

JAINISM AND BUDDHISM

CAUSES RESPONSIBLE FOR THE RISE OF JAINISM AND BUDDHISM

The following were the chief causes for the origin of the two religious sects- Jainism and Buddhism, in India in the 6th century B.C.

1. **Rigidity and Ritualism in Hinduism:** Early religion of the Aryans was very simple both to understand and to practice but gradually it became quite complex. The universal truth vanished giving place to empty rituals, which were stressed more frequently ignoring the purity of heart and conduct. It was the reason that the people in the 6th century B.C. craved for a simple religion.

2. **Costly Rituals:** The ancient Vedic religion was very simple. However, later on, it became not only highly complex but also costly to observe. Too much importance was now given to sacrifices, which were costly to perform. Therefore, a wave of protest rose against such religious practices.

3. **Animal Sacrifice:** The Yajnas were an unbearable burden on the common people and on the other hand, they felt sore at the introduction of animals sacrifice in such Yajnas. People now craved for a simple religion that preached non-violence.

4. **Faith in Magic and Charms:** The early Vedic religion lost its purity and simplicity and the people began to believe in charms, spells and magic. But many progressive thinkers were not to believe in such practices blindly. They gradually lost faith in such a religion. They too craved for a simple religion.

5. **Supremacy of the Brahman Priests:** In the beginning, the Rigvedic society was divided into four Varnas based on occupations followed by different sections of the society. Only the learned among them were known as Brahmanas. But later on the Varnas became hereditary and even an idiot born to a Brahman family began to be called a Brahman. The learned among the Kshatriyas challenged the authority of these Brahmanas and opposed their privileges. In this way, they heralded a new religious wave.

6. **Unethical Life of the Priests:** The priests enjoyed special privileges, which they could guard only having a morally pious life. But these priests and guardians of religion had become highly debased as well as spiritually degenerate. As a result, the people began to look down upon them and lost faith in these priests.

7. **Difficult Language:** Most of the scripts (the Vedas, the Upanishds, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata were written in Sanskrit, which was beyond the comprehension of the common man. Even then, they were forced to follow Sanskrit texts while performing religious functions while the common people wanted their own spoken language to be the vehicle for performing the religious rites. Hence, a revolt was simmering against the use of Sanskrit as well. The people wanted a simple language to replace Sanskrit.

8. **The Caste System:** The greater evil in Hinduism was the caste distinctions which was great impediment to the equality of all people. The high caste people hated the low caste people. Even the meanest among the Brahmanas were worshipped and honoured while the noblest scholars among the Sudras were looked down upon with contempt. People could no longer tolerate that a morally degenerate Brahman should be honoured while a saintly Sudra should be treated

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with contempt and insulted at every level. It was therefore natural that people should crave for a caste less religious order.

9. **Endeavors of the Learned Scholars:** The principles of inequality, caste discrimination, rituals and sacrifices were beyond the comprehension of a common man, which he could hardly understand. In such circumstances, people were naturally attracted towards the simple teachings of Mahavira and the Buddha.

LIFE OF MAHAVIRA

Mahavira, whose real name was Vardhamana, was the founder of Jainism. According to the Jaina belief, he was the 24th in the line of Tirthankaras, i.e., the Holy souls of the Divine. According to a popular belief, it was Mahavira who founded Jainism. He was born in 599 B.C. at Kundagram, in Vaishali in modern Bihar. Siddharatha was the name of his father who was the chief of his tribe. At an early age Vardhamana was married to Yashoda who bore him a daughter but having an ascetic bent of mind he left his home and worldly pleasures at the age of 30 and joined the ascetic order (Sanyasin). Therefore, he wandered for 12 years in search of truth and knowledge. At last, he achieved it at the age of 42 and was renamed as 'Mahavira'. He spent the rest of his life in the propagation of Jainism. In his life-time, he had succeeded in spreading this religion to the territories of Videh, Magadha and Anga etc. he attained salvation near Rajgriha at a place called Pava in 527 B.C. at the age of 72. At that time, his followers numbered more than 14,000.

TEACHING OF JAINISM

Mahavira's teachings are considered the specific teachings of Jainism. Following are the main features of these teachings:

1. **Non-Violence:** Non-Violence is the chief feature of his teachings, which forbids teasing, and killing of all animate or inanimate life. That is why the Jain ascetics walk bare-footed and keep a cloth band on their mouths. They also take water after sieving it through a piece of cloth lest some living substance should get destroyed. The Jains see life even in water, air and plants and fire. It all came as a severe reaction to the growing sacrificial rituals in Hinduism.

