always pass one short message through story.

2.2 Classifications of the oral folk literature

There are many types of oral form of literature like; song, prose, proverbs, etc. if we again try to classified the oral literature in a form of song again, so many groups will come in sight. For example-



From the ancient time, peoples are trying to spread stories, songs, myths, legends etc. for the purpose of entertain people with a message of moral value, life instructions, re-connecting with history etc. As we all know that, oral literature or historical facts are not be considered as a reliable source, because it was transmitted through memory. But it is one of the major tools to understand the knowledge of our ancestors, tradition, culture and of course the language.

2.3 Oral Literature in India

Undivided India was ruled by Britishers for almost 200 years and India got independence in the year 1947. The constitution of the Republic of India has 22 officially recognized languages. The official languages are, *Assamese, Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Kashmiri, Konkani, Malayalam, Manipuri, Marathi, Nepali, Oriya, Punjabi, Sanskrit, Sindhi, Tamil, Telugu, Urdu, Bodo, Santhali, Maithili* and *Dogri*.

The ancient Indian literature like, *Veda, Upanishad, Ramayana, Mahabharata* etc. were orally transmitted generation to generation. Then these oral literatures were written down in Sanskrit language. The early texts like, *Vedas* and *Upanishad* are written in Vedic Sanskrit, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* was written in the classical Sanskrit.

In Hinduism, we can see the caste system in present day also, which is not the same as ancient India. The caste system in Hinduism is depends on the *Karma*, like Valmiki become one of the great *Rishi* but in his early life he was a big robber, later he wrote the great epic *Ramayana*.

ancient India we can find the *Guru* and *Shishya* concept, which is same as present Teacher and Student concept. Also, students appeared in exam before leaving *gurukul*, which is also similar to present time. In *Gurukul*, all the *Shishyas* was studied there and also learn about fight to protect themselves. *Gurus* are giving the knowledge of *Vedas, Sutras, Upanishads* etc. where they learn about the tradition and culture, on the other hand *Guru* give the knowledge of weapons, like swords, bow and arrow etc.

Guru gives his knowledge to his *Shishya* by remembering what he learnt from his *Guru*, and the *Shishya* received the knowledge of their *Guru* by hearing with full hearted. It is because if our mind is full with something or if we think of something while learning then it is difficult to memorize.

After Siddhartha Goutama got enlightenment, he become Buddha or the awaken one. After that, he started spreading his knowledge among the common people, and gradually Siddhartha Goutama become the traveling teacher because he visits place to place with his followers and spread his teachings. Siddhartha Goutama shows the Middle Path (*Chu-do* in Japanese) to get rid from the suffering of human life. Siddhartha Goutama preaching the Eight folded path, the right speech, the right conduct, the right livelihood, the right effort, the right mindfulness, the right concentration, the right views and the right Intention. If someone follows these paths it will lead him or her towards the state of enlightenment.

Buddha spread his teachings through short stories, which is very easy in language, therefore the teachings are spread quickly among the common people. Buddhism is a very simple and not as expensive as other religious rituals have, and also Buddhism has no concept of caste system or class division, Buddhism makes all the people in same place, these are the few reasons, many people converted into Buddhism from other religious belief. *Bhikshus* are played the major role in spreading Buddhism, they visit place to place and telling about the way of Buddha.

Samrat Ashoka or Ashoka the Great (304BC~232BC) was an Indian Emperor of the great *Mourya* Dynasty. *Samrat Ashoka* turns into Buddhist follower after the great victory of *Kalinga* war (264BC or 265BC) because this war took too many lives of people, he felt the pain of the war. He declared Buddhism as a state religion, and makes lots of temples and spread Buddhism via messengers beyond the border. He sent his son *Mahinda* and daughter *Sanghamitta* to Sri Lanka to spread Buddhism, which reflects his strong belief in Buddhism. The institutions like, *Nalanda*, *Taxila* etc. played very significance role to spread Buddhism.

2.4 Oral Literature in Japan

Japan is small island country surrounded by the ocean, that is why, they easily protected their own unique tradition and culture from the outsiders. But from the ancient time, Japan is very much influenced by two neighboring countries, China and Korea. People of Japan positively adopted their culture and tradition but never forget their own tradition, they mixed both culture and create a new tradition or culture.

In ancient time, people live their life by farming, fishing or hunting, later the farming culture was introduced from China during *Yayoi* period (300 BCE~300 CE). Then people started believing in *Shizeno Kami* (God of Nature). People started making songs, poems etc. which reflects their culture and tradition. The experts, those who transfer their culture and tradition through oral form, are known as *Kataribe*⁵.

Japanese was a language without any writing script until 6th century, the language they used for communication is known as *Yamatokotoba*⁶. During 6th century along with Buddhism, Chinese writing script, *Kanji* was also introduced in Japan, and finally Japan started using Chinese script to write down their culture and traditions through stories, poems, verses etc., but as it was a foreign script, common people face difficulties to understand and only some people or in short people of elite class are only privileged to study.

With the help of Chinese character *Kojiki*⁷, *Nihonshoki*⁸, *Fudoki*⁹ etc. were compiled. There are two collection of poems, *Kaifuso*¹⁰ and *Manyoshu*¹¹. *Kaifuso* is a compilation of Chinese classical poem, compiled in Chinese character and *Manyoshu* is a compilation of Japanese classical poem, which is compiled in *Manyogana*¹².

