



BUDDHISM: ORIGIN, PHILOSOPHY, SOCIAL IMPACT AND ETERNAL SIGNIFICANCE

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ABSTRACT

The 6th century BC was a golden age of intellectual and religious spirit in the history of human culture. The complex rituals of the Vedic tradition in ancient India, excessive animal sacrifices in yagna-yagadis and the strict Chaturvarna system based on birth, caused severe inequality and religious oppression in society. In such a harsh environment, Buddhism is the most influential philosophy that emerged in the 'Shramana Parampara' to show peace, equality and a simple way of life to the common people.



KEYWORDS: *golden age of intellectual and religious spirit, ancient India*

INTRODUCTION

This religion, founded by Gautama Buddha, rejected superstitions and external pomp and taught the 'Middle Path', which included non-violence, compassion and righteousness. With its democratic thinking, human values and simple principles preached in the language of the common people, 'Pali', Buddhism spread beyond the borders of the Indian subcontinent to China, Japan, Tibet, Sri Lanka and Southeast Asian countries and grew into a global culture. The present research paper comprehensively analyzes the emergence of Buddhism, its philosophical theories, literary, educational and artistic contributions and its timeless relevance.

1. The emergence of Buddhism: Broad historical background

In the 6th century BC, Indian society was facing a period of great transition in the intellectual, political and religious fields. Major changes taking place in the Ganges river basin of North India provided a powerful background for the rise of Buddhism:

Secondary urbanization and political change: Agricultural production increased due to the widespread use of iron. This led to the growth of trade in the Gangetic plain and the emergence of cities like Kaushambi, Sravasti, Varanasi, Rajagriha. 16 great dynasties (e.g. Magadha, Kosala, Vajji) emerged, and the traditional tribal system broke down and centralized kingdoms were established.

• **Discontent with Vedic rituals:** By the late Vedic period, religion was limited to complex yajnas and yagadis. Expensive religious rituals and animal sacrifices were a setback for the agrarian economy. This led to a strong resentment against rituals among the common people.

• **Social inequality and the caste system:** The Chaturvarna system grew very rigid, and the dominance of the Brahmins increased. The growing Vaishya (merchant) class sought social respect commensurate with their economic power. The Kshatriyas began to challenge the Vedic supremacy of the Brahmins. Since Buddhism gave equal opportunities to everyone regardless of caste and creed, the Vaishyas, Kshatriyas and the lower classes were attracted to it.

• **Shramana tradition and ideological revolution:** During this period, the tradition of 'Sramana' (wandering ascetics) began, challenging the traditional Vedic ideas. More than 63 new philosophical schools such as the philosophical ideas of the Upanishads, Jainism and Buddhism began to teach a simple way of life in the language of the common people (Pali, Ardha Magadhi).

Founder of Buddhism: Gautama Buddha (Siddhartha)

The founder of Buddhism was Gautama Buddha. His way of life and path to enlightenment are the strong foundation of Buddhist philosophy.

• **Birth and early life:**

Birth: Born in the 6th century BCE (usually 563 BCE) in the grove of rowan trees in 'Lumbini' in the Terai region of Nepal.

Family and parents: His father was the king of the Sakya Republic, Shuddhodana, and his mother was Mayadevi. His original name was 'Siddhartha'.

Marital life: Married to a princess named Yashodhara. They had a son named 'Rahula'.

• **Great Renunciation (Mahabhi Niskraman):** Despite all the pleasures and luxuries of the palace, Siddhartha was searching for the true meaning of life. Four scenes he saw while walking around the city—an old man, a sick man, a corpse, and a peaceful monk—created a deep sense of detachment in his mind. At the age of 29, he left his wife and child and left the palace in search of truth.

• **Enlightenment (Sambodhi):** After undergoing penance under the gurus Aala Kalama and Rudrak Ramaputra, he was not satisfied and went into self-realization. At the age of 35, he attained enlightenment after 49 days of rigorous meditation under an Ashwattha (Arali) tree on the banks of the Neranjana River in 'Gaya' (present-day Bodh Gaya) in Bihar. From then on, he became known as 'Buddha' (the enlightened one) and 'Shakyamuni'.

• **Turning of the Wheel of Dharma and Final Days:**

First Teaching: After enlightenment, he gave his first teaching to his five disciples (the Panchavargis) in the 'Mrigadava' (deer forest) of 'Sarnath' near Varanasi. This event is known as 'Turning of the Wheel of Dharma'.

