

BOOK REVIEW

Schumann, H. W. 2004. *The Historical Buddha: Life and Teachings of the Founder of Buddhism*. Translated by M. O'C Walshe. Delhi: Motilal Benarsi Dass Publisher (First Indian Edition), Bibliography, Index, Maps, Sketches, Diagrams, pp. XVII + 274, Price IRs. 295.

This book exclusively deals with life and teachings of the historical Buddha. It is an invaluable work about Gautam Buddha covering the themes such as early career, foundation of Buddhism, teachings and the mission, doctrine, psychological aspect of the historical Buddha and his great decease. This book is a proof of western scholarship on historical Buddha. The entire book is based on both Buddhist and non-Buddhist sources, which cover varied aspects of the Buddha and Buddhism.

Very few historical personalities have long lasting impression as that of Gautam Buddha. His way provided an alternative path to many aspirants to overcome sufferings and attain enlightenment. Buddha's entire teachings are so practical that the first teachings delivered at Sarnath in 528 BC continue to give beneficent effects even at the present time. Thus, his timeless teachings are worthy of attention.

The value of this book is attributed to the fact that both non-historical Buddhas and their past is not dealt in this book. Therefore, the author has laid emphasis on historicity of events, which are given rightful place in the discussion.

One of the main features of this book is that the philosophical-religious system aiming at attainment of enlightenment for oneself or for the welfare of all the sentient beings taught by the Buddha in the contemporary Indian society for almost forty five years, is dealt very perfectly in the book. However, the author did not concentrate on philosophical aspects but more concerned with bibliographical facts and relationships. Although Buddhist and non-Buddhist sources are used in this book, *Pali Tripitaka* is used as the main source of history.

The book is divided into 8 sections starting from scenario before the birth of Gautam Buddha. A special focus is laid upon his early career, foundation of the order, Buddhist mission, psychological aspect of the historical Buddha, his last years, the great decease (passing away of the Buddha), Buddhist Councils and the Pali canon.

The book opens with discription of landscape of contemporary Northern Indian plain between the foothills of the Himalaya and the banks of river, Ganga and political scenario in the 6th century B.C.

Since this book is on the historical Buddha, it obviously deals with his life history and contemporary society. The other chapters focused on are foundation of the Buddhist order and Buddhist mission started by the Buddha himself. His activities as a religious Master during his entire life are dealt in separate chapter.

The author also lays emphasis on dealing with his doctrine, the Buddhist order and the lay society. A separate chapter also deals with his personality, emotional disposition and the way he dealt with his followers. In the final chapter, his final departure and councils and Buddhist canons are described. It excludes all other non-historical Buddhas from its discussion list.

The author has done utmost effort to make the book authentic in terms of historiography. For this purpose, he has made best use of the *Tripitaka*, Buddha's biographies and other Buddhist and non-Buddhist works. The variety of evidence used so far makes the book very authentic. However, some minor mistakes and certain weaknesses still crop up in some places. Since the book is a historical narrative, the author has ruled out all sorts of legends in interpretation. This step is rather logical. In fact, historical kernel could not be detected in legendary accounts.

This book is one of the authentic biographies of the Buddha. It not only deals with his biography but also gives accounts of contemporary history and society. Although this book is very useful to know history of Buddhism with special focus on the Master, it still has some drawbacks. It has some factual errors. Modern Lumbini has been historically proved as the birth place of the Buddha for which Indians claim to be located in India. Thus, modern Rupandehi is misspelled as *Rumindeai*. It could create some kind of historical controversy. The translation of the Lunbini pillar inscription of Emperor Ashoka does not fit exactly in the context of recent interpretations done by the native historians.

However, the book is an example of scholarly work ever produced on the achievement of the Master of peace, the compassionate Buddha.

– Shanker Thapa