

Religious Reform Movements in 6th Century BC – The Rise and development Of Jainism and Buddhism (Part-3)

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BUDDHISM

Buddhism was the movement that gave the greatest shock to Brahmanism.

- It was founded by Gautama Buddha who was a contemporary of Mahavira.
- Stood on *three pillars*- the '**Buddha**' (*its founder*) the '**Dharma**' (*his teachings*) and the '**Sangha**' (*the order of the Buddhist monks and nuns*).
- Gautama Buddha or Siddhartha was also known as Sakyamuni or Thathagatha.
- He was born in 563 A.D. on the Vaisakha purnima day in the royal grove at **Lumbini** (*now in Nepal*) near Kapilavastu, capital of the Sakyan republic, where his father Suddhodhana

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was the ruler. His mother was Maya.

- The site of his nativity is marked by the celebrated *Rummindei Pillar of Ashoka*.
- As Maya died at child birth, Siddhartha was brought up by his aunt and step mother, *Prajapati Gautami*.
- An introvert by nature, Siddhartha remained absorbed in philosophical and spiritual musings from childhood.
- At the age of sixteen he *married Yasodhara* and gave birth to a *son, Rahula*.
- The sight of an old man, a sick man, a dead man and an ascetic intensified Siddhartha's quest for the world and made him realize the hollowness of worldly pleasures.

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- Left home at the age of 29 in search of truth. This departure is known as the 'Great Renunciation' (*mahabhinishkramana*). For full six years Gautama lived as a homeless ascetic, seeking instruction under two Brahmin religious *teachers - Alara Kalama and Uddaka or Ramaputta*.
- Ultimately, one fine morning of *Vaisakha purnima*, at the age of 35, he attained Enlightenment (Nirvana) at Buddha Gaya in Bihar. Since then he was known as the Buddha or the 'enlightened one'. Then he proceeded to the *deer park near Sarnath*, in the vicinity of Benaras, where he gave his first sermon (*dharma Chakrapravartana*) before the five ascetics who had been earlier his colleagues.

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- After preaching for the next 45 years, he passed away in 483 A.D. under a Sal tree at Kusinagara (now Kasi in Gorakhpur district of UP).
- The most renowned converts to his teachings were *Sariputta and Moggallanna*, ascetics of Rajagriha. *Ananda* (his cousin and chief disciple), *Kasyapa* (his most learned disciple), *Upali* (the barber) and the rich youth *Vasa* were his famous followers. Kings *like Prasenajit of Kosala, Bimbisara and Ajatasatru of Magadha* accepted his doctrines and became his disciples. Buddha in his life time spread his message far and wide in North India and visited places like Benaras, Rajagriha, Sravasti, Vaisali, Nalanda and Pataligrama.



TEACHING OF BUDDHA

- A practical reformer who took note of the realities of the day. He did not involve himself in fruitless controversies.
- Rejected the infallibility of the Vedas
- Condemned the bloody animal sacrifices
- Protested against complicated, elaborate and meaningless ritual
- Challenged the caste system and priestly supremacy
- Maintained an agnostic attitude towards god.
- Buddha neither accepted nor rejected the existence of god.
- He laid great emphasis on the law of Karma. He argued that condition of man in this life depend upon his own deeds.



TEACHING OF BUDDHA

- He taught that soul does not exist.
- He emphasized Ahimsa. By his love for human beings and all living creatures, he endeared himself to all.
- His religion was identical with morality, and it emphasized purity of thought, word and deed.



Four noble truths

The essence of Buddhism lies in the four noble truths. They are:

1. The world is full of sorrows.
2. The cause of sorrow is desire
3. If desire is conquered, all sorrows can be removed
4. The only way to achieve the above is by following the eight fold path.



Eight-fold path (Ashtangamarga)

Gautama Buddha recommended an eight fold path for the elimination of human misery. It comprised of

1. ***Right view,***
2. ***Right resolve***
3. ***Right speech***
4. ***Right conduct***
5. ***Right livelihood***
6. ***Right effort***
7. ***Right mindfulness***
8. ***Right concentration***

Eight-fold path (Ashtangamarga)

If a person follows this eight fold path

- *he would not depend on the machinations of the priests,*
- *and will be able to reach his goal of life.*

He taught that a person should avoid the excess of both luxury and austerity. According to his teachings anyone who follows this path, considered as the '*middle path*' (*madhyama prtipada*) would attain salvation irrespective of his social background.

The Buddha also laid down a code of conduct for his followers on the same lines as was done by the Jaina teachers.



Code of conduct

The main items in this social conduct are

1. *do not covet the property of others*
2. *do not commit violence*
3. *do not use intoxicants*
4. *do not speak lie and*
5. *do not indulge in corrupt practices.*

These teachings are common to the social conduct ordained by almost all religions. Therefore, Buddhism was more a social than a religious resolution.

