

INRODUCTION

From 600 B.C. to 400 B.C. there was a lot common in the Indian subcontinent in the political, social, religious and cultural life of India. From the study of the Upanishads, Jainism and Buddhism we can get a glimpse of these new ideas and movements.

THE UPANISHADS

With the passage of time early vedic religion became not only complex but also very costly because of the introduction of many Religious priests, lengthy yajnas and animal sacrifices.

As a reaction, the new ideas of good actions, pure and simple life, developed slowly but steadily. We find an echo of these ideas in the Upanishads and the new faith of Jainism and Buddhism.

The Upanishads, which are actually a part of the Vedic literature, lay emphasis on simple life and true actions.

There are about 300 Upanishads but the most famous among them are Isa, Katha, Taittiriya, Aitareya, Chandogya, Brahadaranyaka etc.

These Upanishads are the source of Indian philosophy. They are an endeavour to explain numerous mysteries of life, to know about the relationship between the soul and the creator and to elucidate the theories of the Karma (Action), Maya (Illusion) and Mukti (Salvation) etc. Shahjahan's eldest son, Dara, was so impressed by the philosophy of Upanishads that he got 50 of them translated into his own language. He was a great admirer of the philosophy of the Upanishads. Prof. Max Mueller, a renowned scholar, affirmed it in these words : "The Upanishads will always maintain a place in the literature of the world, among the most astounding production of the human mind in any country and in any age."

Causes of the Rise of Jain Buddhism

Early religion of the Aryans was very simple both to understand and to practise. But gradually it became quite complex.

Religious practices had become not only complex but also very costly. The introduction of animal sacrifice in the yajnas further alienated the people. They craved for a simple religion devoid of high expenses and animal sacrifice.

Sanskrit, the language of the Vedic texts, was now no longer within the comprehension of the common people.

The simple varna system had degenerated into a rigid caste system. The high-caste Hindu developed hatred for the low-caste people, most of whom were branded as Shudras or untouchables who were subjected to abject humiliation, suffering and misery.

It was during this period of religious degeneration and social persecution of the common people that two great teachers, Mahavira Vardhamana and Gautama the Buddha, preached to them the path of love, kindness and piety. They denounced the rigidity of the caste system and condemned the practice of untouchability.

Mahavira's early teachings were in oral form known as Purvas and Angas.

JAINISM

Life of Mahavira

Vardhamana, popularly known as Mahavira, is generally regarded as the founder of Jainism in India. According to the Jains, Mahavira was the twenty fourth and the last Tirthankara (or saint with divine power of granting salvation to his disciples). Their first Tirthankara was Rishabhadeva and the twenty third Tirthankara was Parshvanath, the son of king Ashvasena of Benaras. But it was Mahavira who is generally regarded as the real founder of Jainism. About his early life, however, much Information is not available. He was born In the 6th century B.C. at Kundagram, near Vaishali (in modern Bihar). His father's name was Siddhartha who was the head of his Kshatriya tribe, Janatrika. His mother, Trishla, was the sister of the famous Lichchhavi chieftain, Chetaka, whose daughter was married to Bimbisara, the renowned king of Magadha. Thus, Vardhamana belonged to a high aristocratic family. He led the life of an ordinary householder up to thirty years. He married a princess named Yashoda and had a daughter. But at the age of thirty, he left his house and became an ascetic. For twelve years, he wandered from place to place in search of the true knowledge.

His patience and meditation bore fruit when, at the age of forty-two, he acquired the highest knowledge (Kevalyajnana), and began to be known as Mahavira (i.e., the conqueror). The rest of his life about thirty years, was spent in roaming about from place to place, spreading the new faith, popularly known as Jainism. During his life time, this new faith had spread over a vast region including Magadha, Anga, Mithila and Kosala. At the age of seventy-two, he breathed his last at Pava (or Pavapuri) near Rajgriha. At that time, the number of his disciples had reached over 14,000.