Maha Parinirvana: At the age of 80 (around 483 BCE), the Buddha passed away in 'Kushinagar' in Uttar Pradesh. This event is known as 'Maha Parinirvana'.

2. Main Principles and Doctrines

Main Principles and Doctrines of Buddhism

Buddhist philosophy rejects superstition, sacrificial rituals, and harsh physical punishment, and provides the most logical and practical way to end human suffering. Its main tenets can be categorized as follows:

1. The Four Noble Truths (Four Noble Truths) The foundation of the Buddha's entire teachings rests on these four truths:

- **Suffering:** Every experience in the world, including birth, death, illness, old age, separation from loved ones, and not getting what one desires, is suffering.
- **The cause of suffering is craving (craving/lust) and excessive attachment to material things.**

- **The cessation of suffering:** By completely abandoning craving, one can attain liberation from suffering (Nirvana).
- The cessation of suffering is the only path to the cessation of suffering, the 'Eightfold Path'.

2. Ashtanga Marga (Middle Path) The 'Middle Path' is the path of life taught by the Buddha, avoiding both excessive pleasure and severe physical punishment. It consists of 8 important points:

- **Right view:** Correctly understanding the difference between right and wrong.
- **Right resolve:** Selfless thought, free from desire, hatred and violence.
- **Right speech:** Truthful, gentle and non-harmful speech.
- **Right action:** Doing good deeds with non-violence and kindness.
- **Right life:** Living an honest life without injustice or cruelty to animals.
- **Right effort (effort):** Constant effort to suppress evil thoughts and cultivate good thoughts.
- **Right mindfulness:** Constant awareness and vigilance of the body, mind and emotions.
- **Right concentration:** Concentration of the mind and meditation.

3. Major philosophical doctrines

Impermanence (Anicca)

Impermanence is the most important of the three fundamental principles (tilakshana - non-being, non-existence, suffering) of Buddhist philosophy. 'Impermanence' means non-permanent or constantly changing.

The main points of impermanence are:

- **Transience (continuous change):** Nothing in the world, whether physical objects or human thoughts, feelings or bodies, is permanent. It is subject to change every moment. Birth, growth and destruction—these three stages are mandatory for everything.
- **Illusion of constancy:** The water flowing in a river is new every moment, but to us it appears to be the same river. Similarly, the ever-changing world appearing to us as constant is an illusion born of our ignorance.
- **Cause-effect relationship (pratityasamutpada):** No object can stand alone or permanently. As conditions and causes change, the state of an object also changes.
- **The root cause and solution of suffering:** The root cause of human suffering is the attachment to impermanent (non-eternal) objects or relationships, considering them permanent. When a person realizes the truth that everything in the world is impermanent, he becomes free from attachment and attains supreme peace (Nirvana).

Anatta (Anatma)

Anatta is the most unique and revolutionary doctrine of Buddhist philosophy. While the Vedic tradition asserted that the 'soul' is eternal, uncreated and immortal, Gautama Buddha denied that there is any kind of fixed or eternal 'self/soul'.

1. The basic idea of anatma is 'anatma' which means 'no self'. According to Buddhism, what we call 'I', 'mine' or the eternal 'soul' is not really a separate reality. Rather, it is a continuous flow and combination of physical and mental entities.

2. Five Aggregates The human personality or sense of 'I' does not come from a separate self; it is an aggregate of five aggregates (aggregates):

- **Form:** The physical body (the body made up of the five elements).
- **Feeling:** The emotions experienced through the senses (pleasure, sorrow, neutrality).
- **Sanjna:** Recognition or perception (recognition of objects, people, or thoughts).
- **Sanskara:** Mental tendencies and motivations (karmic thoughts such as consciousness, desire, aversion).
- **Vygnna:** Awareness or cognition (the power to gain knowledge through the senses).

These five aggregates are constantly changing. Since none of these are permanent, there is no separate, fixed entity called 'atman' apart from them.

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3. The example of a chariot (Milinda Prashana) Buddhist literature gives the example of a chariot to explain anatmavada. If the parts like wheel, axle, yoke, strap etc. are separated, there is no 'chariot' left. Only when all these parts are combined, it is called a 'chariot'. Similarly, when the five elements are combined, the concept of 'man' or 'individual' arises, but there is no separate thing called 'soul' within it.

