Indian Epic Hero Bhīṣma and Buddha

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In the fourth chapter of the SDP, verse number 53 has been appeared the name of Bhīṣma ;

adyo vayaṃ śrāvaka-bhūta nātha
saṃśrāvaiṣyāmatha cāgra-bodhim/
bodhiya Śabdaṃ ca prakāśayamas
teno vayaṃ śrāvaka Bhīṣma-kalpāḥ//53//⁽¹⁾

“Now we are, in real, your disciples, taking the voice of supreme enlightenment, and causing all to listen the word of enlightenment, for we are pure disciples like Bhīṣma.”

But H. Kern claims “Bhīṣma, the son of Sāntanu, was a great hero and sage, and it is by no means impossible that the word used in the text contains an allusion to that celebrated person, Bhīṣma as an epithet of Śiva”²⁾, and S. Matsunami follows Kern’s opinion that it is no example to compare the virtue of śrāvaka in Buddhist scriptures with Hero Bhīṣma in the MBh which is one of the Sanskrit Epic literature. That is why it is no reason to appear Hero Bhīṣma of the MBh in the Buddhist text.

But we can not deny the scripts of the SDP, as far as reading the sanskrit text, the word of Bhīṣma is written. It is not rational to deny the facts. If it were mistakes of compiler at the process of compiling, we have to consider of the meaning of mistakes. Fortunately other evidences are available, there are no word for Bhīṣma in the chinese translations, which are of Dharmarakṣita, Kumārajīva, Jñānagupta and others. Now how about Tibetan translations?

de-bas bdag-cag sgrogs-pa mi-bzad ḥdra

These are also no word for Bhīṣma in Tibetan translation, Beijing, Lhasa, Derge, Conne, Nartan edition. But according to Tibetan translators, the

original text must be Śrāvak-akṣīṇa-kalpāḥ
or Śrāvākākṣīṇa-kalpāḥ

It means that therefore we are real disciples like having endless echo. M.E. Burnouf also dropped the name of Bhīṣma in his French translation³⁹.

As a result, the word for Bhīṣma has been appeared only in Sanskrit texts.

And in the first chapter of the SDP appears one follower of Brahmā ;

evam pramukhair dvādaśabhiḥ ca brahmakāyika-devaputra-sahasraiḥ⁴⁰

brahmakāyika, which means the member of Brahmakāya. therefore we can recognize some influences of the MBh in this chapter⁵¹.

The king and people loved him, but Bhīṣma had to face many family troubles. His step-brothers died one by one. He sacrificed himself and his desires for the goodness of the country and greatnees of the king. He took vow not to marry and he became great soul. From his father's death till his nephew's sons grew to be young prince, he was the beloved of all, a ruler who stood towering one all the kings of the Aryan land.

We should never forget the great poet Vyāsa, who wrote all parvas about Bhīṣma and also major parts of the Mahābhārata as after the birth of Buddha, the life in Kapilavastu, the father's kingdom, looked very happy and prosperous. Similarly Vyāsa says when Bhīṣma became the ruler, the earth began to give harvests and crops also became of good flavour. The clouds began to pour rain in season, and the trees become full of flowers and fruits⁶¹. The draughts cattle were all happy, and the birds and the other animals rejoiced exceedingly. And the flowers became fragrant, and the fruits became sweet, and the cities and towns became filled with merchants and traders and artists of every description. And the people became brave, learned, honest and happy. There were no robbers then, nor anybody who was sinful. It seemed that the golden age had come upon every part of the kingdom. Bhīṣma and Buddha represent two contrasting facets.

Bhīṣma was also very responsible statesman of his age. He was a godly man in the world. Buddha was a godly man in the forest. Now for the throne of Kuru kingdom. sacred and evil strategy occurred off and on. But

Bhiṣma remained as great teacher and the onlooker. He loved Arjuna, but always lived with the Kuru quarters. Like Buddha. He kept his life well-disciplined and holy. By this time Krishna, the incarnation of god became famous and well-established. Bhiṣma had true faith in Krishna and his words. If great Bhiṣma were not there, it was quite evident that it would have been impossible for the Pāṇḍus to perform their great sacrifice. Bhiṣma was the towering personality amongst all the kings of Aryavata. Bhiṣma stood at the head of all. Bhiṣma was all in all in all matter. The great battle of the Mahābhārata, in spite Bhiṣma to display his greatest war efficiency and also his message as a great saint⁷⁾. His life is full of holy words and great sacrifices. He comes nearer to Buddha in search of truth and god⁸⁾.

