



ROLE OF BHADANT ANAND KAUSALYAYAN IN THE REVIVAL OF BUDDHISM IN MODERN INDIA

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Abstract: Twentieth-century revival of Buddhism in India was influenced by the contributions of Bhadant Anand Kausalyayan (1905-1988) as a translator, teacher and organizer. In addition to its many other dimension, the Kausalyayan's translations into vernacular languages, his public pedagogy (lectures, travel writing), and his organizational activities had a significant influence on the transformation of Buddhism from being largely a monastic/scholarly tradition to becoming a movement that was accessible, literate, and institutional in nature, especially in the context of post-conversion that followed B.R. Ambedkar's followers. Based on textual analysis of Kausalyayan's published translations and essays, archival bibliographies, and secondary literature on modern Indian Buddhist movements, the paper will show how Kausalyayan's translations functioned as a form of cultural infrastructure in providing the basis for study circles, catechesis, and community formation. The paper concludes with some reflexive thoughts regarding the translational politics of Kausalyayan's translations and recommendations for future reception and comparative studies.

Key words- Bhadant Anand Kausalyayan, Vernacular Translation, Buddhist revival, Tipiṭaka, Ambedkarite Buddhism.

I. INTRODUCTION

The modern revival of Buddhism in India was not a singular event, but rather a constellation of various forms of intellectual, social, and institutional initiatives. Central to this revival were the creation and dissemination of texts in languages that ordinary people could read. The purpose of this paper is to examine the contributions of Bhadant Anand Kausalyayan to the modern revival of Buddhism in India. Through sustained translation activities, public writing, and organizing, Kausalyayan converted canonical materials preserved largely in Pali and Sanskrit into intelligible resources for lay readers. Through an examination of the style, framing, and distributional goals of Kausalyayan's translations and pedagogical texts, I demonstrate how vernacular scholarship provided the foundation for community formation in the post-Ambedkarite period.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

The study of modern scholarship on Indian Buddhist revival has emphasized translation, print culture, and social movements as interrelated. Studies of Ambedkarite conversions have demonstrated that ordinary converts require accessible scripture and guides to practice. The literature on translation and modern religion has identified three primary functions of vernacular translations: (1) linguistic access; (2) interpretative framing; and (3) institutional utility (study groups, curricula). One of the primary sources for this research consists of the writings and speeches of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. This inquiry begins with

his early writings published in *Bahishkrut Bharat* in the late 1920s, wherein he first began to articulate the necessity of religious conversion [1, 2, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11]. At the historic Yeola Conference held in 1935, he publicly declared his resolve to renounce Hinduism. In his 1948 treatise “The Untouchables: Who Were They and Why They Became Untouchables?” he emphasized that Dalits constituted a distinct moral and political category within Buddhism. This strongly substantiates the argument that their choice of religious conversion was entirely consistent with the philosophical path they had historically followed [1, 3]. A practical understanding of Buddhism emerges through his descriptions of events in the life of the Buddha particularly in his magnum opus, *The Buddha and his Dhamma* (1957) and through his elucidation of how the Buddha's views and vision took shape. To understand that event specifically the impact it had on the people, the significance they attached to their conversion, and how they subsequently remembered the occasion it is crucial to examine these various facets. This documentary filmed by a group of Ambedkarite Buddhists who interviewed local Buddhists who had played pivotal roles in both the movement itself and the construction of Deekshabhoomi. They recount their memories, describe the developments that have unfolded since that time, explain how they assisted in the construction of Deekshabhoomi and contributed to the propagation of the movement, and vividly convey the extent to which that historic event has become deeply internalized within them [6]. This paper situates Kausalyayan within this literature as a translator/public intellectual who produced outputs that fulfilled these functions.

III. RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODOLOGY

The present study addresses three questions: (a) what were the characteristic features of Kausalyayan's translation practice? (b) How did Kausalyayan's textual production contribute to lay Buddhist self-understanding in post-conversion communities? (c) What are the interpretive and distributional limits of Kausalyayan's work?

For this study, the research methodology is a qualitative textual analysis of selected translations, prefaces and essays attributed to Kausalyayan; review of secondary literature on modern Indian Buddhism; and interpretive analysis linking textual style to pedagogical function. When there is uncertainty about bibliographical data, I flag the issue and suggest archival verification.

