

# Shraman and Monastics : Some Interpretations

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## Abstract

This paper is considering some features about yogi, muni, shraman and monasticism in Christianity as well as taking some comparisons in their existence in society. It is a matter of great pride that India has a very rich culture of this ascetic system which is deeply rooted in our glorious culture and our dignified past. Because of these important aspects we can feel proud of our ancient culture. The purpose of this study relies on the present scenario where we find great leaders in ascetics. I hope that this study will continue for more new discoveries. There were munis and yatis who were performing rituals to do various things.

**Keywords** :Parivrajaka, Brahmanic, Shraman, Monasticism, Jainism, Buddhism, Keshin, Yogi, Muni, Christianity, Protestant.

### Introduction

Sramana or Parivrajaka was a common name which we can give to ascetics of all community whether Brahmanic, Buddhist or Jaina. Attempts are also made by scholars like DuttUpadhyay<sup>1</sup> and Doe<sup>2</sup> to trace the origin of the *sramanas*. Dutta traces the origin of the Sramanas to 'a class of men answering to the Brahmanas in Aryan society'<sup>3</sup> According to Deo: 'Shramanism was the outcome of the blending of all elements- indigenous and borrowed'<sup>4</sup>. It seems probable that the philosophy of the Upanishads idealized a condition of life that already existed and was in practice, filling it with a spiritual content and idealistic purpose.<sup>5</sup>

Before 1920 or thereabouts many scholars were disposed to look upon the addition of the fourth or the ascetic stages as Post Buddhist.<sup>6</sup> After the discovery of the Indus valley civilization there has been a tendency to look upon asceticism as a continuation by Indian civilization and a loan from the culture that existed in India before the coming of the Aryans<sup>7</sup>.

Most of the Western and Eastern scholars hold the view that Aryans had come in India from outside. Some Indian scholars have recently maintained that the Aryans were indigenous to India.<sup>8</sup> The Aryans were quick in adopting the culture with the multitude of indigenous elements. It was thus obvious that the Aryans were influenced by and borrowed many beliefs and practices of the indigenous people who had been till then believed to be not so civilized.

These indigenous people were Dravidians who led the Aryan conquerors to borrow elements of their culture. Radhakrishnan tells about the interchange of the culture between Dravidians and Aryans with each other.<sup>9</sup> Suniti Kumar Chatterjee holds the view that three fourths of Indian culture is non Aryan<sup>10</sup>. It seems this clear that the Dravidians lent their beliefs to conquering Aryans and in turn imbibed their cultures.

The above views indicate the non- Aryan influence on the earliest Vedic thought. This becomes obvious if we try to explain the existence of the ascetic beliefs and practices in the Rgveda. In Rgveda the society likes to live life in pleasure and material prosperity. There is no evidence of an ascetic so we can say that it has been derived from the Dravidians.<sup>11</sup> This makes Oldenberg to believe that 'the practice of *tapas* which lies in the midst of the Vedic ritual is a relic of bygone days'.<sup>12</sup> J. Van Troy who calls *tapas* 'a non Rgvedic practice' holds a similar view. He says: 'the word *tapas* come to be used for a practice already existing with all its basic characteristics before it was assumed in Rigvedic society'.<sup>13</sup> This practice was a trait associated with the medicine man called the *shaman*, by the primitive peoples. According to Schweitzer, the Rgvedic Muni was the shaman and medicine man later called the Yogi.<sup>14</sup> So we could associate the origin of ascetic (*Sraman*) or the yogi to the primitive *shaman* or the medicine man.

In the Rgveda both 'munis' and 'yatis' are referred to. The word 'muni', which occurs many times, regularly means some kind of ascetic. Indra is declared to be their friend. In one passage of Rgveda, these 'munis' are described as vatarasana, kesin, and as wearing yellow and soiled garments. There is no controversy about 'Keshin', which means long-haired. These attributes of long hair and yellow soiled garments are typically of ascetics in the full-fledged system of asceticism.<sup>15</sup> The Rgvedic hymn about 'Keshin' described him as a powerful being:

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The Kesin bears fire, he bears water, the Kesin upholds earth and heaven, the kesin sees all visions of luster, the kesin is called the light.