The detached and objective life and mind of this great hero-saviour, demonstrates the truest pattern of a great Buddhist follower. He knew every inch of 'mokṣa' and the honesty of living on earth. He always kept himself aloof from women and the lechery.

In the MBh, we come across many religious irreligious accidents. Bhiṣma always emerged as a great teacher and as a great hero. In between the richness and the property of Yudhiṣṭhira made a wicked Duryodhana mad with jealousy.

Blind Dhritarashtra foresaw the fatal result of this play, but after a good deal of argument, he finally yielded and sent Vidura to bring the Pāṇḍavas to Hastinapura. Most unwillingly Vidura went and delivered to Yudhiṣṭhira the king's message⁹⁾.

Thus we can say the presence of Bhiṣma was the presence of godly right and law. As Buddha represented the defined law and divine truth, who preached the voice of sky on the earth. So people could rise from the slumber of Māyā and lechery. Mahāyāna Buddhism brought discipline and new meanings in life. They remained again and again that life may be happy not only the company of emotional pleasure, it also may be happy in the company of divinity.

As a result, we can acknowledge the doctrine of Bodhisattva¹⁰⁾ as well

as the ideals of kshatriya warriors, who possibly kept the same goal. These aims show the svadharma without expecting fruitful results for only seeking practices, also as reflected in Gītā. That aims to benefit others without expecting nirvāṇa only asking forgetting others enlightenment as possible as quickly.

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- 1) Kern Nandjio edition, pp. 118—119.
 - 2) Kern, H. *The Saddharmapuṇḍarīka or The Lotus of The True Law*, SBES. Vol. XXI, Delhi, 1980, p. 115, 2f.
 - 3) Burnouf, M. E. *le lotus De la Bonne Loi*, Paris, 1973, p. 74
 53 C'est aujourd'hui, ô Chef, que nous sommes devenus/ des Ārāvakas ; aussi exposerons-nous l'éminent état
 de Bōdhi ; nous expliquerons le sens du mot de Bōdhi ; aussi sommes-nous comme de redoutables Ārāvakas.
 - 4) Kern Nandjio edition, p. 4.
 - 5) 漢訳
 竺法護訳 大正蔵 vol. 9, No. 263 p. 83a
 我等今日 乃為聲聞
 鳩摩羅什訳 大正蔵 vol. 9, No. 262 p. 18c
 今得無漏 無上大果
 我等今者 真是聲聞
 闍那崛多等訳 大正蔵 vol. 9, No. 264 p. 151b
 我等今者 真是聲聞
 - 6) Bose, J.N. *Bhīṣma his life and teachings*, Delhi, 1989, pp. 11-12
 - 7) Srimad Bhagavad-gītā, Chap. 4, 7

yadā yadā hi dharmasya	abhiyutthānam adharmasya
glānir bharati bhārata	tadā'tmānam sṛjāmyaham
pāritrāṇya sādhnām	dharmasamsthāpanārthāya
vināśāya ca duṣkṛtām	sambhavāmi yuge yuge
 - 8) Sekido, Norio. *A Study of the Mahāyāna Buddhism with special reference to the Saddharmapuṇḍarīka sūtra and the Mahābhārata Bhīṣma Parva and Śānti Parva*, Ph. D, dissertation, University of Delhi, 1991, pp. 211-219.
 - 9) Katz, Ruth Cecily. *Arjuna in the Mahābhārata*, Delhi, 1990, pp. 156-169.
 - 10) Mitomo, Ryojun. *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka Sūtra : A Textual and Philosophical Study*, Dissertation, University of Delhi, 1984, pp. 196-204

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