2. **Severe Penance and Self-Sacrifice:** Jains believe in curbing their desires and impulses by undertaking severe penance. To them it is a virtue even to die of slow starvation during penance.

3. **No faith in God:** Mahavira did not believe in the existence of a Supreme God who is the creator and preserver of the universe.

4. **No Faith Yajnas, Sacrifices and Rituals:** The Jain did not believe in the Yajnas, sacrifices and other rituals preached by the Brahmanas and that is why they discarded them. They had no faith even in the Vedas.

5. **Worshipping Twenty-four Tirthankaras:** In place of the Brahman gods they worshipped their own twenty four Tirthankaras.

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6. **No Faith in the Caste System:** The Jains did not believe in the caste system and inequality among men. To them all people who have faith in the Jain tenets are considered equal.

7. **Salvation:** Like the Hindus, the chief goal of the Jains is the attainment of salvation. They believed that salvation could be attained only by following the three principles called 'Tri Ratnas' (The three Gems) i.e., Righteous Belief, Righteous Knowledge and Righteous Conduct.

8. **Faith in the Cycle of Rebirth and Karma:** Like the Hindus and the Buddhists, the jains also believed in the theory of rebirth. They believed that the form of rebirth is decided by the deeds of a person in this world. That is why they emphasized a pious living and pure conduct.

9. **Emphasis on Morality:** Mahavira preached his followers to lead a pious and noble life. He said that they should keep themselves away from immoral action such as – anger, greed, Jealousy, theft, criticism etc.

INFLUENCE OR EFFECTS OF JAINISM

Jainism influenced greatly the social and political life of India.

(1) **Jainism Emphasized:** The doctrine of non-violence which resulted in the feeling of peace. Even the Kshatriyas gave up their fighting spirit and gradually became weak and peace-loving. As such, they lost their strength to face the invading enemies, which ultimately brought almost the whole country under foreign subjugation. Thus, the doctrines of Jainism did not leave a healthy impact in the political field.

(2) **In the Social Field:** Jainism did a meritorious job by removing the evil of the Varna System or the caste system. The Jains did not believe in inequality among men. Besides their faith in non-violence and doing good to others prompted them with the zeal of service to all.

(3) **In the religious sphere :** Jainism worked to remove several evils prevalent in Hinduism. It saved the people from the cumbersome Yajnas and simplified the complex ideas. It also preached against animal sacrifice. In this way, Hinduism was relieved of several obnoxious influences.

(4) **In the cultural sphere:** Jainism gave us many beautiful books like 'Angas' which are of utmost importance to the historians as they provide them with a true picture of the contemporary society. Besides, the Jains made several beautiful temples, rest-houses and idols etc. In this way, Jainism helped in the promotion of art and architecture.

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LIFE OF GAUTAMA BUDDHA

1. **Early Life:** Gautama Buddha was decidedly the greatest of those saints who took birth in India. Original name of Gautama Buddha was Siddhartha. He was born in Lumbini near Kapilavastu situated in the foothills of Nepal. He was born in 567 BC. Shuddhodana was his father who was the chief of Shakya republic. Kapilavastu was his capital. Mahamaya was the name of his mother. He was only seven years old, when his mother died.

2. **Childhood and Marriage:** Gautama had no inclination towards worldly issues. His father, therefore, in order to develop his taste for worldly matters married him to a beautiful girl Yashodhara at the age of 19. He was blessed with a son named Rahul. But even then, he was least interested in worldly pleasures.

3. **Great Sacrifice:** Shuddhodana made several efforts in order to keep Siddhartha pleased and away from worldly pains. Siddhartha had no mental peace. He began to hate the luxuries of the royal palaces. From time to time, he viewed heart-shaking sights like disease, old age etc. which made him still more restless. He realized that the world was the home of pains. He, therefore, resolved to get rid of them. So one night he left home in search of knowledge, sacrificing all the worldly pleasures when his wife and son were fast asleep. He was about 29 years old then (537 BC). The followers of Buddhism call this happening as 'Mahabhinishkraman' or 'Great Sacrifice'.

