

Art of Characterization in the Buddha and His Dhamma

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Abstract

The Buddha and His Dhamma is the magnum opus by Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar. It is not only essential but mandatory to go through this book to understand the complex character and philosophy of the Buddha. The work itself is a unique literary creation with wonders of literary devices employed by the architect of Indian Constitution. The work is also memorable for its art of characterization. The greatness of Dr. Ambedkar lies in presenting characters in a very rational and logical manner. The work has provided a different vision to look at the characters. Dr. Ambedkar has successfully reintroduced the character of the Buddha and other major and minor characters. It was a herculean task to present the complex character of the Buddha. It was even difficult to fetch the Buddha from the cobwebs of orthodoxy, traditionalism, mist of superstition, supernaturalism and myth. The great responsibility on the writer was to link the missing episodes of the Buddha's life and present 2500 years ancient facts before the modern generation. The skill of the writer is appreciable in sketching the adorable character of Yashodhara. The paper definitely is a feast for research scholars to understand a different Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar.

KEYWORDS : Characterization, dhamma, round and flat characters.

Preface :

The Buddha and His Dhamma is essentially a praise literature. It deals with many stories of men and women within stories. Most of the characters are round and few are flat characters. Characters can be described in terms of a network of character-traits. There are two basic types of indicators of character: direct definition and indirect presentation. The first type names the trait by an adjective [He was good-hearted] An abstract noun [His goodness knew no bounds] The second type, on the other hand, does not mention the trait but displays and exemplifies it in various ways, leaving to the readers the task of inferring the quality they imply. The writer defines some prominent traits of the hero or heroine – such naming of a character's qualities counts as direct characterization. Characterization is also exemplified by the specific behavior of the characters.¹

Variety of Characters in BHD :

There are many characters in BHD. But characters of Buddha, Yashodhara, Rahul, Shudhodhana, Channa, Visaka, and Angulimala are easily recognizable. All the characters are real characters. Dr. Ambedkar did not create any fictitious character. As a man of literature, he has listed well as well as bad characters in the story. He has also

¹ Kenan Shlomith Rimmon – *Narrative Fiction* p.59

taken care of not celebrating villainous characters. Nor he narrates adventures of villainous characters to make them appear hero-like. Though there are number of major and minor characters, the entire story revolves around the Buddha.

All characters in BHD are human-like characters. No character is superhuman. They represent ordinary life. They are full of vices and good qualities as well. Though they have vicious tendencies, they also contain a lot of opportunities. Ordinary characters become unordinary due to the miraculous, rational, logical and scientific preaching of the Buddha. But the story the combination round and flat characters. There are certain characters like Angulimala, Anand, Yashodhara who change in the due course of action. But there also characters Ajatsatru, Devdatta who do not change in the due course of time and remain. The great personality like the Buddha also fails to bring change in them. This is not the Buddha's defeat but the victory of Dr. Ambedkar's characterization which succeeds in projecting human limits and prevents the story from being a fairy tale. It also underlines that good and bad both tendencies exist in the society.

BHD portrays characters from all walks of life. There are kings, prince, princes, dancers, military men, learned Brahmins, dancing women, dacoits, lepers, men and women from lowest castes, untouchables and many more. The story represents the mass and not just one class. It is truly the reflection of the time and the society. This beauty makes the plot of the story balanced. Everybody has said in the story. This what the literature stands for.

The story is not the one-sided affair. All types of contemporary beliefs are discussed in the story. It provides an appropriate opportunity to compare Buddha's philosophy. The most important part of Buddhist is that there is no compulsion to accept it. But its beauty is that no person of sound mind can resist him or her from accepting it. The characterization shows that characters are allowed to raise questions. This tendency itself nourishes democratic values. It also helps readers to have a better understanding of the particular character and deeper insight into human nature.

Dr. Ambedkar's Art Characterization :

The important and notable fact about the characterization of Dr. Ambedkar is that there is no ambiguity in understanding characters. They can be understood in relation with Buddha and also isolated. The gigantic character of the Buddha in the story also allows other characters to grow individually. Other minor characters also have their individual identity and specialty. The characters like Anand, Yashodhara, Amrapali, and Angulimala have their own separate identity.

The skill of Dr. Ambedkar makes all characters free from the bondage of myth. It makes the story reliable and presentable before the modern world. The characters appear relevant in the modern century as well. There is no to drag them to modern time. They are representatives of the modern world and universal thought since Buddha's time. The timelessness is one of the import factors of Buddha's character.

It must be accepted and appreciated here that Dr. Ambedkar is highly selective in characters. He knows better how much weight age should be given to which character. In some episodes, the character of Channa and Anand appears superior to Buddha himself. Many of us know about the Buddha's life story. But it gives different

experience and pleasure to understand Buddha through Dr. Ambedkar's perspective. It will not be irrelevant here to say that readers should try to understand the Buddha through Dr. Ambedkar's spectacles. Reading Buddha through traditional canons may invite misunderstanding the Buddha.

There is no excessive use of supernatural agency. It is very much the story of human beings. The book seems to be a full bloomed flower of Renaissance.

It is a notable thing that there is no comic character in BHD. There is no requirement also.

It is one of the important features of **BHD** that narration of story and philosophy, history and many other aspects are interwoven and cannot be separated from narrating Buddha's character.

