

Historical Fabric of Buddhism in Sharadindu Bandyopadhyay's Writing: Tracing Non-violence, with Reference to Triratna in Selected Literary Works of Bandyopadhyay

Moulina Paul*

Submitted: 28.02.2026

Revised: 29.05.2026

Accepted: 02.06.2026

Abstract: *The present paper aims to explore how Sharadindu Bandyopadhyay, the most esteemed literary figure, has embellished some of his literary works with Buddhism, Buddhist principles and references of Triratna (Buddha, Dharma, Sangha) in the context of the early mediaeval Indian history. The analytic study of some of his novels and short stories from the remarkable book Oitihāsik Kahini Samagrāha, elaborates that the Buddhist principals of non-violence, non-vengeance deeply influenced the Indian kings of Hindu dynasties to embrace and patronise Buddhism in an anarchical period of post Vedic era. There was also emergence of Varna system with rigid caste division and extreme anarchies. The contribution of Atisha Dipamkara Srijnaana in spreading Buddhist philosophy is also narrated by the author through his storyline. In the novel Tumi Sondhar Megh, the mediation of Atish Dipankara in maintaining peace between two Indian dynasties by promoting non-violent reconciliation (to prevent foreign invasion), is reflected. The triumph of love, pacifism over ancestral rivalries by the influence of Buddhism, is also represented here. In Kaler Mondira, the Buddhist principle of non-vengeance and in Maru O Sangha the rigid disciplines of Sangha, are depicted. In Amitabha, the incarnation of Buddha and his last journey to Kushinagar, is illustrated. Thus the writings of Sharadindu intermingle history with Buddhism.*

Key Words: *Non-violent reconciliation, Non-vengeance, Buddhist-History, Sangha, Triratna, Buddhist principle, Atisha Dipamkara, Varna system.*

*P.G. Student, Dept. of English, University of Kalyani, Nadia, W.B.
e-mail: moulinapaul2002@gmail.com

Introduction

Sharadindu Bandyopadhyay is (1899-1970) an eminent literary figure of Indian Literature. He has demonstrated his magnificence and versatility by including historical themes in some of his notable literary works. He is renowned for his mastery in writing historical fiction with relevant historical occurrence. In an article, published by the Information Desk (2021) of Get Bangla, it is written, "Among contemporary writers of Bengali- nobody could write a historical fiction quite like him" - that's what Sunil Gangopadhyay had to say about Sharadindu Bandyopadhyay, the very author we usually relate to only detective Byomkesh Bakshi! But he was the one who wrote some of the best historical novels of all time."¹

Besides elaborating upon the history of medieval India, he has enriched some of his novels and short stories of Oitihasyik Kahini Samagra, by encompassing Buddhism with its doctrine of nonviolence. Buddhism flourished in India during the Magadha, Maurya, Pala and Gupta dynasty. So the influence of Buddhist doctrines in contemporary Indian reigns, is also analysed in these selected text. The present paper aims to interpret these selected novels and short stories of Bandyopadhyay through the principles of Buddhism with the reference of Triratna-Buddha (the enlightened in Amitabha), Dharma (which also includes teaching, practice of non-violence and non-vengeance in Tumi Sandhyar Megh, Kaler Mondira), Sangha(in Maru O Sangha).

Historical Fabric of Buddhism

In the early medieval ages of Indian history, there was widespread anarchy with foreign invasion, and the emergence of Varna (social) divisions. The Vedic philosophy had lost its original purity in this time and become very complex. It had degenerated into superstitions, dogmas, rituals.⁹ The Buddhism and its philosophical, ethical principles of nonviolence captivated numerous Indian kings who were entirely devout Hindus.

In the 6th century BCE, there was the emergence of Mahajanapadas in India. Magadha was the most dominant of them.² Then Magadha was ruled by King Bimbisara from Harayanka dynasty. He met Lord Buddha and patronized Buddhism. Though his son Ajatshatru was at first opposed to Buddhism, later he was moved by the Buddhist philosophy and embraced it.