4. Anatmavada and Reincarnation If there is no eternal soul, the question arises as to how reincarnation is possible. According to Buddhism, the passage of life is not an eternal soul, but a 'continuous flow of karma'. When one lamp is lit from another, the light continues, but the flame of the first lamp does not go there. Similarly, the series of karma and consciousness of a person leads to the next birth.

5. Relevance and Importance

- **Destruction of Ego:** The ego of 'I', 'mine' is the root of all human suffering, hatred and selfishness. When the truth that there is no self is realized, ego and delusion are destroyed.
- **The path to Nirvana:** Realizing that all things in the world are impermanent and non-self is an important step towards enlightenment and Nirvana.
- **Pratītyasamutpāda (Law of Cause and Effect):** The theory that "there is then; from this arises that arises". No event in the world occurs independently, everything has a root cause.
- **The theory of Karma and Rebirth:** A person's good and bad deeds determine his future and next birth. But what is born here is not an eternal soul, but a continuous stream of karma.
- **Nirvana (Liberation):** Nirvana is the complete destruction of desire, ignorance and ego. It is not just a state obtained after death, but a state of supreme peace that can be achieved while still alive.
- **The Ashtanga Marga (Middle Path):** Right view, Right intention, Right speech, Right action, Right livelihood, Right effort, Right mindfulness, and Right concentration. Buddhism teaches the 'Middle Path', rejecting either extreme austerities or excessive luxury.

• Other important doctrines:

Impermanence: Nothing in the world is permanent, everything is subject to constant change.

Anatmism: There is no eternal soul, personality is the union of the five aggregates.

Pratītyasamutpāda (Pratītyasamutpāda - Dependent Origination)

'Pratītyasamutpāda' is the most central and important doctrine of Buddhist philosophy. It is the 'Law of Causality', which states that every event, object, and experience in the world is not independent, but arises based on another.

1. Basic meaning

• **Pratītyasamutpāda:** Based on or in accordance with one.

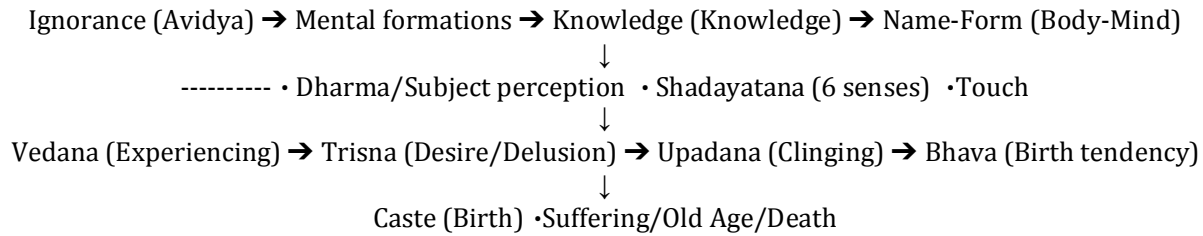
• **Samutpada:** arising or arising.

Basic principle: "When this is, it is; from its arising, it arises. When this is not, it is not; from its annihilation, it is annihilation."

That is, no object or state in this world is created by itself or from nothing. Everything has a cause, and when that cause is destroyed, its function (effect) also ends.

2. The Twelve Links (Wheel of 12 Links)

Buddhist philosophy offers 12 interdependent links (the Twelve Links) to explain the cycle of human samsara and the cycle of suffering:



1. Avidya (Ignorance): Ignorance of the truth (the root of all suffering).
2. Sanskara: Thoughts and actions of previous births.
3. Knowledge: Initial awareness of the new birth.
4. Nama-rupa: The formation of the body and mind in the womb.
5. Shadayatana: The five senses and the mind.
6. Sparsha: The contact of the senses with objects in the external world.
7. Vedana: The experience of pleasure, pain or neutrality caused by sensory contact.
8. Trishna: The intense desire to regain pleasure.
9. Upadana: The tendency to cling to the desired object.
10. Bhava: The karmic tendency that leads to the next birth.
11. Jati: New birth or birth.
12. Jara-marana: Old age, death, mourning and sorrow.

3. Importance of Pratityasamutpada

Effect of Kshetra Pratityasamutpada

Negativity of Ishvara There is no need for any external Lord or God to create the world; the law of cause and effect governs the world.