The first collection of Buddhist short story collection is known as the '*Nihonryōiki*', it was compiled by the monk *Shamon Kyōkai* during the beginning of *Heian* period (794~1185). The monk *Kyōkai* was a monk of *Yakushi-ji* (*Yakushi* temple) who collected all the Buddhist narratives. The time frame of stories are basically *Nara* period (710~794), and also stories shows us the thinking of people and life style of that time. This collection is divided into three volumes and have 116 stories. These stories are focused on *Ingaoho* (retributive justice).

3. Contribution of Shotoku Taishi in Japanese Buddhism :

Shotoku Taishi (574~622) was the Crown Prince, and he was also the first person who helped Buddhism to flourish in the Japan. *Taishi* was the son of Emperor *Yomei*¹³ (540~587) and *Anahobeno Hashihiro*, they belong to the Soga clan. *Taishi* become *Sessho* or regent by the Empress *Suiko* in the year 593.

⁵Hereditary role of narrator in early Japan. Professional story teller.

⁶Ancient or primordial Japanese language.

⁷*Kojiki* was compiled by *O no Yasumaro* in early 8th century, because Empress *Genmei* requested him.

⁸*Nihonshoki* was edited by prince *Toneri*, with the help of *O no Yasumaro* in the year 720.

⁹*Fudoki* is the regional gazetteers, the literal meaning of *Fudoki* is 'Records of Wind and Earth'.

¹⁰*Kaifuso* is the oldest collection of Chinese poem collection, compiled in 751 by an unknown author.

¹¹The meaning of *Manyoshu* is the collection of ten thousand leaves, it is a compilation of classical Japanese poem collection (*wakashu*) divided into twenty books. *Manyoshu* is compiled during the *Nara* period.

¹²*Manyogana* is one of the ancient Japanese script, which was developed from the Chinese *Kanji*. *Manyogana* can be considered as the first step towards the present *Kana* script.

¹³1st Emperor of Japan.

It is difficult to get detailed explanation of *Taishi's* life, or his biography, but there is a book called *ShotokuTaishiDenreki*, which was written by *FujiwaranoKanesuke*¹⁴(877~933) in the year 917. Everyone believed that *ShotokuTaishi* was a precious child, because he acquired knowledge and wisdom in very early age, which makes him different from others.

Taishi built many temples to spread Buddhism like, *Horyu-ji* in Nara, *Shitennō-ji* in Osaka etc. He was not only built temples but also arrange lectures to giving knowledge of Buddhist sutras for the common people. He imports Buddhist scriptures from China to gain a deep knowledge of Buddhism. He declared Buddhism as the state religion, and also, he preached the first constitution of Japan, which is known as *Junanajo Kenpo* or the constitution of seventeen articles. Shintoism, the native religion of Japan was the state religion from the beginning, but after Buddhism become the state religion, Shintoism was cornered or hide in the shadow of Buddhism. The concept of calendar also taken from China and they create/formulated their own lunar calendar.

ShotokuTaishi's contribution in Japanese Buddhism is unforgettable same as in India we cannot forget *SamratAshoka*. Both of them gave their maximum to spread the teachings of *Shakyamuni* Buddha. Both of them built many temples to spread Buddhism.

4. Hindu Deities in Japan:

Along with Buddhism many Hindu deities also introduced to Japan. For example, *Kangi-ten*(Ganesha), *Kichijoten*(Laxmi), *Taishaku-ten*(Indra), *Bon-ten*(Brahma), *Naraen-ten*(Narayana), *Daijizai-ten* (Maheswara) *Daikoku-ten*(Mahakala), *Benzai-ten*(Saraswati), *Bishamon-ten*(Kubera)and many more.*Benzai-ten*, *Daikoku-ten*, *Bishamon-ten* are very famous in Japan because these three deities are associated with the *Shichifukujin*or the Seven god of Fortune.

Tri-deva, the major god of Hinduism Brahma, Vishnu or Narayana and Maheswara or Shiva also worshipped in Japan. Ganesha is also very popular deity among the Japanese people. They also worshipped Laxmi, Indra and others. It is also interesting that, *Daijizai-ten* (Maheswara) and *Daikoku-ten* (Mahakal) both are worshipped in Japan.

*Kangi-ten*was started worshipped in Japan around 8th or 9th century as a part of the Shingon sect. *Kangi-ten* is also known as *Sho-ten*, and there are many local temples of *Sho-ten* found throughout Japan. The origin of *Kangi-ten* is the Hindu god *Ganesha*. The Hozan-ji (Hozanji Temple), which is situated in the Mount Ikoma, Osaka is considered as one of the important temples of *Kangi-ten*.

5. CONCLUSION:

In Japan people belief their own native religious belief Shintoism, but time to time other religious belief introduced to Japan and Japanese people accepted the religious belief and performed the rituals. Still they celebrate all religious festivals throughout the year.

From the ancient time until the Chinese script introduced to Japan, they transmitted their tradition and culture orally, and written down after the introduction of Chinese script. In India also we can find oral transmission for a long time, like *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata* etc.

In Japan we can find the existence of Hindu deities and people of Japan worshipped them not only in festivals but also in their daily life. Which reflects the impact of Hinduism beyond the border and without any kind of force to the people.

Lastly, we can say that, the oral tradition is very much important to understanding the lifestyle, myths, tradition, culture of the particular group of people and it is our duty to protect the tradition and follow the rituals for continuation of the tradition. Hinduism and Buddhism born in India but the followers are throughout the globe, because the ancestors passed their knowledges orally until it took a written form. If the oral tradition was not their we never know about our tradition and culture.

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¹⁴ *FujiwaranoKanesuke* was a poet of Heian period. *MurasakiShikibu* who is well known author of the famous book *Genji Monogatari* or the Tale of Genji is the belongs to his family.