BUDHIST SANGHA

The Buddha had two kinds of disciples

- ❑ monks (bikkus) and
- ❑ lay worshippers (upasikas).

The former were organized into the Sangha. The membership of the Sangha was open to all persons, male or female, above fifteen years of age. There were no caste restrictions. Buddhist Sangha was a liberal organization. All the members of the Sangha had equal rights and Gautama Buddha did not appoint anybody as his successor. The process of admission to Sangha was called '*Upasampada*'.



BUDDHIST COUNCILS

Shortly after the Buddha's death the *first Buddhist Council* was held in 483 A.D. at Rajagriha.

- purpose was to maintain the purity of the teachings of the Buddha. Ajatasatru was the king of Magadha at that time.
- Attended by 500 monks and presided over by Mahakasyapa.
- The conference compiled Vinaya pitak and Sutta pitak.

A century later a dispute arose regarding the code of discipline as the monks of Vaishali wanted a relaxation of rules.

BUDDHIST COUNCILS

A Second Council was convened

- in or about 383 A.D. at Vaisali (Bihar). Kalasoka was the ruler at that time.
- Was presided over by *Sabakami*.
- Mahakachchayan and his followers refused to accept any change in Vinaya pitak. They were called *Theravadin*. Those who accepted the changes were led by Mahakasyapa and called *Mahasamghika*.



BUDDHIST COUNCILS

The Third Council was held at **Pataliputra** during the reign of Ashoka in 250 AD.

- under the chairmanship of a learned monk ***Moggaliputta Tissa*** to revise the scriptures.
- The conference was dominated by Theravadins.
- The main achievements were to compile a third pitak i.e. ***Abhidamma pitak*** and to decide to propagate Buddhism outside India.
- The canonical literature was precisely, definitely and authoritatively settled so as to eliminate all disruptive tendencies, making any division within the Sangha punishable.

BUDDHIST COUNCILS

The Fourth Council was held in the first or second century A.D.

- During the reign of Kanishka at Kundalavana in Kashmir.
- Presided over by Vasumitra.
- This conference led to the *division of Buddhism* into two broad sects namely the *Mahayana and the Hinayana*.
- The followers of *Mahayana sect* believed in Bodhisatvas. They worshipped the idols of Buddha and Bodhisatvas and used Sanskrit as medium of writing. It was a popular sect.
- The followers of *Hinayana sect* wanted to maintain the original purity of Buddha's teachings. This sect was popular in Magadha, Srilanka and Burma.



Spread of Buddhism

Buddhism made phenomenal progress as a popular religion not only in India but even outside it. There are a *number of factors* which helped in this progress and growth.

- The overwhelming support extended by the unprivileged, who formed the bulk of the population in those days made Buddhism very popular within a record time.
- Personality and character of Gautama Buddha was a key factor in making Buddhism popular. His rationalism appealed to the mind of intellectuals. His morals and simple living touched the heart and imagination of common folk.
- Buddhism made rapid progress in North India even during Buddha's life time. Magadha, Kosala, Kausambi, and several republican states of North India embraced Buddhism.



Spread of Buddhism

- About two hundred years after the death of Buddha, the famous Mauryan emperor Ashoka embraced Buddhism.
- After the third Buddhist Council Ashoka launched a vigorous campaign to preach and propagate the message of the Buddha and sent missionaries to various parts of India and the neighbouring countries. Through his Buddhist missionary, his effort spread into West Asia and Ceylon.
- Thus a local religious sect was transformed into a world religion. After the death of Ashoka, the Kushan king, Kanishka and Harshavardhana patronized Buddhism.



Spread of Buddhism

It was due to these efforts that Buddhism made had considerable influence in South East Asia, the Far East and Central Asia. It may be stated here that though Buddhism disappeared from the land of its birth, it continued to hold ground in the countries of South East Asia and Far East. A number of illustrious saints like *Asvaghosha, Nagarjuna, Sanga, Vasubandhu, Buddhaghosa etc.*, made an immense contribution to Buddhist philosophy and religion.



Causes of decline of Buddhism

After the death of Harshavardhana, Buddhism started losing its popularity and finally disappeared even from the land of its birth. Several factors were responsible for it.

- ❖ Buddhism, in the beginning, was inspired by the spirit of reform. Gradually it succumbed to the rituals and ceremonies which initially were it attacked and denounced.
- ❖ After the birth of Mahayanism, the practice of idol worship and making of offerings led to the deterioration of moral standards.
- ❖ Pali language was used for writing the canonical literature and for preaching the gospel of the religion. Hence it maintained close touch with the masses. Gradually the Buddhist monk gave up Pali and Prakrit and took to Sanskrit. This created distance between Buddhism and common people.



