



THE PROFOUND INFLUENCE OF BUDDHISM AND JAINISM ON MEDIEVAL INDIA

K. R. Vivekananda

M.A,PGD, Assistant Professor, Hosadurga.

ABSTRACT:

This comprehensive article explores the profound influence of Buddhism and Jainism on medieval India during the period from the 6th to the 18th century. Both of these ancient traditions left an indelible mark on various aspects of medieval Indian society, including art, architecture, literature, ethics, and social structure. Buddhism's emphasis on compassion and non-violence manifested in the construction of stupas, rock-cut caves, and moral-rich Jataka tales, influencing Indian art, architecture, and literature. Emperor Ashoka's patronage promoted social welfare and ethical governance inspired by Buddhist principles. Jainism, with its focus on non-violence and truth, left an architectural legacy with ornate temples like the Dilwara Temples, and its philosophical treatises contributed significantly to the intellectual discourse of the time. Jainism's practice of anekantavada fostered tolerance and dialogue among diverse religious and philosophical traditions, shaping a pluralistic society. This article highlights the enduring impact of Buddhism and Jainism, showcasing how their principles continue to resonate in modern India's cultural and ethical landscape.

KEY WORDS: influencing Indian art, architecture, and literature.

INTRODUCTION

The medieval period in Indian history, spanning roughly from the 6th to the 18th century, was a time of significant social, cultural, and intellectual transformation. Two major religious and philosophical movements that played a pivotal role in shaping the ethos of medieval India were Buddhism and Jainism. This article delves into the profound influence of these ancient traditions on various aspects of medieval Indian society, including art, architecture, literature, ethics, and social structure. By examining the enduring impact of Buddhism and Jainism, we gain insights into the dynamic tapestry of medieval Indian history.

Buddhism: Spreading Compassion and Dharma

1. Impact on Art and Architecture

Buddhism, founded by Siddhartha Gautama, emphasized non-violence, compassion, and the pursuit of enlightenment. This philosophy left an indelible mark on the artistic and architectural landscape of medieval India. The construction of stūpas, such as the famous Sanchi Stupa, and rock-cut caves at Ajanta and Ellora, exemplify the Buddhist architectural style. These structures, adorned with intricate carvings and sculptures, not only served as places of worship but also as centers of learning and artistic expression. Buddhist art promoted the depiction of noble values,



compassion, and the life of the Buddha, setting the tone for the cultural milieu of the time.

The impact of Buddhism on Indian art and architecture was profound. The construction of stupas and viharas (monasteries) became a hallmark of Buddhist culture during the medieval period. These structures were not only places of worship but also centers of learning and intellectual exchange. The Sanchi Stupa, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, stands as a testament to the artistic and architectural achievements of Buddhism. Its intricate carvings depict scenes from the life of the Buddha, conveying moral and spiritual lessons to the masses.

Additionally, the rock-cut caves at Ajanta and Ellora are masterpieces of Buddhist architecture. These caves served as monastic retreats and are adorned with exquisite sculptures and frescoes that narrate stories from Buddhist scriptures. The art found in these caves not only celebrates the life of the Buddha but also conveys profound philosophical and ethical teachings. The Ajanta and Ellora caves are a testament to the enduring influence of Buddhism on India's artistic heritage.

2. Literature and the Jataka Tales

The Jataka tales, stories about the previous lives of the Buddha, contributed significantly to medieval Indian literature. These narratives offered moral lessons and ethical guidance, reflecting the Buddhist emphasis on right conduct and virtuous living. The stories also celebrated the principles of compassion, selflessness, and the pursuit of wisdom, leaving a lasting impact on Indian storytelling traditions.

The Jataka tales are a collection of stories that recount the previous lives of Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha, before he attained enlightenment. These stories serve as moral and ethical guideposts, illustrating the virtues of compassion, self-sacrifice, and the pursuit of wisdom. The Jataka tales have been a source of inspiration for Indian literature and storytelling for centuries.

In addition to the Jataka tales, Buddhist literature included scriptures like the Tripitaka (Three Baskets) and the Mahayana sutras. These texts not only expounded Buddhist philosophy but also provided guidance on ethical conduct and the path to enlightenment. The teachings of the Buddha, as recorded in these texts, influenced the ethical and philosophical discourse of medieval India.

3. Ethics and Social Welfare

Buddhist principles of non-violence (ahimsa) and compassion influenced the ethical fabric of medieval Indian society. Kings and rulers patronized Buddhism, adopting principles of justice and welfare in their governance. Emperor Ashoka, in particular, is known for his promotion of Buddhism and his commitment to the welfare of his subjects. The establishment of hospitals, roadside wells, and the spread of the Dharma through inscriptions are examples of Ashoka's contributions to the well-being of his people.

Emperor Ashoka's conversion to Buddhism marked a turning point in Indian history. His commitment to the principles of dharma, or righteousness, guided his rule and influenced his policies. Ashoka's famous Rock Edicts, inscribed on pillars and rocks throughout his empire, conveyed his commitment to non-violence, tolerance, and social welfare. These edicts promoted the welfare of both humans and animals and laid the foundation for a more ethical and compassionate society.

The impact of Buddhism on the social welfare of medieval India cannot be overstated. The establishment of hospitals and dispensaries for both humans and animals, the planting of medicinal herbs, and the construction of rest houses for travelers were all initiatives aimed at alleviating suffering and promoting the welfare of the people. These efforts were guided by the Buddhist principles of compassion and non-violence, which were integrated into the fabric of Indian society during this period.