4. **Attainment of Knowledge:** After leaving home, Siddhartha went to Rajgriha, the capital of Magadha. There he sought knowledge from two Brahmins named Alar and Udrak. But he could seek no mental peace. Then he left for the jungles of Urvula. There he meditated for a period of 6 years. As a result, this body was reduced to a skeleton. He now realized that fasting and hard penance were useless. He, therefore, gave up this path. Now he seated himself beneath a papal tree in Bodhi Gaya¹. He attained knowledge after 48 hours of strict penance and was called Buddha. He was 35 years old then.

5. **Religious Propagation:** After attaining knowledge, Buddha delivered his first sermon at Sarnath. Then he wandered about in the kingdoms of Magadha and Kaushal and spread his religious views. Impressed with his influential personality and sweet voice, many people became his followers soon. He also went to Kapilavastu, where his father, wife, son and all the relatives embraced his religion.

Attainment of Nirvana: He propagated his religion laboriously for a period of 45 years. About 487 BC at Kusinagar in the district of Gorakhpur, he left this world on Purnima of Baisakh at the age of 80.

TEACHING OF BUDDHA

Following were the main teaching of the Buddha:

1. **Four Noble Truths and Eight-Fold Path.** The four noble Truths preached by Buddha were:-
 - a) This world is full of sorrows.
 - b) Desires are main cause of these sorrows.

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- c) One can get rid of these sorrows by killing desires.
- d) The desires can be killed only by following the *Eight-fold Path*, which consisted of the following principles:
 - a) Right Belief
 - b) Right Thought
 - c) Right Speech
 - d) Right Action
 - e) Right Living
 - f) Right Recollection
 - g) Right meditation

This path is also called the 'Middle Path' as Buddha on the one side condemned the life of pleasures as practiced by the Brahman priests while on the other side he opposed the life of severe penance as preached by the Jains. Hence, he preached a middle path of righteous living.

2. **Non-Violence:** Like Mahavira, Buddha too, laid a great stress on non-violence towards all living beings. He believed that men should neither kill nor tease animals. He preached love for all living beings. But unlike Mahavira he did not extend his concept of non-violence to inanimate objects like plants and stones.

3. **Silence over the Existence of God:** The Buddha was silent about the existence of God. He avoided discussing such phenomenon that would expose his religious ideas to some controversy. He regarded only religion as the supreme power. Buddha wanted to avoid all such controversies in this religion.

4. **No Faith in the Caste System:** Buddha had no faith in the caste distinctions. He opposed the caste system vehemently. He believed that men should be distinguished on the basis of their qualities and not caste.

5. **No Faith in Yajnas, Sacrifices and Rituals:** The Buddha had no faith in Yajnas and the animal sacrifices. He had no faith in the supremacy of the Vedas or the Brahmanas. He regarded it mere ostentation, which was useless for seeking salvation. That is why he opposed all such things and practices.

6. **Nirvana:** According to the Buddha, the chief aim of man's life was to lead a noble life and to attain Nirvana or ultimate salvation. Whether a person is born to a Brahman or a Shudra, he can attain salvation by following the righteous path, this ultimate Bliss or salvation is called 'Nirvana' by the Buddhists. In this state, the soul becomes free from the eternal cycles of life and death.

7. **The Karma Theory:** The Buddha believed in the theory of Karma and Rebirth. He said that it was the eternal law that a man reaps the fruits of this deed. None can escape the consequences of his deeds.

8. **Stress on Righteous Conduct:** The Buddha stressed the importance of a moral living. He paid more attention to the purity of thought, word and deed. His teaching can be summarized as showing kindness to animals, telling the truth, to avoid stealing and immoral living, not to indulge in talking ill of others etc.

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CAUSES THAT LED TO THE SPREAD OF BUDDHISM IN INDIA

Buddhism spread rapidly not only in India but also in other countries such as China, Japan, Burmal (Myanmar), Ceylon etc. Following were the reasons for that:-

1. **Favourable Time:** Buddhism appeared in India at such a time when people earnestly felt the need for religious reforms. People were tired of religious dogman, useless rituals, animals sacrifices, service caste restrictions etc. and were craving desperately for reforms. Therefore, when Buddha raised his voice for religious reforms, people followed and supported him.

2. **Buddha's Personality:** Buddha, the founder of Buddhism was an embodiment of sacrifice, service and truth, which attracted the people. Besides, Buddha was born of a royal family. It also helped him in preaching his new faith.