The negation of the eternal and the transcendental The things are neither completely eternal nor completely void. They are a constantly changing flux.

The path to the cessation of suffering The root cause of suffering is 'avidya' (ignorance). If ignorance is destroyed by enlightenment, the entire chain of suffering can be broken.

"He who knows the pratyasamutpada, he knows the Dharma; he who knows the Dharma, he knows the Buddha." — Gautama Buddha

3. Buddhist Sangha and Literature

Buddhist Sangha: Structure, Discipline and Democratic Function

The 'Sangha' (community) established by the Buddha is the most important factor in the propagation, preservation and institutional strength of Buddhism. It is one of the 'Tri Jewels' (Buddha, Dharma, Sangha) of Buddhism and is considered one of the oldest democratic institutions in the world.

1. Membership and Classification of the Sangha

There were four main divisions in the Sangha (Chaturparishad):

- **Bhikkhus:** having renounced samsara and become full-time

2. Rules and stages of admission

Those who wanted to join the Sangha had to go through two main stages:

- **Pabbajja:** The initial stage of joining the Sangha. The candidate had to shave his head, wear saffron robes and take the 'Trisharan' (Buddham Sharanam Gachaami, Dhammam Sharanam Gachaami, Sangham Sharanam Gachaami).
- **Upasampada:** The final ordination to the priesthood, which was received after completing at least 20 years of age. Official membership was granted after an examination was conducted in the presence of senior monks of the Sangha.

- **Prohibition of entry:** Debtors, soldiers, infectious patients, criminals and minors without parental permission were not allowed to enter the Sangha.

3. Democratic system of governance

The Buddhist Sangha functioned on completely democratic principles without any monopoly:

- **Assembly and Quorum:** Important decisions of the Sangha were taken in the assembly of monks. The presence of a minimum number of members (quorum) was mandatory for the meeting to be valid.
- **Voting (Saleka-Grahapaka):** When there was a difference of opinion on any matter, a secret or open vote was taken. 'Salaka' (wooden sticks) were used to collect votes.
- **Uposatha (Uposatha):** On every new moon and full moon day, all the monks had to gather together and confess openly (Pracitta/Posadha) if they had violated any rule and purify themselves.

4. Rules and Conduct (Vinaya)

The conduct of monks was regulated by the rules recorded in the 'Vinaya Pitaka':

- Monks were allowed to keep only 8 essential items (three pairs of robes, alms bowl, shaving knife, needle, water filter cloth, etc.).
- Pleasures such as eating after noon and using a luxurious bed were prohibited.
- **Varshavasa:** The sister would stop traveling for 4 months during the rainy season and engage in meditation and study in a single monastery.

5. Social and historical significance

- **Caste-gender equality:** It was the first institutional platform in India that gave religious rights to women, from Brahmins to barbers and Chandals, and to men.
- **Development of knowledge centers:** Initially simple dwellings, the 'monasteries' eventually grew into global universities like Nalanda, Takshashila, and Vikramashila.
- **Tripitakas** (original literature in the Pali language):

Vinaya Pitaka: A corpus of discipline and rules

The Vinaya Pitaka is the first of the 'Tripitakas', the original literature of Buddhism. 'Vinaya' means discipline or conduct. It is a comprehensive treatise that describes the daily conduct, religious rules, and administrative framework of the Buddhist order of monks and nuns.

1. Structure and background

- **Codification:** The Vinaya Pitaka was recited by Upali, a direct disciple of the Buddha, at the first Buddhist Sangiti (Great Assembly) held at Rajagriha after the Buddha's great parinirvana (c. 483 BCE).
- **Language:** It is mainly in the Pali language.

2. Three major sections of the Vinaya Pitaka

The Vinaya Pitaka is divided into three major sections according to its content:

- **Sutta Vibhanga:**

It contains the Patimokkha, a collection of rules for the moral discipline of monks and nuns.

It contains a historical account of why and under what circumstances each rule was promulgated by the Buddha.

It contains 227 rules for monks and 311 rules for nuns.

- **Khandhaka:**

Contains the daily routine and organizational rules of the Sangha. It is further divided into two parts:

Mahavagga: Rules for entry into the Sangha (upasampada), the Uposatha assembly, the Varshavasa (rainy season stay), and the rules for the dress and diet of monks.