Book II – Buddha and His Vishad Yoga – is the discussion by Dr. Ambedkar parallel to Shakespeare's to be or not to be in Hamlet. Chapter titled to preach or not to preach has its own literary importance. The word Tathagata appears in book-II in the chapter to preach or not to Preach for the first time.²

Charachetr Sketch of the Buddha :

The only son of King Suddhodan of Kaiplavatsu, born in 563 B.C. in Lumbini Nepal. Died in Kushinagar in 483 B.C The central character of BHD. Pasanedi King of Kosala and Bimbisara of Magadha were his contemporaries. He was the founder of Buddhism. The following lines and passages from BHD help readers to understand Buddha's personality and his life sketch. Dr. Ambedkar describes Siddhartha's personality in befitting words. He writes about his physic "those two feet of his, tender with their beautiful web spread between the toes, with their ankles, concealed and soft like a blue lotus,—how can they, bearing a wheel mark in the middle, walk on the hard ground of the skirts of the forest" (p.40) Having seen his personality and dignity and his splendid beauty, surpassing all other men, the people of that region were all astonished at him wearing the clothes of a sanyasi. His eyebrows, his forehead, his mouth,—his body, his hand, his feet, or his gait,—whatever part of him anyone beheld, that at once riveted his gaze (p.45) He made his journey of 400 miles from Rajagriha to Kapilavatsu on foot .

He had used to embark with fixed eyes, seeing only a yoke's length before him, with his voice hushed, and his walk slow and measured, he, the noblest of mendicants, went begging for alms, keeping his limbs and his wandering thoughts under control. (p.46). He visited Shravasti about 75 times and Rajagriha about 24 times. (p.533) Roughly speaking, he travelled over the whole of Northern India. He did not even use a bullock-cart. (p.534)

From all accounts the Blessed Lord was a handsome person. His form was like the peak of a golden mountain. He was tall and well built; with a pleasing appearance. His long arms and lion gait, his bull-like eyes, and his beauty, bright like gold, his broad chest, attracted everyone to him. His brows, his forehead, his mouth or his eyes, his body, his hands, his feet or his gait— whatever part of him anyone beheld that at once

² Ibid p.111

riveted his eyes. Whoever saw him could not help being struck with his majesty and his strength, his splendid beauty, surpassing all other men. (P.567-568)

A definition of an epic hero would be: "The heroes of epic should be, if not idealized or 'perfect' figures, at least admirable ones who inspire in listeners and readers an awe and a desire, however misplaced or unrealizable, to imitate; heroes should be exemplars of moral and physical action"³ Following are some of the characteristics of an epic hero:

- 1) Excels in skill, strength, and courage
- 2) Succeeds in war and adventure
- 3) Values honor and glory
- 4) Usually has a guide
- 5) Battles demons or monsters
- 6) Is generous to his followers but ruthless to enemies
- 7) Is a man of action?
- 8) Epic hero accepts challenges and sometimes invites troubles.
- 9) Sometimes make rash decisions and takes unnecessary risks
- 10) Meets monsters and temptations
- 11) Encounters women who tempt him
- 12) Descends into darkness (often the underworld)
- 13) Achieves his goal

The above characteristics seem as if were made after seeing the Buddha. The above cited examples make it clear that Siddharth Gautam stand as an Epic hero. Homeric heroes tend to fit "the powerful image of the physically perfect young hero dying for fame and escaping maturation by achieving a 'good death.'⁴

Notable Character of Yashodhara :

Daughter of a Shakya by name Dandapani. Siddharth married with Yashodhara. She is one of the major characters in the book. She plays important role in the story. She is sketched as a strong character. She has her independent personality and thought. She is firm on her decision marrying Siddhartha though she was told he may turn Sanyasi. She shows her courage when Siddhartha discusses his decision of taking Parivraja. She gives her consent and promises to take care Rahula. She knows that she will never see her husband again nor Rahul will roll in his father's lap. Among the Sakya women who became Bhikkhunis along with Mahaprajapati was Yeshodhara. After her initiation she came to be known as Bhadda Kaccana. (p.196)

Round and Flat characters :

³ Hunter, R.L. *The Argonautica of Apollonius*. pp. 9–10

⁴ Miller, Dean. *The Epic Hero*. p. 4

There are some round and flat characters in the book. The mercy, benevolence of the Buddha also could not bring any change in them.

- 1) **Ajatsatru:** He became a disciple of the Lord. The Blessed Lord did not make him a Bhikku as he wanted him to remain free to tend to the sick and the wounded. When Bimbisara died Jeevaka continued to serve his son Ajatsatru and was mainly instrumental in bringing him to the Lord after his crime of parricide. (p.153)
- 2) **Sundari :** She was given the responsibility to spread a scandal about Samana Gautama. The purpose was to lower his influence and malign his image. She pretended to be pregnant from Buddha. In the last her conspiracy was exposed.
- 3) **Chincha:** She was one of the crafty schemers who plotted to spread a scandal about Gautama, and thereby discredit him, to which other Tirthikas gave their consent. But she also did not succeed in her conspiracy. (P.490-491)

4) **Devadatta:**

Devadatta was a cousin of the Buddha. But from the beginning he was jealous of the Buddha and disliked him intensely. When the Buddha had left his home, Devadatta tried to make love to Yeshodhara. Devadatta was very angry with the Buddha who did not make him the chief in the Sangh and instead made Sariputta and Moggallana the chief men in the Sangh. Devadatta made three attempts on the Buddha's life, but did not succeed in any of them. (P.491-493)

Conclusion :

It is not easy to understand complex Buddhist philosophy through its vast expanded literature. The more we read, the more we get baffled. Dr. Ambedkar's characterization in BHD has made it easy to understand characters and the complex philosophy of the Buddha. The reason is that the book was written with the intention that the common masses converted into Buddhism will be able to understand it easily. It is the skill of the writer to present Buddha's vast philosophy in a single work. It is only because of this book that the modern Ambedkarite generation and Buddhists could meet the Buddha and converse.

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