Teachings of Mahavira

* **Follow the Triratnas-Three Jewels.**

- Right Faith
- Right Conduct
- Right Knowledge

* **Take the vows of**

- Ahimsa or non-violence
- Not telling a lie
- Not stealing
- Not acquiring property
- Observing Brahmacharya

MAIN TEACHINGS OF JAINISM

What Mahavira taught formed the teachings of Jainism. These are the following

Ahimsa: The first and foremost principle of Jainism was Ahimsa or non-injury to anyone. This principle was against the rising number of animal sacrifices in the yajnas.

Severe Penance and Self Uplift: Jainism believed in curbing one's desires and impulses by undertaking severe penance. To die doing penance was considered as a great virtue.

No Faith in Yajnas, Sacrifice Ritualism: Jainism was a sort of revolt against the superiority of the Brahmins and their yajnas, sacrifices and useless rituals.

Worship of Twenty-Four Tirthankaras: Instead of respecting the Brahmins and worshipping their gods, the Jains began to worship their own Tirthankaras.

No Faith in God: Mahavira did not believe in the existence of God, the creator and preserver of the universe.

No Faith in the Caste-System: Jainism strikes a deadly blow at the caste-system and all sorts of class distinctions. It preaches the equality of human beings. A Jain monk Bhadrabahu founded the Digambara Sect.

Attainment of Salvation: The Jains like the Hindus believe that the chief aim of man is to attain salvation (Moksha) or freedom from the cycles of birth and rebirth.

This salvation can be achieved by following the Three Jewels (or Triratnas) of right faith, right knowledge and right conduct.

Next Life and the Karma Theory: The Jains too, like the Hindus and the Buddhists, believe in next life and transmigration of soul.

About two centuries after Mahavira's death, the Jains were divided into two sects -(i) The Digambaras or the orthodox followers of Mahavira who preferred to lead a life of self-torture and remained naked, and (ii) the Shvetambaras or the followers of Bhadrabahu who wore white dress.

Shvetambaras wear white clothes and cover their mouths with a piece of white cloth to avoid breathing in even the tiniest of insect.

At one time, Jainism became one of the most popular religions. Some kings also followed the teachings of Mahavira. They also built some beautiful temples, one of which is the famous Dilwara Temple at Mount Abu and another at Palitana, Shatrunjaya Hill (Gujarat).

BUDDHISM

Like Mahavira, Lord Buddha also led a revolt against the evil practices that had become part of the Hindu religion. But unlike Mahavira, he followed the 'Middle Path'.

Life of the Buddha: Lord Buddha also came from a royal family. His father, Shuddhodana, was the King of Kapilvastu. Buddha was born in the 6th century B.C. at a place called the Lumbini Garden, when his mother, Mahamaya, was returning from her mother's house. She died when the prince was hardly seven days old.

It is said that Siddhartha (that was the real name of Buddha) took no interest in worldly affairs and spent long hours in meditation. Therefore, his royal father, who wanted to divert his attention to the material joys of the world, arranged the marriage with a beautiful princess, Yashodhara. Siddhartha was then only 19 years old. A son was also born to them. They named him Rahul.

The Great Renunciation: All comforts of palace-life and the joys of material bliss could not affect the prince much. One day, driving with his chariofer, Channa, he came across a sick man then an old man with his back bent, and still another day, he saw the agony of death. All these sights made him sad and he clamoured to find the means for salvation. He felt like a bird in a cage. So, one night when his wife was asleep, he slipped away from his royal bedroom and renounced the world. He was then only 29 years old. This event is called as 'the Great Renunciation'.