Chullavagga: Rules for the discipline of the Sangha, the resolution of differences, the description of the first and second Buddhist canons, and the rules for the admission of nuns.

- **Parivara:**

This is the last section of the Vinaya Pitaka. It is a question and answer section on the rules in the previous sections, a summary, and an appendix prepared for study.

3. Major rules and principles

- **Parajika** (great crimes): Four major transgressions—sexual intercourse, theft, murder, and falsely claiming false enlightenment—resulted in permanent expulsion from the Sangha.
- **Prachitta** (minor offenses): Common misconduct could be confessed openly in the assembly and atonement sought.
- **Social conduct:** It gave strict guidelines on how monks should behave in society, including rules for almsgiving and the moderation of material use.

4. Significance The **Vinaya Pitaka** is not just a religious text; it is an excellent example of democratic institutional governance in ancient India. These rules were the primary reason for maintaining order and unity in the Sangha and for the sustainable growth of Buddhism over hundreds of years.

Sutta Pitaka: A repository of the teachings of the Buddha

The Sutta Pitaka is the second and most extensive of the 'Tripitaka' of Buddhism. 'Sutta' (sutra) means teaching or exhortation. It contains the discourses, sermons, and messages given by Gautama Buddha during his 45-year preaching period.

1. Codification and language

- **Recitation:** In the first Buddhist music hall (rajagriha), the Buddha's beloved disciple Ananda recited the Buddha's teachings from memory. Each sutra begins with the phrase "evam me sutam" ("thus I have heard").
- **Language:** Composed in the Pali language.

2. The 5 major Nikayas (divisions) of the Sutta Pitaka

The Sutta Pitaka is divided into five 'Nikayas' according to the size and content of the teachings:

Nikaya form and content

Long Nikaya A collection of 34 long sermons. Describes Buddhist philosophy, political thought, and the final days of the Buddha (around Mahaparinibbana).

Majjhima Nikaya 152 medium-sized teachings. Contains detailed discussions on the Ashtanga path, meditation methods, karma, and rebirth.

Samyukta Nikaya Collection of thousands of short sutras grouped by subject (Four Noble Truths, Anatta, Ashtanga path, etc.).

Anguttara Nikaya Teachings grouped by number (1 to 11). For example: Four Noble Truths, 5 Panchasilas, 8 Ashtanga paths.

Khuddaka Nikaya A separate collection of famous short texts. It is the most popular section of Buddhist literature.

3. Major texts of Khuddaka Nikaya

- **Dhammapada:** A collection of highly moral verses, known as the 'Bhagavad Gita' of Buddhism.
- **Jataka stories:** More than 550 folk tales of Gautama Buddha's early ascetic births (birth as a bodhisattva).
- **Theragatha and Therigatha:** Poems in which senior monks and nuns expressed the joy they experienced when they attained enlightenment (this is also important in the world's ancient women's literature).

4. Significance

The Sutta Pitaka is an excellent historical source for understanding not only religious principles, but also the social, economic, political and cultural situation of India in the 6th century BCE.

Abhidhamma Pitaka: The Higher Philosophy of Buddhist Philosophy

The Abhidhamma Pitaka is the third of the 'Tripitaka' of Buddhist literature. 'Abhidhamma' means 'higher religion' or 'special philosophy'. The general teachings of the Buddha in the Sutta Pitaka are analyzed in this text in a very logical, scientific and psychological way.

The place of the Abhidhamma Pitaka in the Tripitaka literature. Source: BuddhaNet

1. Origin and codification

- **Background:** It was officially codified during the Third Buddhist Council held at Pataliputra (250 BCE) during the reign of Emperor Ashoka, under the presidency of 'Moggaliputta Tissa'.
- **Language and style:** In Pali, it contains no stories or sermons. Instead, there is a strict philosophical and scientific classification.

2. The 7 main texts of the Abhidhamma Pitaka (Sattapakarani)

The Abhidhamma Pitaka is a collection of seven texts in total:

Name of the text	Main contents
Dhammasangani	A comprehensive classification of the mind (citta) and the cetasis (mental states). Vibhanga Chaturarya Satya, Panchaskandhas and Shadayatanas analysis.
Dhatukatha	The intellectual connection between the elements (elements) and the senses.
Puggalapannatti	The nature of individuals and the classification of their stages of spiritual development.
Kathavatthu	A treatise that refutes the differences of the different sects of Buddhism during the Mauryan period and upholds pure Theravada.
Yamaka	Dual questions and answers on Buddhist doctrines and logical analysis.
Pattana	A detailed explanation of the 24 major predicates (relationships) of the cause-effect theory (Pratityasamutpada).