In the 3rd century BCE, the great Maurya Empire was set up. Its founders, Chandra Gupta and Bindusara was also the follower of Buddhism. Buddhist traditions associated him with an interest in the Ajivika sect³. Buddhism and its ethics of nonviolence had great influence over King Ashoka who was altered by Buddhist philosophy after the atrocities of the Kalinga War. After Maurya dynasty, Sri Gupta founded the Gupta Empire. Though the Gupta rulers were devout Hindus, they strongly patronised Buddhism as Kumar Gupta set up the Nalanda University.

Some social phenomena in this century led to the emergence of Buddhism and the patronizing of it by the Hindu devoted kings and neighbouring countries. The post-vedic society was divided into four Varna's- Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras. The Kshatriya reaction against the ritualistic domination of Brahmanas, who claimed various privileges, was one of the causes of the origin of new religions.⁴ This Varna divided system caused anarchies,

tensions and anxieties among people especially in Kshatriyas. So they sought a religion to improve their positions. The new emergent religion of Buddhism was devoid of Varna system or any kind of discrimination, rather it emphasizes the principle of non-violence which would put end war between Indian Kingdoms and promote commerce, trade. As a result, the Hindu kings were inclined to this new religion⁴. Sharadindu's selected stories reflect this context where it is seen that the Indian King of eminent Hindu dynasties, are patronizing Buddhism.

The Pala Dynasty, ruled Bengal from end of 8th century to 12 century AD, also patronized Buddhism. In this time, Atisha Dipamkara Srijnana of Bengal, Chancellor of Vikramshila Mahabihara, strengthened Buddhism by setting up many monasteries all over India.

Buddhism has remarkable influence on the Pala, Gupta, Magadha dynasty. The Buddhist philosophy of non-violence was patronised by some of Indian Kings. Even it was able to reunite Indian kings by preventing wars. The historical allusions which Sharadindu has used in his writing, are not merely the words of fiction. They appear as an authentic representation of Indian history with influence of Buddhism.

Textual Analysis

1. Non-violent Reconciliation in Tumi Sondhyar Megh

Dharma (the teachings of Buddha) is the second component of Triratna. It also includes the teaching and practice of nonviolence (Ahimsa) which is the ethical principle of Buddhism. This is observed in this novel. It is written on the context of the conflict between Pala Dynasty (in the reign of Nayapala) and Kalachuri dynasty (in the reign of King Laxmikarna). The contribution of eminent scholar Atisa Dipamkara Srijnana to prevent wars, conflicts between these two dynasties is depicted here. He proposed for arranging a matrimonial alliance with the principle of non-violence. Being influenced by the Buddhist philosophy of nonviolence and with the mediation of Atisha Dipamkara, the rivalries between the two dynasties finally terminated, through Buddhist influence and the worshipping of love between Vighrahapala and Yauvanashri.

After the Magadha and Maurya, Pala dynasty was profoundly influenced by Buddhism. Then Dipamkara became renowned as a Buddhist scholar. The Pala king, Mahipala, appointed him Chancellor of Vikramshila Mahavihara in Bhagalpur, Bihar. War broke out at this time between Nayapala and Laksmikarna, king of Kalachuri. Dipamkara's mediation helped to terminate hostilities and establish peace. Shortly thereafter the Buddhist king of Tibet, Lah Lama invited him to Tibet to spread the message of Buddha. After the demise of King Lah Lama, his nephew, Chang Chub renewed the invitation made earlier. This time Dipamkara accepted the offer and commenced his journey to Tibet in 1040 Ad. He welcomed Dipankara who founded Khana Vihara and initiated the Nepalese prince, Padmaprabha, into Buddhism⁵. Some glimpses of this incident are reflected by Bandhyopadhyay in this novel.

At the beginning of the story, the novelist has elaborated the foreign invasion of Mahamaad Ghori, Mamud Gajani who destroyed Hindu Temples, Buddhist Monasteries in the western part of India. But in the Eastern India, the relationship among the Indian Kings of Bihar, Bengal, Tripuri were deteriorating.⁶ The relationship between King Nayapala and

Laxmikarna of Kalachuri dynasty (who were ancestral rivals), became malignant. Thus the political crisis and anxieties of medieval India is represented. Though King LaxmiKarna was very crafty, aggressive, Nayapala was not enthusiastic in war, violence because he was a follower of Buddhism. He also patronised and embraced the Buddhist principles of non-violence to maintain peace in his kingdom. In this way, the influence of Buddhism on Pala dynasty, is reflected here.