IV. SHORT BIOGRAPHY

Bhadant Anand Kausalyayan was born in 1905 (born name: Harnam Das), and subsequently became a monk, translator, travel writer and public lecturer. His corpus includes Hindi translations of Pāli texts, commentarial introductions, travelogues describing Buddhist lands and popular essays explaining Buddhist doctrine using modern idioms. Kausalyayan travelled, taught, and collaborated with presses and publishing organizations to circulate vernacular Buddhist literature extensively across India [4, 5].

V. MAJOR CONTRIBUTIONS

5.1. VERNACULAR TRANSLATION AS THE FIRST INTERVENTION OF MAJOR CONTRIBUTIONS

The greatest contribution of Bhadant Anand Kausalyayan was the translation of parts of the Tipiṭaka and associated texts (suttas, Jātaka stories, Abhidhamma summaries) into Hindi and other accessible languages. Kausalyayan's translations are defined by:

- Clear, non-technical language intended for lay readers;
- Introductory prefaces to each text that place the text historically and doctrinally;
- Pedagogical aids (glossary, marginalia, and brief question-answer sections) designed to facilitate classroom use.

Through these characteristics, Kausalyayan's translations were suitable for study circles, Sunday schools, and local sangha thus serving as instructional primers.

5.2. PUBLIC PEDAGOGY: TRAVEL WRITING AND LECTURES

In addition to publication, Kausalyayan utilized lecture tours and travelogues as media to promote popular education. In the same manner, Kausalyayan's travelogues carried out two tasks: (1) they humanized Buddhism by depicting encounters and locations; (2) they provided comparative reflections on religion that allowed Indian audiences to connect with a larger Buddhist world. Doctrinal points were

condensed and formulated for memorization in lectures to provide lay Buddhist communities formed after mass conversions with effective means of oral transmission of doctrine.

5.3. ORGANIZATIONAL AND DISTRIBUTIONAL ACTIVITIES

Kausalyayan collaborated with publishers and language organizations to provide print versions of his translations. In addition, Kausalyayan participated in projects that developed primers and reading lists to create a minimal environment for vernacular Buddhist education. These infrastructures contributed to the reach of his translations beyond academic circles into areas where mass conversions occurred.

VI. ANALYSIS: HOW TRANSLATION CONSTRUCTED COMMUNITY

6.1. LANGUAGE ACCESSIBILITY → RELIGIOUS LITERACY

Translation eliminated the immediate language barrier making it impossible for most lay readers to learn doctrine. With vernacular translations, lay readers gained access to canonical narratives and ethical teachings allowing them to participate in study groups and personal reading.

6.2. TRANSLATED TEXTS AS LEGITIMIZATION TOOLS

By framing each translated text with a scholarly preface and cross-referencing, Kausalyayan's editions presented Buddhism as a reasonable and historic tradition thereby reducing the likelihood of accounts that reduced the new converts' practice to merely a political identity.

6.3. SELECTIVITY AND FOCUS — THE POLITICS OF CHOICE

Selectivity is inherent in translation and conveys choice. Kausalyayan primarily emphasized texts and passages that supported readings that were ethical, anti-caste and rationalist; therefore, Kausalyayan's selections of texts aligned his choices with the intellectual demands of the communities that followed Ambedkar. These choices were both practical and political: translations were tools for social reform as well as religious instruction.

VII. LIMITATIONS, CRITIQUES, AND REFLECTIVE PRECAUTIONS. 8. CONCLUSIONS

- 1) Framing Interpretation: Kausalyayan's introductory writings sometimes interpreted his translations through the lens of contemporary reformist ideologies; therefore, future scholarship on his translations should recognize his translations as interpretative works and not as neutral renditions.
- 2) Bias of Selection: The corpus emphasizes certain themes; other possible emphases (e.g., meditative practice, rituals, and tantric traditions) are present to a lesser extent than others.
- 3) Inequality of Distribution: Although he attempted to make his translations available widely across India, print runs and distribution channels varied greatly by area; therefore, not all language communities benefited equally from his translations.

As a result of these limitations, further translation(s) of his texts, comparative reception studies, and archival studies tracing print runs and regional uptake of his translations are recommended. The translations, public pedagogy and organizational efforts of Bhadant Anand Kausalyayan were a type of cultural infrastructure that directly facilitated the revival and solidification of modern Indian Buddhism. His translations made canonical texts accessible to lay communities, legitimized the study of doctrine in vernacular terms and transformed the momentum generated by mass conversions into long-term educational practices. Future studies would be beneficial if paired with field studies examining reception in Ambedkarite communities and with archival studies of the history of publishing.

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IX. CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The author(s) declare that no generative AI or AI-assisted technologies were used in the preparation or writing of this manuscript. There are no conflicts of interest.

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