3. Major philosophical analyses

- **Mind and consciousness (Buddhist psychology):** Analyzes mental processes by classifying them into 89 or 121 types of 'minds' and 52 'consciousnesses' (emotions and thought tendencies).
- **Ultimate Reality:** Argues that the 'person' or 'thing' that we see in everyday life is not real, but rather that there are only four ultimate truths: mind (mind), consciousness (emotions), form (body/material), and nirvana.

4. Importance While the Sutta Pitaka is a simple teaching that can be understood by the common people, the Abhidhamma Pitaka is a higher-level psychological and philosophical framework prepared for scholars, philosophers, and serious meditators.

Want to know the difference between the Mahayana and Hinayana schools of Buddhism?

Artistic and educational contributions

Buddhist educational centers and universities in ancient India

World-famous educational institutions (mahaviharas) developed under the auspices of Buddhism in ancient and medieval India. These were not limited to religious instruction, but were international educational centers teaching philosophy, medicine (Ayurveda), astronomy, mathematics, logic, and administration.

1. Nalanda University

- **Location:** Near Rajgir (present-day Rajgir), Bihar.
- **Foundation and royal patronage:** Founded in the 5th century CE by the Gupta emperor Kumaragupta I. Later, Harshavardhana of Kannauj and the Pala kings granted royal patronage.
- **Speciality:**

It was one of the first residential universities in the world, with about 10,000 students and 2,000 professors.

Students from China, Tibet, Korea, Japan, Sri Lanka and Southeast Asian countries came to study here.

Chinese travelers Hiuen Tsang (Xuanzang) and I-Ching studied here for years.

It had a huge library called 'Dharmaganj' (three huge buildings called Ratnasagara, Ratnadadi and Ratna Ranjaka).

Philosophers like Nagarjuna, Aryadeva, Vasubandhu and Dharmapala taught here.

2. Takshashila University (Takshashila / Taxila)

- **Location:** Located in the Rawalpindi district of present-day Punjab province of Pakistan.
- **Background:** An ancient institution that grew as an educational center from the 6th century BC. It was a global cultural center due to its location on the Indus River trade route.
- **Speciality:**

It was famous for both Vedic and Buddhist education.

Chanakya (Kautilya), Maurya emperor Chandragupta, physician Jivaka (Buddha's physician), Prasenaajit and grammarian Panini were educated here.

There are extensive references to the educational center of Takshashila in Buddhist Jataka stories.

3. Vikramashila University

- **Location:** Antichak in Bhagalpur district of Bihar.
- **Establishment:** It was established by the famous Pala king Dharmapala in the late 8th century AD.
- **Speciality:**

It was famous for the study of the 'Vajrayana' (Tantric Buddhism) sect of Buddhism.

This institution, which grew as a challenge to Nalanda University, had more than 100 teachers and thousands of students.

The famous Buddhist scholar Atisha Dipankara (Sri Gyan) was the head here and played a major role in reviving Buddhism in Tibet.

4. Vallabhi University

- **Location:** Located in Bhavnagar district of Saurashtra region of Gujarat (Vallabhipur).
- **Establishment:** It flourished under the patronage of the kings of the 'Maitraka' dynasty from the 6th to the 8th century AD.
- **Speciality:**

It was an important educational center of the Hinayana (Theravada) sect of Buddhism.

It was known for teaching economics, politics, law and commerce along with religious education.

Scholars who graduated here used to get high administrative positions in the royal assemblies.

5. Odantapuri and Jagaddal Universities

- **Odantapuri:** Located in Bihar Sharif, Bihar, it was founded by the Pala king Gopala. It was a model for the construction of Tibetan Buddhist monasteries.

- **Jagaddala:** Founded by the Pala king Ramapala in Bengal (present-day Bangladesh), it was a place of Vajrayana Buddhism.

Educational significance These Buddhist educational institutions were not only centres of religious propagation but also represented the golden age of Indian intellectual heritage, where international exchange of ideas, logical thinking and dissemination of knowledge took place.