3. **Simple Teachings:** Buddha's teaching were nothing mystic or highly philosophical. The common people could understand them very easily. Therefore, they were attracted towards it and consequently Buddhism grew rapidly day by day.

4. **Simple Language:** Sanskrit was beyond the comprehension for a common man and they were averse towards it. They could neither speak nor understand it. Therefore, they were attracted towards Buddhism, which was devoid of all such useless rituals and costly sacrifices. They preferred a simple and inexpensive religion.

5. **No Caste System:** The caste system had become quite rigid among the Hindus. The high caste among them looked down upon the low caste, especially the untouchables or Sudras. Therefore the common people, who were already tired of such discriminations were attracted towards Buddhism which regarded all people equal and eligible for 'Nirvana'.

6. **Not a Costly Religion:** The Hindu religion had been burdened with costly rituals and sacrifices. It was impossible for the poor to follow or practice it. Therefore, they were attracted towards it. They could neither speak nor understand it. Therefore, when Buddha preached his religion in their own language, they could easily understand him and consequently they became his followers.

7. **Missionary Religion:** Hinduism was not a missionary religion, nor was an effort ever made to spread it among other people. Against it, Buddhism was a missionary religion and the Bhikshus or Buddhist monks took great pains to spread it among other people. These monks themselves were learned and virtuous. Therefore, their conduct influenced the people who became their followers.

8. **Organization and Role of the Buddhist Sanghas:** The Buddha himself had organized his monks into a systematic order called the Sangha. The Sangha proved of great help in spreading his message of Buddhism. These Sanghas were the seats of learning where plans were made to spread Buddhism in other parts. Decisions were also taken to punish the guilty monks. As these Sanghas carried on their work systematically, the religion of the Buddha flourished rapidly.

9. **Adaptability:** Many Hindus had deserted their old religion to accept the new faith. But it was not easy for them to abandon their gods like Rama, Krishna or

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Indra. Therefore, it was possible that many of them would return to their old faith. But Buddhism too adopted all such practices which were popular with the common people and which they could hardly abandon. As a result, a new sect the Mahayana type of Buddhism came into being. It allowed them to worship their gods while following the teaching of the Buddha. It made Buddhism still more popular.

10. The Buddhist Universities: Besides, the Buddhist universities at Taxila, Gaya and Nalanda etc., took great interest in spreading the religion of the Buddha. Students from far off countries came in these universities to seek education and when they went back they carried with them the religion of the Buddha as well.

11. The State Patronage: The greatest single factor that helped in the rapid spread of Buddhism was the patronage that it received from kings like Ashoka, Kanisha and Harsha who not only became its followers but declared Buddhism as the state religion and left no stone unturned in spreading it far and wide. The Buddhist monks were given all help from the royal treasury and they were given all kinds of facilities. The missionaries were sent not only to various parts of India but to other countries as well. Consequently Buddhism became a world religion and spread in countries like Ceylon, China, Japan and Tibet etc.

CAUSES OF THE DOWNFALL OF BUDDHISM

Buddhism spread rapidly in India and several other countries. Though today it is one of the largest religions of the world, the number of this follower in India is negligible. The causes for this unimaginable change are given below:

1. **Reforms in Hinduism:** When a large scale migration started from Hinduism, the high caste Hindus especially the Brahmins were set to realize their shortcomings. They had also a great urge to keep their existence and identity. They had to reform their beliefs and conduct which soon won them back their lost popularity and respect. It also saved Hinduism from the imminent decline. They also adopted Buddha as one of their Divine incarnation and ahimsa as their doctrine. All such reforms stopped the flow of the common people towards Buddhism and made Hinduism popular once again.

2. **Corruption in the Buddhist Sanghas:** In the beginning, the Bhikshus were men of noble character and only the virtuous were taken in the order as monks. But slowly riches accumulated in the Sanghas and women were taken as nuns. All this change, however, resulted into corruption and the Bhikshus left the idea of service to pursue a life of luxury. Therefore, the people started hating the corrupt monks and abandoned their religion as well.

3. **Split in Buddhism:** For some time the Buddhists worked together with a missionary spirit. But gradually they lost their spirit of togetherness and quarreled among themselves. Soon there grew sixteen sects among them, the Hinayana and the Mahayana being the major ones. These quarrels and differences and jealousies drained the religion of the Buddha of all its sheen.