Causes of decline of Buddhism

- ❖ The kings and wealthy people offered generous gifts and grants in the form of cash and kind for the maintenance of viharas, stupas and Chaityas. This developed laziness and transparent pleasures amongst the Buddhist monks and nuns. Thus the Buddhist monasteries lost its purity and became centres for unethical practices.
- ❖ The revival of Brahmanism and the rise of Bhagavatism led to the fall of the popularity of Buddhism.
- ❖ Due to moral degeneration in the Buddhist Sangha and the revival of Brahmanism, many kings supported the cause of Brahmanism. The lack of royal patronage had a telling effect on the moral and material strength of Buddhism.



Causes of decline of Buddhism

- ❖ Brahmanas, to meet the Buddhist challenge, radically reformed their religion and won the hearts of the common people. This paved the way for the emergence of Bhagavatism which represented a synthesis of orthodox and heterodox religions.
- ❖ Moreover, the attack of the Huns (in 5th and 6th centuries) and the Turkish invaders (in 12th century) destroyed the monasteries.

Thus, Buddhism, by 12th century A.D., practically disappeared from the land of its birth.

CONTRIBUTION OF BUDDHISM TO INDIAN CULTURE

Buddhism had made a remarkable contribution to the development of Indian Culture. The progress of Buddhism exercised considerable influence in shaping various aspects of Indian life viz., social, religious, cultural and political.

- The concept of Ahimsa was its chief contribution. It became one of the cherished values of India. The doctrine of Ahimsa, so strongly stressed and devoutly preached and sincerely practiced by the Buddhists was incorporated bodily in their teachings by the Brahmins of later days.
- With its emphasis on non-violence and the sanctity of animal life, Buddhism boosted the cattle wealth of the country.

CONTRIBUTION OF BUDDHISM TO INDIAN CULTURE

- The brahmanical insistence on the fairness of the cow and non-violence was apparently derived from Buddhist teachings.
- The practice of worshipping personal gods, making their images and erecting temples in their honour was adopted by the Hindus.
- The principle of non-violence attracted large number of traders and artisans as trade and commerce flourish in peaceful conditions. Further money lending and commercial transactions were never considered as taboo by Buddhism. This helped in the development of trade and commerce and emergence of cities and towns.

CONTRIBUTION OF BUDDHISM TO INDIAN CULTURE

- Buddhism made substantial contribution to learning and education.
- Buddhism created and developed a new awakening in the field of intellect and culture. The use of *Pali and Prakrit* for preaching the doctrines and for the compilation of Buddhist literature enormously enriched those languages.
- Some of the *Buddhist monasteries like Nalanda and Vikramasila in Bihar and Vallabhi in Gujarat were developed* as great centers of learning and attracted students from different parts of the world.
- Buddhism made an important impact on society by keeping its doors open to all.

CONTRIBUTION OF BUDDHISM TO INDIAN CULTURE

- Buddhism contributed a lot in the *promotion of architecture, art and painting.*
- The first human statues worshipped in India were probably those of the Buddha. The faithful devotees portrayed the various events in the life of Buddha in stone.
- The stupas at Sanchi, Barhut, Gaya and Amaravati, the stone pillars of Ashoka and the cave temples of Kanheri, Karle and Nasik were considered the *best specimens of Buddhist art.* The stupa at Sanchi is world renowned for its gateways and railings which are profusely covered with sculpture. For the residence of the monks, rooms were hewn out of the rocks and thus began the cave architecture in Barabar hills in Gaya and western India around Nasik.

CONTRIBUTION OF BUDDHISM TO INDIAN CULTURE

- Buddhism took credit for the *Chaityas and Viharas* in different parts of India. The world famous Ajanta paintings were mainly the work of the Buddhist painters. Most of the paintings illustrate the incidents that occurred in the previous lives of Buddha and also graphically described in the Buddhist *Jatakas*.
- The Greek and Indian sculptors worked together to create a new kind of art on the north-west frontier of India, which is known as the *Gandhara Art*. The images made in this region betray Indian as well as foreign influence. Buddhism broke the isolation of India and established an intimate contact between Indian and foreign countries. Indian culture and civilization



CONTRIBUTION OF BUDDHISM TO INDIAN CULTURE

was carried by the Buddhist missionaries into China, Mongolia, Korea, Japan, Burma, Java, Sumatra and other countries from the time of Ashoka.



Summary

It may be stated that the emergence of Jainism and Buddhism exerted valuable influence on religion, society, economy, etc. But the contribution made by these heterodox religions on learning and education, art, architecture and painting was everlasting. In fact these religions enriched the Indian Culture as a whole.