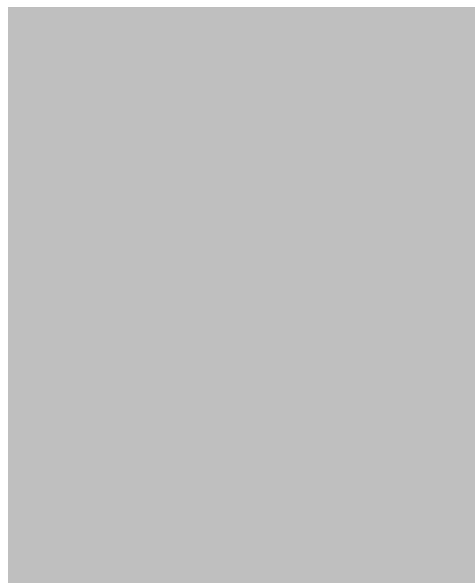
Attainment of Higher Knowledge -Leaving his home, he reached Rajgriha, the capital of Magadha, and became a disciple of the two distinguished teachers of his time -Alara Kalama and Uddaka Ramaputta. Getting no solace from them, he left them and practised the severest austerity and penance in the Urvula jungles near Gaya for six continuous years. He reduced himself to a mere skeleton. He would have collapsed had not a girl offered him a glass of milk. At last, thinking that mere sufferings and sacrifices could not lead him to truth, he left that path. One night when he was sitting under a pipal tree, true light dawned on him and he became the Buddha, or the Enlightened One. This happened at Bodhi Gaya in Bihar when he was 35 years of age. On the site where Buddha got the enlightenment, now stands the Mahabodhi Temple, the centre of attraction for the world.

Confucius lived in the period of 551 -479 BC. He was a Chinese philosopher.

Preaching Work: Buddha delivered his first sermon in the 'Deer Park', Sarnath, near Benaras and converted five disciples to Buddhism. This very event is known as "Dharma Chakra Pravartana" or "Turning of the Wheel of Law" in the history of Buddhism. The rest of his life, about 45 years, Buddha spent in preaching his religion, moving from one part of the country to another. He visited Kapilvastu where his father, son, relatives and many people became his disciples. A large number of people of Magadha and Kosala, including their rulers also, embraced Buddhisms, and in this way, Buddhism began to gain popularity with a rapid speed. He also laid the foundation of the Buddhist Sangha or 'Order of the Bhikshus' which did commendable work in popularising Buddhism.

- The world is full of misery and sorrow.
- The main cause of this misery and sorrow is desire.
- Misery and sorrow can be ended by killing the desire.
- This desire can be killed by following the eight-fold path.

Buddha breathed his last in about 483 B.C. at Kushinagar.



TEACHINGS OF LORD BUDDHA

Four Noble Truths and Eight-Fold Path: According to Buddha, there are Four Noble Truths :

- (i) This world is full of misery and sorrow.
- (ii) The main cause of all this misery and sorrow is desire.
- (iii) Misery and sorrow can be ended by killing the desire.
- (iv) This desire can be suppressed or killed by following the Eight-fold Path.

The Eight-fold Path, which every Buddhist is expected to follow, consists of the following eight principles which were based on high morals and righteous conduct:

(1) Right Belief, (2) Right Thought, (3) Right Speech, (4) Right Action, (5) Right Living, (6) Right Effort, (7) Right Recollection, (8) Right Meditation.

This path is sometimes called the Middle Path because Buddha hated both the extremes—the dogmatic and worldly life of the Brahmanas, and the grim austerity of the Jains. He avoided the extremes and followed the middle path.

Ahimsa -Like Mahavira, Buddha laid great emphasis on Ahimsa or non-injury to animals.