Being a Buddhist philosopher, Atisha was in favour of non-violence, unity. He intended to maintain peace among the Indian Kingdoms and advocated for a non-violent reconciliation. This Buddhist scholar realised that India could resist the foreign attack of Turkish by their unity and accumulation of power. But the contemporary Indian Kings desired to increase their power, expand their kingdoms through war. Atisha was pondering “violence increases violence, not decrease”. In Dhammapada, it is written in verse 129-131 that all tremble at violence, all fear death. Putting, oneself in the place of another, one should not kill nor cause another to kill. In 131, it is mentioned that One who, while himself seeking happiness does not oppress with violence other being who also desire happiness, will find happiness hereafter⁷. Atisha was determined to influence the anarchic condition of India, through this Buddhist principle. Because in this time of political crisis and chaos, Atisha wanted to use the Buddhist ethics of non-violence, as a shield and tent, to bring harmony and unity in India.

Even in the book *The Teaching of Buddha*, in the chapter ‘Building a Buddha Land’, it is written that the devil’s dominion is full of greed, darkness, struggling, fighting, swords and bloodshed and is replete with jealousy, prejudice, hatred, cheating, flattering, fawning, secrecy and abuse⁸. As an intellectual Buddhist scholar, Atisha did not want to let India to be a land of devil’s dominion with violence, aggression. He emphasized for brotherhood, harmony with nonviolence. He resisted any kind of bloodshed, hatred in this Buddhist Bihar. Because it could escalate the existed political disharmony. So in the Vikramashila Bihar, when Atisha realised that Laxmikarna had entered into Patliputra to invade it, he did not provoke Nayapala to commence war against him, rather he tried to dissuade him to leave Bihar for the sake of religion. But Laxmikarna was indifferent to it. In the next day, by proposing a matrimonial alliances between the daughter of Laxmikarna and the son of Nayapala, Atish aspired to transcend the ancestral rivalries into a harmonious political unity.

Later a love relationship set up between Bigrhapala and Yauvanashree, the daughter of Laxmikarna. In swayamvar banquet, she chose Bigrhapala. Then Laxmikarna could not control his inner indignation. He announced war against Nayapala. But no war happened in the battlefield. Rather Laxmikarna embraced his daughter and son in law with affection. The two kingdom were reunited by the marital knot. In the climax, there was triumph of love, compassion, affection over violence, anarchy, and war. Thus the influence of Buddhism was capable of preventing atrocious wars.

By interpreting this novel through the lens of Buddhist principle, it can be remarked that in the middle age of Indian History, when there was emergence of chaos, anarchies with the anxieties of foreign attack, the Buddhism with its principle appeared as a saviour. Through this novel, Sharadindu argued that Buddhist philosophy has the most integral contribution in deescalating imperialistic expansion, violence, bloodshed and political disharmony.

2. Buddhist Non-vengeance Outcome in Kaler Mondira

The novel is written on the context of Hun invasions in India during the Gupta dynasty. The plot revolves how the atrocious Huns and their King were reformed by embracing the practice of non-vengeance and non-violence philosophy of Buddhism. Sharadindu also highlights how vengeance transforms into forgiveness, love, compassion by the influence of Buddhism.

The author has narrated an imaginary hilly region, named Bitanka which was invaded by Huns. The main leader of Huns, Ratta conquered Bitanka by marrying Dhara Debi and this region became Rotta Kingdom. But the violent and austere Hun King Ratta, was transformed by the Buddhism. He became the son of Dharma. Through the narrator Myong, Sharadindu elaborates the Huns invasion and their atrocities. The seven Huns warriors, after killing the king, intended to assassinate the new-born prince Chitrak by their savage sword-play, but he did not die. By losing his real identity, Chitrak became a mere soldier. When he was grown up, he entered in Ratta kingdom in a disguise. When Chitrak came to know his real identity, he intended to take the revenge by killing Ratta, the only one successor of Ratta kingdom, his rival. But with the touch of love, compassion, and kindness, his vengeance had obliterated. Chitrak, whose real name was Tilak Vharma, married his rival princess Ratta, and regained his Bitanka kingdom without any violence and shedding blood. From this point of view, the novel can be interpreted through a Buddhist Philosophy of nonviolence, practice of non-vengeance (which is also included in second principle of Triratna -Dhrama).

