

Nirvāṇa and Nivṛtta

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ABSTRACT

Nirvāṇa is the summum bonum of the Buddhist tenet. The term Nivṛtta appears in the Manusmṛti a Hindu Law book, as a substitute for salvation. Therefore the Buddhist Tripitaka and the Manusmṛti have been utilized here as resources for this research. Many other secondary sources have also been referred to whenever arises necessity.

Etymologically the term Nirvāṇa consists of the negative prefix "nir" and "vāṇa", underlying the idea of absence of craving. Nivṛtta is used as a past participle in Sanskrit language. The simple meaning of the word is "has been stopped" philosophically it gives deep idea of the discontinuity of the journey of saṃsāra. The final aim of the Buddhist is to get rid of the bondage of saṃsāra. As such there appears some verbal similarity between the two terms Nirvāṇa and Nivṛtta, but in the philosophical aspect there is a vast difference. The term Nivṛtta in the Manusmṛti is mingled with Ātmavāda or concept of soul. But Nirvāṇa is absolutely free from the concept of self. The Sanskrit term is Nirvāṇa while Pali expression is Nibbāṇa.

The two words namely pravṛtta and nivṛtta, which appear in the Manusmṛti are very important regarding the concept of salvation. It runs thus; "Acts which secure the fulfilment of wishes in this world or in the next are called pravṛtta, but acts performed without any desire for a reward, preceded by the acquisition of true knowledge, are declared to be nivṛtta, such as cause the cessation of mundane existence"

As per above passage it seems that the two terms pravṛtta, and nivṛtta respectively represent the words saṃsāra and nirvāṇa in Buddhist Tenet.

The manusmṛti further elaborates that he who sedulously performs acts leading to future births (pravṛtta) becomes equal to the gods, but he who is intent on the performance of those causing the cessation of existence (Nivṛtta), indeed, passes beyond the reach of the five elements.

Unlike in the Buddhist texts in the Manusmṛti there is only one word for Nibbāṇa which is Nivṛtta to denote salvation. Therefore there it does not arise the problem of negative and positive aspects as in the case of the Buddhist Nirvāṇa; whatever it is, we should not forget that there are numerous expressions in Brāhmaṇa, upanisad and other various Hindu texts to denote salvation. They spare our limit of discussion here.