Buddhist architecture and art: The development of ancient Indian art

Buddhism introduced a new concept of stone buildings to Indian architecture, sculpture and style. The shift in 1. Major Styles of Buddhist Architecture

- **Stupas:**

Hemispherical monuments built over the relics and sacred remains of the Buddha or his principal disciples.

Main parts: Anda (hemisphere), Harmika (upper platform), Chhatra and decorated 'torana' (gates) on all four sides.

Example: Sanchi Stupa (Madhya Pradesh), Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda Stupas (Andhra Pradesh).

- **Chaityas:**

Prayer halls for Buddhist monks. These are usually rock-cut cave temples with a small stupa at the end.

Example: Karle Chaitya in Maharashtra (the largest Chaitya in India), Bhaja and Ajanta Chaityas.

- **Viharas:**

Monasteries built for Buddhist monks to live and study. There was a courtyard in the middle and small rooms around it.

Example: Nalanda, Sarnath and Kanheri Viharas.

• **Ashokan Pillars:**

Pillars carved from a single stone (monolithic) by the Mauryan Emperor Ashoka to propagate religion.

Example: The Lion Bodhi of Sarnath (which is the national emblem of India).

2. Buddhist Idol Art Styles

With the rise of Mahayana Buddhism, the production of Buddha statues became widespread. Three major art styles developed during the time of Kanishka:

Art Style Key Features Influence

Gandharan Style Use of black and gray stone. Curly hair, physique and Greek-style clothing (similar to the god Apollo). Greco-Roman influence

Mathuran Style Use of red and white speckled sandstone. Buddha with muscular body, pleasant speech, and lotus posture. Completely indigenous/Indian style

Amravati style Use of white marble (limestone). Storytelling art of Buddha's life and horoscopes carved in stone. Indigenous style of South India

3. Buddhist Painting

• **Ajanta and Bagh Caves:** The frescoes in the Ajanta caves of Maharashtra are great examples of world painting.

• **Subject:** Bodhisattva Padmapani, Vajrapani, and scenes of horoscopes are wonderfully depicted using natural colors.

5. Buddhism and Social Equality

In the 6th century BC, Buddhism brought a strong ideological revolution against the harsh social discrimination, caste system, and untouchability in India. It established a respectable place for everyone in society by basing itself on equality, humanity, and compassion.

1. Opposition to Varna and Caste System

• **Rejection of Birth-Based Superiority:** The Buddha completely rejected the birth-based superiority that existed in Vedic society. He taught that a person becomes superior or inferior not because of his birth, but because of his 'karma' (conduct and thought).

• **Equality in the Sangha:** There was no caste barrier to entry into the Buddhist Sangha. "Just as the water of a river loses its individuality when it joins the sea, so everyone is one after joining the Sangha," the Buddha taught. Not only Brahmins, Kshatriyas, and Vaishyas, but also lower castes like the barber Upli and the Chandala Sunita were given high status and respect in the Sangha.

2. Equality of Women and Gender Justice

• **Admission to the Sangha and the Bhikshuni Order:** The door to the Sangha was opened to women at the request of the foster mother Mahapajapati Gautami.

• **Spiritual equality:** It was asserted that women were as worthy and capable of attaining enlightenment and nirvana as men.

• **Therigatha literature:** The Therigatha, a collection of poems composed by enlightened nuns, is the first open evidence of a woman's voice in the world's ancient literature.

3. Preference for the language of the common people (Pali language) At that time, Sanskrit was the language of the upper class or scholars. But the Buddha taught in the language of the common people of the society, 'Pali', to simplify religion and knowledge. Due to this, education and religious knowledge could reach even the lowest person in the society.

4. Upliftment of farmers and laborers

- **Prevention of violence and animal sacrifice:** By prohibiting the sacrifice of animals in expensive sacrifices, the economic interests of farmers and laborers in an agricultural-based society were protected.
- **Respect for merchants (Vaishyas):** It encouraged urban culture and trade, allowing the Shudras and Vaishyas to rise economically and socially.

5. Relevance and Navayana (Ambedkar's contribution) In the modern era, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, influenced by the principles of social equality in Buddhism, embraced Buddhism (Navayana) with millions of followers in 1956. Buddhism continues to be an ideological beacon for the struggle for social and human rights of the oppressed.