At the beginning of the story it is seen that Myong, the narrator was talking about their King Ratta and his dismissal of war fare, violence, bloodshed as he had embraced Buddhism. So it is observed that being influenced by Buddhism, the savage, cruel, blood thirst Huns became worshipper of Buddha and non-violence.

In the verse 5 of Dhammapada, it is said, "Hatred never ceases by hatred in this world. By love alone they cease. This is ancient Law". In this novel, it is seen Chitrak wanted to take revenge by murdering Princess Ratta. He also got any opportunities to kill her brutally, but he did not. His forgiveness, compassion and love got triumph over vengeance.

In Verse 103 of Dhammapada, it is written that though he should conquer a thousand men in the battlefield a thousand times, yet he indeed who would conquer himself, is the noblest victor⁹. In this novel Chitrak is seen to conquer the anguish, indignation, anger, so it could be remarked that though he served as a soldier, witnessing violence, vengeance, was also altered by Buddhism. By analysing the plot and story line, it is comprehended that it was contemporary time of Gupta dynasty and Hun Invasion. From Kumargupta to Skandagupta, the kings of Gupta dynasty also patronized Buddhism. Though it is not mentioned whether Chitrak embraced Buddhism or not, but he was influenced by Buddhist Philosophy of nonviolence during dwelling in Bitanka Region. As a result, he dismissed his revenge on Ratta.

Later Chitrak also accompanied Ratta to rescue her father from Kirath, the owner of Chastan fort who once was rejected by King Ratta for marriage proposal to his daughter. Chitrak could have killed Ratta in their journey to Chastan. On their way to Chastan, they spent their night in a Buddhist monastery. When they reached there, Chitrak was amazed that Ratta, being a Hun, was uttering Buddhist spell to worship lord. She mentioned that she learnt

it form her father. From here, it is proven that the atrocious Hun dynasty embraced Buddhism and was influenced by Buddhist philosophy. There Chitrak was very much mesmerised by the Buddhist dictum in this monastery. He learnt the sacred saying of Buddhism- "He abused me, he laughed at me he stuck me, thus one thinks so long as one retains such thoughts one's anger continue." So Chitrak's conflict and anguish melted here. It was not for the beauty, affection of Ratta, he was very much reformed by the Buddhist dictums of Dharma. Thus, through this novel and historical reference, the author represented that the political chaos and tensions go through spiritual reformation by embracing Buddhism.

3. Representation of Buddhist Sangha, Discipline V/S Compassion in Maru O Sangha

Sangha, which is one of components in Triratna, is represented in this story. The Sangha arose from a group of disciples who gave up their worldly lives to travel with the Buddha and listen to his teaching.¹⁰

The short story narrated the disciplined, restricted life of Buddhist Sangha with rules, regulations and the place of love, compassion, affection in the Buddhist principle. The monastery was located in an oasis in the desolated scorching desert of Middle East Asia. In this dismal, barren desert, the Buddhist monastery was the only remnant with two Buddhist Monk- Uchanda and Pithumitto. Once they rescued two orphan children from the desert and gave shelter in their Buddhist monastery. The rules of Buddhist monastery or Sangha, are represented here. In the book *Buddhism in India*, in the chapter 'Sangha and Society', it is said that the society of the first millennium BCE as experienced by Gautama was dual; it consisted of householders who lived in the world as they found it and the homeless samanas, who sought answer to the meaning of life. Though the Buddha himself was flexible regarding behaviour and the life of the sangha must have been simple to begin with, the Vinaya rules eventually became extremely elaborate. They regulated all aspects of the bhikkhu's relationship to one another, to the world they lived in, common habits of courtesy, how to eat, what was allowed for shelter, beds, clothing, food etc. all such rules are justified by putting them on the mouth of Buddha¹¹. These rules, regulation of sangha's life, are explicitly elaborated by the author in this story.

