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HST100
Primary Source Assignment #3

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"Hymn of Man" from the Rig Veda and the Buddhist teaching "The Evolution of the World" (Hereafter referred to as the Vedic and Buddhist tale.) both originated somewhere in the northern territories of the Indian Subcontinent. Despite the location, they are on the surface very different. The discrepancy can be attributed to a change in Indian society, both in cultural organization and religion. The Vedic tale was written approximately 1500-900 B.C.E. In contrast, the Buddhist tale was written between 200 B.C.E, and 400 C.E saw a shift in the way the Indian culture was organized from semi-nomadic family tribal units to Flexible kingdoms. Additionally, there where new religious ideas like reincarnation, the effects of cosmic karma and, the cyclic nature of time. The Buddhist tale reflects these new ideas.

The Vedic tale reflects the belief that sacrifice is necessary to maintain the order in the universe with the sacrifice of the Man bringing the world into existence. The Buddhist tale suggests that the world was naturally ordered. When the change of the beings' greediness brings sin and disorder into existence, kings restore the order. Religious change reflects the shift in the organization of society. It shows the movement away from ritual sacrifices. The new time with kingdoms calls for a new religious view of order.

It is not surprising that the four social classes of the Vedic tale are absent in the Buddhist tale. Discontent with the predetermination of social caste was part of the buddhas struggle. It does introduce new divisions of the ugly and beautiful, another reference to karma.

The Buddhist tale moves away from deity worship. Although still containing magic forces, they are attributed to the natural order, karma, and the cycle of time rather than gods. This is strongly reflected by the origin of the beings attributed to unsettled karma from the previous era. Hinting at Enlightenment and escaping the cycle.

Although both texts are religious, they differ in the subgenre. The Vedic tale is taking the form of a hymn praising a god from which all life sprung forth. The Buddhist tale reads like a parable, A metaphorical story containing great wisdom. The will or handiwork of a deity is noticeably absent from the Buddhist tale.

To better understand the Buddhist tale, a knowledge of Buddhist deities, if they even have any, would help me understand the text better. As told here, the tale seems almost secular. Similar to social evolution theory.

To conclude, the two tales reflect different religious ideas corresponding to the change in the social structure over time.