Munis with the wind for their girdle wear soiled yellow robe; they go long the course of the wind where the Devas have gone before.

"Maddened by austerities we have ascend on the wind, and only these bodies of ours are what you mortals ever see"

The Muni through the mid-air flies while he looks at varied forms and he is every Deva a comrade in doing good<sup>16</sup>.

Vedic man's idea of the ascetic as magical being is evident in this hymn.<sup>17</sup>

With the discovering of the Indus valley civilization and its critical study, there came about a change in the opinion about yatis Rama prasad chanda 18 propounded the view that the Indus valley civilization cultivated 'Yoga' and meditative technique along with its cult of Siva as Pasupati and Yogi. Ascetic and Yogic cult was in his opinion a contribution of the Indus valley civilization. D.R. Bhandarkar<sup>19</sup> distinguished the 'yatis' from the 'munis' and considered the former as Asuras and the latter as Aryans of the Indra Cult.

Here we may say that the Rgvedic Indo-Aryans had developed among them a class of ascetics who were not only naked and credited with miraculous powers, but were also, as we have tried to establish, in the habit of demonstrating their achievement of power in holding their penis in tumescence without excitement. There is no reason to think that they might not have had another class of ascetics who made the male organ their object of worship. And they were the 'yatis'.

In the same way as in the *Rigveda* is extolled the kesin, there is a hymn in *Atharvaveda* in which the *brahmacarin* is extolled in very similar words.

The Brahmacarin, born before the sacred knowledge, robed in libation, stood up with his *tapas*: through him were manifested the sacred love, highest Brahman and all Devas with immortality. The Brahmacarin, bright with the blaze of the sacrificial wood, comes, clad in black buck-skin, consecrated, long bearded; and he forthwith goes from the eastern to the northern sea, and grasps the worlds together, constantly drawing them near.<sup>20</sup>

Here the ascetic motif is even more evident. *Tapas* in fact means heat especially the internal heat produced in the body by austerity which is a magical force whose power can even dominate the gods and move the whole universe as we shall see below. *Tapas* is the force utilized by the gods themselves to create the world.

There is no room for Oriental asceticism based upon world-flight in a true Protestantism. The only place asceticism can properly have is as a training for the life of service, and it is only a matter of loving expediency whether the Protestant shall prepare himself for service by fasting, deprivation and negation of legitimate desires, or by the simple and faithful discharge of daily duty. In the Mathew tradition Jesus certainly anticipated fasting; but in actual facts His disciples did not emphasize it during His lifetime, as is seen also in the Mark tradition and St. Paul's doctrine of Christian freedom, permitting, indeed, any act that may prove for spiritual edification, excludes any emphasis upon such practice are necessary. Hence the reformers admit fasts. All the ascetic practices have dropped away, or been actually condemned by both Lutheran and Reformed Churches. In the form of world-flight Protestantism has overcome asceticism. Only in the forms of a legalism can be trace remains of the Catholic conception of a negative holiness, and even the legalism that forbids dancing, theatre-going, wine-drinking and card-playing does: So now on the basis of the expediency of the Christian life, or on the ground of inherent immorality in the practices, thus removing the discussion of them from the sphere of asceticism. It is therefore a source of confusion to confound these two separate motives. With Protestantism, therefore, Oriental asceticism may be said to have been theoretically overcome.