4. **Idol-worship of the Buddha:** One of the reasons of the popularity of Buddhism was that it opposed idol-worship and blind-faiths. But soon the Buddhists

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themselves began to make the idols of the Buddha and started worshipping him. People thought that if the Buddha was a god, how could he differ from the Hindu gods. Moreover, the Hindus had accepted Buddha as one of their own gods, so there was now little difference between Hinduism and Buddhism. As such Buddhism gradually got merged in Hinduism and after some time, it became extinct in the land of its own birth.

5. **Hindu Philosophy and Use of the Sanskrit Language:** Later Buddhist adopted many doctrines of the Hindu thoughts which made their simple religion quite complex and compound. They also gave up the language of the people and adopted Sanskrit, the scholarly language of the learned which was too difficult to be understood by the masses. The difficult language and the complex rituals ceased to attract the common people any more.

6. **Revival of Hinduism:** During the Gupta Age, Hinduism revived its lost strength. The Brahmanas regained their respect and beautiful temples were built for their gods. Soon Hinduism regained its lost glory. With the Hindu kings at the head, the people too leaned towards Hinduism. As a result, those who had previously deserted Hinduism to embrace Buddhism came back to their own folds.

7. **The Hindu Missionaries:** Many Hindu missionaries made herculean efforts to save Hinduism from impending decay and took it on the road to progress and popularity. In the 8th and 9th centuries, two great scholars Kumaril Bhatt and Sankaracharya preached the Vedic religion and proved the supremacy of Hinduism upon Buddhism. The Buddhist scholars could not face these preachers who refuted their doctrines. As such Buddhism was eliminated from India.

8. **Persecution of the Buddhists and Opposition to the Doctrine of Ahimsa:** After Ashoka the Great, the Mauryan Empire disintegrated and unrest spread in the length and breadth of the country. It added to people's sufferings. The people accused Ashoka and his Ahimsa for this state of affairs and started hating Buddhism. Many rulers like Pushyamantra wreaked vengeance on the Buddhists and tried to stamp them out.

9. **Loss of the Royal Patronage:** After the death of Kanishka, Buddhism lost the royal patronage which was the main factor in its meteoric rise. Especially, during the Gupta Age, Buddhism could not get such a help or patronage, which it had received during the time of Ashoka and Kanishka. The Gupta rulers were Hindus and they did their best to revive and spread Hinduism. Samudra Gupta performed the Ashvamedha. Harsha no doubt took some measure to revive Buddhism but the sudden emergence of the Rajputs robbed Buddhism of this benefit.

10. **Invasions of the Huns:** The Hun invader gave a mortal blow to Buddhism. They were cruel and barbaric people. They not only destroyed the Buddhist monasteries but also massacred them in thousands. As a result, Buddhism was eliminated from the Punjab, the Rajputana and the North-Western Frontier regions.

11. **Rise of the Rajputs:** From the seventh to the 11th centuries, the Rajput rulers were the most powerful in Northern India. The Rajputs were warriors who could never reconcile with the doctrine of ahimsa. When they gained power, the Buddhist

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monks left India to cross into other lands. As such, Buddhists became extinct in India.

12. *The Muslim Invasions:* The Muslim invasions proved the last straw in this respect. During their invasions, they did the greatest damage to the Buddhists by destroying their monasteries. As the Buddhists had no training in warfare, they fell an easy victim to the Muslim swords. Some of them accepted conversion to Islam while other fled to Tibet and Nepal. Thus, Buddhism in India became totally extinct.

EFFECTS OF BUDDHISM ON SOCIAL LIFE

1. The Buddhism brought a change in the food of the people of India. People became vegetarians.
2. Mahatma Buddha was a critic of casteism. As a result, people started living in spirit of brotherhood.
3. People became moralists. They kept away from stealing, telling lies and bad company. Thefts reduced as a result of this. Buddhism promoted the moral standards of the people.
4. Buddhism promoted the feeling of social service in people. Buddhism reduced the superstitions. People began to think logically and reasonably.
5. Buddhism gave rise to a spirit of generosity. People began to give alms to the mendicants generously.

Assignment

Q1. Explain the following terms:

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|--------------|-----------|----------------|-----------------------|---------|
| a) Aryavarta | b) Dvija | c) Tirthankara | d) Nirvana | e) Jina |
| f) Ahimsa | g) Sangha | h) Dhamma | i) Great Renunciation | |

Q2. What similarities and contrast do you find in Jainism and Buddhism?