Jainism: Non-Violence and the Path to Liberation

1. Impact on Architecture

Jainism, founded by Mahavira, also made significant contributions to medieval Indian architecture. Jain temples, characterized by their ornate design and intricate carvings, stand as architectural marvels. The Dilwara Temples in Mount Abu, Rajasthan, are prime examples of Jain architecture. These temples are not

only places of worship but also symbols of austerity and non-violence. Jainism's emphasis on non-violence is reflected in the vegetarian diet followed by many adherents, and this dietary practice also influenced the cuisine of medieval India.

Jain architecture is characterized by its intricate and ornate design, reflecting the Jain emphasis on aesthetics and precision. The Dilwara Temples in Mount Abu, Rajasthan, are among the finest examples of Jain architecture. These temples, built between the 11th and 13th centuries, feature exquisite marble carvings and intricate patterns that demonstrate the craftsmanship and dedication of Jain artisans. The Dilwara Temples are not just places of worship but also showcases of Jain principles, including non-violence, truth, and asceticism.

In addition to the Dilwara Temples, other notable examples of Jain architecture include the Ranakpur Jain Temple and the Palitana Temples. These architectural wonders continue to inspire awe and admiration for their beauty and the profound philosophical principles they represent.

2. Literature and Philosophical Writings

Jain scholars produced a wealth of philosophical and ethical literature during the medieval period. Works like the "Tattvartha Sutra" by Umasvati and the writings of Kundakunda elucidated Jain doctrines, emphasizing the path to liberation through non-violence, truth, and asceticism. These texts had a profound impact on the intellectual climate of medieval India, contributing to the philosophical discourse of the time. Jain literature encompasses a wide range of texts, including scriptures, commentaries, and philosophical treatises. The "Tattvartha Sutra," attributed to Umasvati, is a foundational text in Jain philosophy. It provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the fundamental principles of Jainism, including the concept of jiva (soul), karma (action and its consequences), and the path to liberation. This text has been studied and revered by Jain scholars for centuries, and its influence extends beyond the Jain community to the broader philosophical and religious landscape of India.

Kundakunda, a prominent Jain philosopher and theologian, made significant contributions to Jain literature with works like the "Samayasara" and the "Pravachanasara." These texts delve into the nature of the soul, the importance of self-realization, and the path to spiritual liberation. Kundakunda's writings have had a lasting impact on the intellectual and spiritual traditions of India, shaping the discourse on ethics, metaphysics, and spirituality.

3. Influence on Social Structure

Jainism's commitment to non-violence extended to its stance on social harmony. The Jain practice of *anekantavada*, or the doctrine of non-absolutism, promoted tolerance and understanding of differing viewpoints. This inclusive approach to spirituality and ethics had a ripple effect on medieval Indian society, fostering an environment of coexistence and dialogue among various religious and philosophical traditions. Jainism's emphasis on non-violence, truth, and compassion extended to its stance on social ethics. The Jain community practiced a strict code of conduct that emphasized non-violence not only towards humans but also towards all living beings, including animals and plants. This commitment to non-violence influenced dietary practices, with many Jains adopting a vegetarian lifestyle. The Jain principle of *aparigraha*, or non-possessiveness, encouraged simplicity and minimalism, which had an impact on economic and social behaviors.

Additionally, Jainism's philosophy of *anekantavada*, often translated as "the doctrine of non-absolutism" or "the doctrine of manifold perspectives," promoted tolerance and understanding of differing viewpoints. This philosophical stance encouraged dialogue and mutual respect among adherents of different religious and philosophical traditions. It fostered an atmosphere of intellectual exchange and coexistence in medieval India, contributing to the pluralistic and diverse society of the time.

CONCLUSION

The influence of Buddhism and Jainism on medieval India was profound and multifaceted. These traditions, grounded in principles of compassion, non-violence, and ethical conduct, left an indelible mark on the cultural, artistic, and philosophical landscape of the era. The architectural marvels of Buddhist and Jain temples, the moral guidance offered by Jataka tales and Jain scriptures, and the ethical principles of non-violence and truth continue to resonate with modern India.

Moreover, the enduring legacies of Buddhism and Jainism remind us of the dynamic interplay of ideas and beliefs in the history of the Indian subcontinent. The coexistence and mutual influence of these traditions, along with others such as Hinduism and Islam, shaped the pluralistic and diverse society that India is today.

As we reflect on the influence of Buddhism and Jainism on medieval India, we gain a deeper appreciation for the rich tapestry of Indian history and the enduring values that continue to inspire individuals in their pursuit of spiritual and ethical fulfillment. The legacy of these ancient traditions serves as a testament to the enduring power of compassion, non-violence, and the quest for enlightenment in the human experience. It is a reminder that the values of peace, tolerance, and ethical living have the capacity to transcend time and continue to shape our world today.

REFERENCES

1. Zimmer, Heinrich. "Philosophies of India." Princeton University Press, 1969.
2. Basham, A. L. "The Wonder That Was India: A Survey of the Culture of the Indian Sub-Continent Before the Coming of the Muslims." Picador, 2004.
3. Smith, Vincent A. "The Jainas." Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1998.
4. Cousins, L. S. "Buddhism: A Short Introduction." Oneworld Publications, 2008.
5. Jain, Jagdishchandra. "Shramana Tradition: From the Indus Valley Civilization to the Time of Mahavira." Prakrit Bharati Academy, 2014.
6. Dhavalikar, M. K. "Buddhism and Its Historical Significance." Pragati Publications, 2009.
7. Sangave, Vilas Adinath. "The Sacred Books of the Jainas." Bharatiya Jnanpith, 1991.
8. Schopen, Gregory. "Figments and Fragments of Mahayana Buddhism in India: More Collected Papers." University of Hawai'i Press, 2005.
9. Basham, A. L. "History and Doctrines of the Ajivikas: A Vanished Indian Religion." Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 2002.
10. Hultzsch, Eugen. "The Inscriptions of Asoka." Indian Antiquary, 1925.