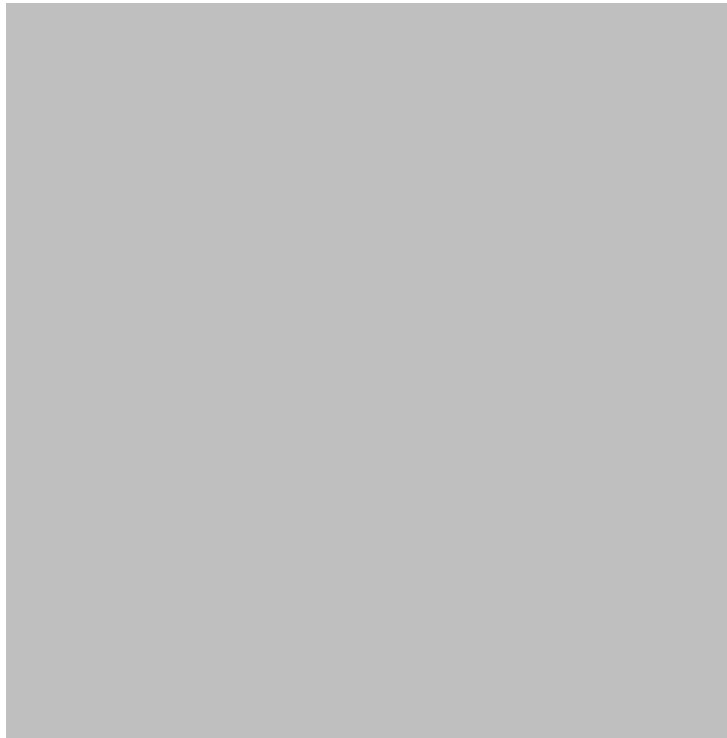
Nirvana -According to Buddha, the chief aim of man's life should be the attainment of Nirvana or the 'Ultimate Salvation', which can be achieved only by following the eight-fold path of virtuous living.

Faith in the Theory of Karma-Like the Hindus and Jains, the Buddha too believed in the theory of Karma. He said that everybody has to reap the fruits of the seeds he has sown.

No Faith in Yajnas, Sacrifices and Ritualism -Like Mahavira, Buddha had no faith in yajnas and costly sacrifices where animals were sacrificed in large numbers.

No faith in the Caste-System -He had no faith in the caste system and treated all men as equal. He embraced even the humblest among the low-caste into his fold.

Silence over the Existence of God -The Buddha was silent over the existence of God as he wanted to keep his new faith above controversy.



THE SANGHA

Both Mahavira and the Buddha held the view that those who left their homes could gain the true knowledge. they formed the Sangha, or an association for those who had left their homes.

The rules for the Buddhaist Sangha were compiled in a book called the Vinaya Pitaka. From this we come to know that the Buddha has two kinds of disciples monks (Bhikshus) and lay worshippers (Upasikas). The former were organised in Sanghas to popularise Buddhism and spread its teachings among the people in simple language. The Sanghas were organised on scientific and democratic lines. In the begining, only men were admitted to them but, later on, their doors were opened for women also. they led a life of purity, chastity, devotion, simplicity, austerity and celibacy. The Sangha had framed rules to enforce discipline among its members. The Budhist Sangha and the monks and nuns proved a powerful means for spreading Buddhiiism in all corners of India. During the reign of Ashoka and Kanishka, they helped to spread Buddhism in foreign countries also.

THE MONASTERIES

The permanent shelters of the monks, both Jain and Buddhists were known as monasteries or viharas. The land for these monasteries were donated by the rich people or the kings. The local people offered food, clothings etc. to the monks and the nuns. In return they taught the poeple.

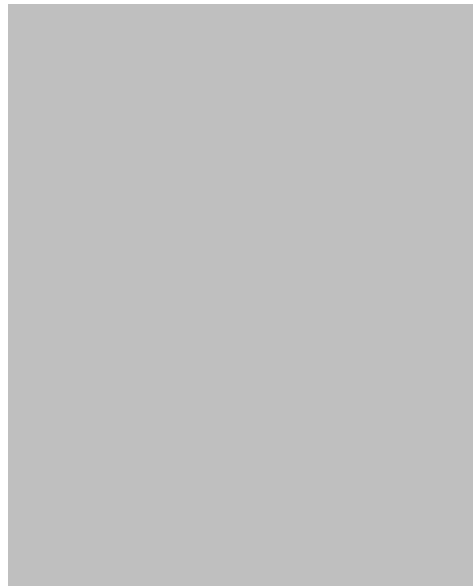
Some of these monasteries developed into great seats of learning. They imparted training in the Hindu philosophy, the Buddhist religion and logic. Even the lay people could come to receive education there and also get the help of learned scholars in solving their problems. These monasteries also did social service and undertook many activites for the welfare of the general public.