Besides Indian culture, Christian culture is the only one which has recognized asceticism as a legitimate mode of life. Christian asceticism is known to have begun in Egypt about the 3rd or the 4th century A.D., and is associated with St. Anthony. About the end of the 3rd century it is believed that Anthony's life as a solitary ascetic was brought to an end by a number of disciples gathering round him. St. Anthony thus becomes the father of Christian monasticism. It was this type of monastic life that prevailed in Egypt upto the middle of the 5th century A.D. All later Christian asceticism and monasticism is traceable to it. The earliest of the ascetic and monastic orders in Western Christianity was the work of St. Benedict about the beginning of the 6th century A.D. He "effected a permanently working adaptation of the monastic ideal and life to the conditions of Western races." The life to be led did not involve great austerity through it was self-denying and hard. The whole day a monk was occupied with the public celebration of the canonical office, reading and work.<sup>21</sup>

For about 600 years, c. 550-c. 1150, in Italy and other European Countries monastic life based on the code of St. Benedict was the only type of religious life. This monastic influence continued to dominate the church until the emergence of the Universities and the foundation of the Orders of Mendicant Friars in the second half of the 12th century, The Lose connection in general between the Universities Christianity is testified to by the fact that they established chairs in theology which came to be held by mendicant Friars. Even more significant than this general connection is the direct papal support given to the University of Paris as the center of orthodox theological teaching.<sup>22</sup>

It is well-known that the Protestant reformation of Christianity not only protested against asceticism but also led to the despoliation of the monasteries. Protestant Christianity having rejected ascetic and monastic life altogether has acclaimed only one ideal type, namely, that of the householder, or the non-monk. Catholic Christianity, however, has continued to own and encourage the monkish type in spite of various vicissitudes and difficulties. The vitality of ascetic ideal type as an integral part of Catholic culture cannot be better demonstrated than by the fact that within twenty years of Martin Luther's burning of the papal bull of excommunication was founded the most significant and perhaps the latest of the regular ascetic Orders. And that is the Society of Jesus, popularly known as the Jesuits. The wide ramifications, both in the sphere of work and in the extent of territory, which this ascetic order has made, need not be entered into here. There great significance is brought out by the fact that "the Jesuit has not home the whole world is his parish. Mobility and cosmopolitanism are the very essence of the Society."<sup>23</sup> Catholic Christian culture has continued to be served by two ideal types- the ascetic and the non-ascetic. The ascetic ideal type has exerted not only to spiritualize the other type but also to do selfless service in the cause of society.

The Christian ascetic ideal, which has now remained as an ideal of Catholic Christianity alone and whose development has been more or less parallel with that of India Asceticism, was first developed in Egypt. Its Egyptian development was in its turn, inspired by Buddhist asceticism.<sup>24</sup> Flinders petrie, the great Egyptologist, in his excavation of Memphis, the capital of ancient Egypt, discovered in the Persian strata of that city pottery- heads and figures of Indian type along with Scythian and Tibetan ones, Pondering over Indian infiltration at Memphis through its Persian conquest, he observes : "The importance of the Indian colony in Memphis under the Persian empire lies in its bearing on its importation of Indian thought, and the rise of the ascetic movement before Christ-which culminated in western monasticism." This influence of Indian culture, according to him, culminated in Western monasticism through the medium of the "Communal form of asceticism" which had already come into existence in Egypt by 340 B.C. Rev. Frank Knight further specifies the Indian influence as having been associated with Buddhism and having been disseminated throughout Egypt by the end of the 5th century B.C. Commenting on the significance of this influence he observes : "the consequences were remarkable. Monasteries or groups of ascetic devotees living together in a communal form and ordering their lives on rules laid down by Indians were established in Egypt by B.C. 340. It is in many ways probable that Greek stoicism was not an indigenous Hellenic product, but merely infiltration via Egypt of beliefs derived from the Buddhist priests of India."

**Aim of the Study**

The aim of my study is to find out the possibilities of exchange of ideas between the two diverse civilisations which are very far from each other this is a new kind of study in which we are trying to trace the elements of ascetic practises into different countries one is related to the religion of Jainism Buddhism and the other one is related to the religion of christianity so this is a new kind of study which will throw some light over the issues of Monasticism.

**Conclusion**

In the conclusion we can say that in both the religions Christiana T and in Jainism the things were very much related to each other and the rules and regulations to be followed by the S ethics were very much common in some ways and I think that this is a study of a different kind and in present scenario we could not find this kind of study and it needs more attention to be paid to find new findings in this field

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