In a critical study titled *Buddhist Education in Thailand*, it is mentioned that another Sanghadiseasikkhapada is that monks must not touch a woman, young or old, with lust. In order to avoid breaking of this rule, monks, usually keep a distance with woman. The scope of this rule covers all women alive, even a female infant. Monks must not touch, with lust, a dead body of a woman or woman's cloth. If he does, although it is not Sanghsdisea, he is still breaking some of the Vinaya rules¹². These restrictions of Sanghas, monks and the impact of dismantling it, is reflected in this present text.

In *Moru and Sangha*, a love relation was generated between the orphan children- Eti and Nirban who were in their 20s. Their affection and intimacy increased. Meanwhile Uchanda and Sthabir realised it. One day they were caught by Uchanda. He could not prevent himself from venting indignation on them. They were strictly dismissed from the Sangha for breaking the rules. But after that, Uchanda and Sthabira started repenting. They reared up them from

childhood. So a feeling of compassion, affection emerged in them. They had remorse for their decision but they were obliged to maintain the rules and regulations of Sangha. At last they prayed to Lord Buddha for judging their decision.

It can be remarked that in spite of strict rules, regulations, Buddhism is not devoid of compassion, forgiveness, affection. Even Lord Buddha never dejected love. In The Buddha's Teachings on Love, it is asserted that just as blood nourished the heart which keeps its flowing, so love nourishes spiritual freedom and in turn, kept flowing by. Perhaps this is what when the Dalai Lama said his religion is kindness. For the Buddha, love is one of the paths to full spiritual liberation¹³.

In this story it is perceived that the reputed monk of the monastery Uchanda and Sthabir could not disassemble the disciplines of monastery so they had to dismiss Eti and Nirban for their intimacy, on other side, their heart was replete with compassion, kindness for them. As a result Uchnada, out of repentance, immersed himself into the devastated Addhi, to return them. So it is proven that Buddhist philosophy is not only confined of disciplines of Sangha and is not devoid of humanity, compassion and love. Rather Lord Buddha suggested to follow the middle path. Man should avoid both extremes - a life of comforts and luxury and a life of severe asceticism, which is also known as Madhya Marga/ Madhyama Pratipad¹⁴.

The spirit of Buddha is that of great loving, kindness and compassion. The light of compassion, love, and kindness are profoundly observed amidst the regulated Sanghas which was abided and confined by rigid discipline. Thus the principles of Buddhism, are illuminated through this short story.

4. Incarnation and Enlightenment of Buddha in Amitabha

The Buddha is the first component of Triratna. Both the historical Buddha and ideal of Buddhahood are referred to as the Buddha or the teacher/Enlightened which is narrated in this story through the incarnation of Lord Buddha himself. Here the Buddhism is reflected through the journey of Buddha to Kushinagar for his Parinirvana. The story also narrated the construction of fortress and establishment of Patligram by Ajatshatru, in the bank of Ganga and Sohn River to combat with Vrijis. Bimbisara was deeply influenced by Buddhism, dismissed war and conflicts. He made peace with Lichhvi and Koshal by a marital knot. But Ajatshatru was at first opposed to Buddhism. He abducted all the land which were given by Bimbisara to Lord Buddha.

In the story, it is seen that the Buddhist monks, beggars were killed for the suspicion of spy. The supervisors intended to kill a human being as a sacrifice, for the ritual of fort construction. In this time they abducted some Buddhist monks to assassinate them. But it was Lord Buddha with his followers who were in their way to Kushinagar. The political chaos, violence, conflicts, Vedic and tantric rituals of sacrifice, executions, are illustrated here.

When the narrator Sanal Utpal and the Dingnaag (characters) recognised this monk whom they ordered to be killed, was, Lord Buddha, they started feeling his magnificence. Sanal Utpal repented that his heart was filled with pride, violence, rivalry, blood thirst so that he failed to recognise Lord Buddha. Thus this story portrays the philosophical manifestation of Lord

Buddha. Buddha is represented here as the Enlightenment/the teacher. Even the merciless, savage, aggressive heart of soldiers like Dhudharsha, Niskaruna, Dingnag, were melted and filled with tears after they were being witnessed of the majesty of Lord Buddha. In the next day, finally Buddha also delivered his immortal dictum that hatred does not decrease hatred rather increases violence.