EDUCATION IN ASHRAMAS

Great importance was attached to education. Brahman gurus imparted education in the Asharams. The Gurukul system was quite popular in ancient India.

Some Ashramas were just like modern universities where higher education was also given.

They were generally situated far away from the populated areas. These Ashramas worked under the guidance of a Rishi who was famous for his learning and knowledge. An Ashrama had various subjects like logic, religion, politics, economics, music and archery, etc. The Ashramas were non-Buddhist.



SPREAD OF BUDDHISM AND ITS CAUSES

Buddhism, being a very simple religion, spread rapidly not only in India but also in several other countries. It became a popular religion with the people of Sri-Lanka. Tibet, China, Japan, Burma, Thailand, Indochina and other countreis in East and South-East Asia.

Some of the causes that led to the popularity of Buddhism in India and other countries were given below:

1. It was a simple religion as it laid no stress on useless rituals and costly sacrifices.
2. The Buddha and his monks preached in the simple language of the people which everybody could easily understand.
3. Buddhism did not believe in the practice of dividing the people into high and low castes. It preached equality of all men.
4. The ancient Indian universities of Taxila, Nalanda and Vikramashila became great seats of Buddhist learning. Scholars from India and abroad came there not only to learn but also to supplement the knowledge of others.
5. Above all, the Royal patronage that Buddhism was able to acquire in India and abroad, made it popular. In India, kings like Ashoka, Kanishka and Harsha did a great job in carrying the message of the Buddha to other places.

DECLINE OF BUDDHISM IN INDIA

Gradually, some evil practices crept into the religion of the Buddha as well.

1. With the passage of time, the Buddhist monks accumulated wealth and began to lead to degenerated life.
2. The split in Buddhism - Hinayanism and Mahayanism also had an evil effect.
3. Vedic Hinduism also tried to rid itself of its weaknesses and ultimately there was a strong revival of the Vedantic Hinduism under the leadership of Adi Shankaracharya, who established the supremacy of the old Vedic religion in India. It happened during the age of the Imperial Guptas, that is, between the 4th and the 6th centuries.
5. Later on, the rise of the Rajputs, coupled with the Huna invasions, also led to its fall.
Zoroaster the founder of Zoroastrianism lived in around 600 B.C.

BUDDHISM AND JAINISM: A COMPARISON

Points of Similarity: Both Buddhism and Jainism were reform movements. They were started to reform the Hindu religion. Both were in favour of Ahimsa or noninjury to animals. Both condemned the caste-system and were against the Vedas and Sanskrit. Both of them challenged the superiority of the Brahmins.

Points of Difference: While the Buddha was silent about the existence of God, Mahavira denied his existence. While Jainism laid much stress on hard penance, Buddhism followed the Middle Path. Buddhism does not believe in remaining naked as some of the followers of Jainism believe.

Effects and Contribution of Buddhism

Buddhism influenced almost every aspect of Indian life. It promoted the feeling of peace and many projects for the welfare of the people were undertaken. By opposing the rigidity of the caste system, it promoted the feelings of unity and brotherhood. In the cultural field, Buddhism contributed the most: Many beautiful temples, Stupas, Viharas and Chaityas were built. For the first time, the life-size statues of any deity, i.e., the Buddha, were made and worshipped in India. The Buddhist monasteries became great centres of learning. Buddhism encouraged the common languages of the people like Pali and Prakrit.

In one field, however, Buddhism proved harmful. It killed the martial spirit of the people and thus brought slavery to India.