Royal patronage and global expansion of Buddhism

The main reason for Buddhism to grow from a small religious movement into a global religion was the encouragement and patronage given by the powerful kings of ancient India. The important emperors adopted Buddhist principles in their administration and made immense contributions to the propagation of religion and the development of culture.

1. Mauryan Emperor Ashoka (3rd century BC)

Ashoka was the most important patron of Buddhism in the history of Buddhism. After the massacre of the Kalinga War, he renounced his arms and embraced Buddhism.

- **Dharma Vijaya:** Instead of 'Digvijaya', which means conquering territory through war, he adopted the path of 'Dharma Vijaya', which means conquering hearts through love and non-violence.
- **3rd Buddhist Council:** In 250 BC, he held the 3rd Great Council under the presidency of 'Moggaliputta Tissa' in his capital Pataliputra and codified the Abhidhamma Pitaka.
- **International Propagation:** He sent religious preachers to various parts of the world. His sons Mahendra and Ashoka from wood to stone construction is first seen in Buddhist art.

2. Kushana King Kanishka (1st-2nd century AD)

Kanishka, a great king of the Kushana dynasty, strongly promoted Buddhism in North India and Central Asia.

- **4th Buddhist Council:** He organized the 4th Buddhist Sangha in Kundalavan in Kashmir under the presidency of 'Vasumitra' (with Ashvaghosa as vice-president).
- **Rise of Mahayana Sect:** In this great council, Buddhism was divided into two major sects, Hinayana and Mahayana. Kanishka gave strict royal patronage to the 'Mahayana' sect.
- **Preaching to Central Asia and China:** Kanishka's rule was the reason why Buddhism reached China, Tibet, Korea and Japan through the Silk Route.
- **Patronage of Arts:** He encouraged the art of Gandhara and Mathura and was responsible for the creation of the first human-shaped images of Buddha.

3. Harshavardhana of Kanauj (7th century AD)

A king of the Vardhana dynasty, Harshavardhana was a strong supporter of Buddhism.

- **Kanauj and Prayag Sabhas:** He organized a huge religious council at Kanauj to discuss Buddhist philosophy. He donated all his wealth to the 'Mahamukha Parishad' held every 5 years at Prayag (Allahabad).
- **Support for Nalanda University:** He donated the revenues of more than 100 villages to the Nalanda educational center, helping it grow into a world-class educational center.
- **Chinese traveler Hiuen Tsang:** He honored the Chinese traveler Hiuen Tsang at the court of Harshavardhana with royal honors.

4. Pala kings of Bengal (8th - 12th century AD)

At a time when Buddhism was declining in North India, the Pala kings of Bengal and Bihar gave Buddhism its last major royal patronage.

Dharmapala and Gopala: The Pala kings promoted the 'Vajrayana' (Tantric Buddhism) sect of Buddhism.

Establishment of universities: Dharmapala founded the Vikramashila University. Gopala built the Odantapuri and Ramapala built the Jagaddal Mahaviharas.

Tibetan Buddhism: Scholars like Atisha Dipankara, who were under the patronage of the Palas, went to Tibet and revived Buddhism there.

The Fruition of Royal Patronage

With the support, financial assistance and embassy of the kings, Buddhism, which was confined to the Gangetic plains, grew into a national religion and global culture not only in the entire Indian subcontinent but also in countries such as Sri Lanka, China, Tibet, Japan, Burma (Myanmar), Thailand and Vietnam.

CONCLUSION

Buddhism is not just a religious sect that arose in the 6th century BCE against the austerity and inequality of Indian society; it is a global way of life of a metropolitan culture that embodies morality, compassion and rational thought. The Four Noble Truths, the Ashtanga Marga, the doctrine of impermanence and the doctrine of anatma, taught by Gautama Buddha, showed a new path for human consciousness and thought.

Buddhism spread from the Gangetic plains across Asia due to the Sangha system, democratic governance, the simplicity of the Pali language and the support of the royal patrons. The global universities like Nalanda and Taxila, the artistic splendors of Sanchi Stupa and Ajanta created a golden age of Indian culture and architecture.

Buddhism has not lost its relevance in the modern era either. Through Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's Navayana movement, Buddhism was revived as a symbol of the human rights of the oppressed. In today's violent, conflict-ridden and mechanized world, Buddhism's 'non-violence', 'compassion' and 'middle path' have always been a beacon for global peace and human coexistence.

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