

STUDY NOTES – Vajrayana, Ajivikas, Sthaviravadins & Mahasanghikas

1. Vajrayana Buddhism

- Also known as Tantric Buddhism or Thunderbolt Vehicle.
- Originated around 7th century CE in Bengal–Bihar region.
- Patronized by Pala dynasty rulers.
- Features: use of mantras, mudras, mandalas, tantra.
- Worship of female deities like Tara.
- Goal: quick enlightenment (Vajra Path).
- Spread: Tibet, Nepal, Bhutan, Mongolia.

2. Ajivikas

- Ancient Shramana sect contemporary of Buddha and Mahavira.
- Founder: Makkhali Gosala.
- Doctrine: Niyati (absolute determinism); no free will.
- Karma plays no role in liberation.
- Patron: Mauryan king Bindusara.
- Declined after Mauryan period.

3. Sthaviravadins (Theravada)

- Means “Doctrine of the Elders.”
- Conservative branch of early Buddhism.
- Buddha viewed as a human teacher, not divine.
- Ideal: Arhat (individual liberation).
- Scriptures: Pali Canon (Tripitaka).
- Spread to Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia.

4. Mahasanghikas

- Liberal branch of early Buddhism.
- Originated after the first schism (4th century BCE).

- Believe Buddha is divine and possesses supernatural powers.
- Precursor to Mahayana Buddhism.
- Centers: Amaravati, Nagarjunakonda (Andhra region).
- Emphasized Bodhisattva ideal.

Comparison Table

- Sthaviravadins: conservative, human Buddha, Arhat ideal.
- Mahasanghikas: liberal, divine Buddha, Bodhisattva ideal.
- Vajrayana: mantra–tantra based, later Buddhism.
- Ajivikas: deterministic non-Buddhist sect.