The armies, guards of Ajatshatru who were on the duties, became altered with Lord Buddha's teachings and his sublime presence. Once they intended to shed blood by killing monks as their hearts were filled with violence, aggression and pride, conspiracies of monarchies. As soon as they met Lord Buddha, their inner aggression of blood thirst melted away. Their merciless, savage eyes were replete with tears, by the majestic view and dictum of Lord Buddha.

The story is not only embellished with Buddhist principles of nonviolence, non-vengeance, but also with the incarnation of Lord Buddha himself. His magnificent presence illuminates everyone's soul from an obscurity of violence, bloodshed and war. Thus the glory of Buddhism is also reflected in this story.

Conclusion

By analysing and interpreting the selected stories of Sharadindu Bandyopadhyay from his Oitihāsik Kahini Samagraha, it can be concluded that the most eminent writer intermingle Indian History of Early Medieval ages with the touch of Buddhism. It is universal truth that Literature has neither barrier nor any boundary and religion is interconnected with history very profoundly. The author has demonstrated it through his writing. In the middle ages, after the emergence of Mahajanapadas, there was also rise of Buddhism. From Haryanka dyastasy to Pala dynasty, from King Bimbisara to Nayapala, Buddhism was patronised by Indian kings who were devoted Hindus. They were influenced by the nonviolence, non-vengeance principles of Buddhism with the dictums of compassion, unity, brotherhood, love and kindness amidst the anarchic situation created by Varna division in post Vedic era. These historical writing of Bandopadhyay are not mere illusionary rather the historical testimonies are very relevant. The Buddhist principles of non-violence with reference to Triratna, is illustrated vividly in his selected historical fictions. So, being an eminent documentarian Sharadindu Bandyopadhyay is successful in flourishing his literary works by the fabric of Buddhism with relevant historical context.

References:

1. https://www.getbengal.com/home/story_detail/saradindu-bandopadhyay-not-just-detective-byomkesh-but-a-master-writer-of-historical-novels#:~:text=Saradindu%20Bandyopadhyay's%20versatility%20touched%20along,treat%20for%20the%20young%20readers. Accessed on 20th February, 2026.
2. Thapar, Romila, (2002). The Penguin History of Early India: From the Stone Age to 12th Century, Pearson Longman, p. 137.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 178.
4. Sharma, R.S, (2004). India's Ancient Past, Oxford University Press, pp. 131-132.
5. https://en.banglapedia.org/index.php/Dipankar_Srijnan,_Atish#:~:text=This%20time%20

- Dipankar%20accepted%20the,helped%20spread%20Buddhism%20in%20Tibet. Accessed on 21st February, 2026.
6. Bandyopadhyay, Sharadindu, (2008). *Oitihāsik Kahini Samagra*, Ananda Publishers Private Limited, Kolkata, pp. 493-634.
 7. Buddhārakkhita, Acharya. (Trans.). (2011). *The Dhammapada: The Buddha's Path of Wisdom*, Buddhist Publication Society, p. 23.
 8. Bukkyo Deno Kyokai, (1972). *The Teaching of Buddha*, Bukkyo Deno Kyokai, pp. 233-234.
 9. Buddhārakkhita, Acharya, translator (2011). *The Dhammapada: The Buddha's Path of Wisdom*. Buddhist Publication Society, p. 46.
 10. <https://prepp.in/news/e-492-triratnas-buddhism-ancient-india-history-notes>. Accessed on 5th March, 2026.
 11. Omvedt, Gali, (2003). *Buddhism in India: Challenging Brahmanism and caste*, Sage Publication, p. 97.
 12. Aphiwatamonkul, Smitthai (2018). *Buddhist Education in Thailand*, Wisdom Library, p. 43.
 13. <https://www.insightmeditationcenter.org/books-articles/the-buddhas-teachings-on-love/>. Accessed on 11th March, 2026.
 14. Karna, Binay, et.al., (2020). *Lucent's General Knowledge*, Lucent Publication, p. 33.