

Ancient Indian History UPSC CSE

(Prelims + Mains)
Supplementary Study Material

Module 5: Jainism and Buddhism

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Jainism and Buddhism

Causes of Origin

- Kshatriya reaction against the domination of the brahmanas, who claimed various privileges, was one of the causes of the origin of new religions.
- real cause of the rise of these new religions lay in the spread of a new agricultural economy in north-eastern India.

Vardhamana Mahavira and Jainism

- Mahavira had twenty-three predecessors who were called *tirthankaras*. Jainas believe that Rishabhadeve was the first *tirthankara* or teacher of Jainism.
- earliest important teachings of Jainism are attributed to Parshvanatha, the twenty-third *tirthankara*, who hailed from Banaras, abandoned royal life, and became an ascetic.
- It was his spiritual successor Vardhamana Mahavira who was the real founder of Jainism. Mahavira led the life of a householder, but in his quest for truth he abandoned the world at the age of 30 and became an ascetic. At the age of 42 when he attained omniscience (*kaivalya*).
- Through *kaivalya* he conquered misery and happiness. Because of this conquest he is known as Mahavira or the great hero or *jina*, that is, the conqueror, and his followers are known as Jainas.
- He propagated his religion for thirty years, and his mission took him to Koshala, Magadha, Mithila, Champa, and elsewhere. He passed away at the age of 72 in 468 BC at a place called Pavapuri near modern Rajgir. According to another tradition he passed away in 527 BC

Doctrines of Jainism

- Jainism taught five doctrines:
 - ✓ do not commit violence,
 - ✓ do not tell a lie,
 - ✓ do not steal,
 - ✓ do not hoard, and
 - ✓ observe continence (*brahmacharya*).
- In later times, Jainism split into two sects:
 - ✓ *shvetambaras* or those who donned white garments and
 - ✓ *digambaras* who remained naked.
- Jainism principally aims at the attainment of freedom from worldly bonds. No ritual is necessary for such liberation.
- It can be obtained through right knowledge, right faith, and right action. These three are considered to be the three jewels or *triratna* of Jainism.

Two sects in Jains

1. Digambar Jains

2. Shwetambar Jains

- Those who are Achelak (without clothes) or who believes / worships Achelak are Digambers, whereas, those who are Sachelak (with clothes) or who believes in Achelak (Arihants) and Sachelak (Monks) are Shwetambar.
- Some Shwetambar text mentions Tirthankars are Achelak after attaining Kewalgyan (Gyan Kalyanak) whereas, Digambers believe that on taking diksha, monks (sadhus) leave all clothes and possessions.

The differences can be stated as follows -

- The **monks** of Digambar sect do not wear clothes because they believe that salvation can be achieved by relinquishing all materialistic things including clothes. On the other hand, **monks** of Shwetambar sect wear white clothes and believe in achievement of salvation with clothes.
- The Digambar sect **worship the idols** those do not even possess a single piece of thread, whereas, Shwetambar sect **worship the idols** which are decorated with few stuffs like sandalwood paste, jewels, silver leaf etc.
- The **monks and the nuns** of Digambar sect eat (including water) only once a day at one house itself, whereas **monks and the nuns** of Shwetambar sect eat multiple times in a day, after collecting the food from multiple houses.
- Digambar Jains do not accept the **liberation of a woman**, in order to attain liberation, the woman needs to be reborn as a man. On the other hand, **Shwetambar** believe in the liberation of a woman from that birth itself.
- After a soul attains **Kevalgyan (Omniscience)**, **the body doesn't need any food to survive**, according to Digambar sect. On the other hand, according to Shwetambar sect, the body **needs food even after attaining Kevalgyan**.
- According to Digambar sect, **Mahaveera, the 24th Tirthankar didn't get married**, whereas, Shwetambar believe in the **marriage of Mahaveera**.
- According to Digambar Jains, **Mallinath, the 19th Tirthankar was a male**. On the other hand, according to Shwetambar sect, **Tirthankar Mallinath was a female**.
- Digambar monks are allowed to keep only **3 possessions**, which are *pinchi, kamandalu, and shastra*. Shwetambar monks are allowed to keep **14 possessions**.
- There are differences in rituals but the core of Jainism i.e., Ahimsa etc are common and are followed by both.

Spread of Jainism

- In order to spread the teachings of Jainism, Mahavira organized an order of his followers that admitted both men and women. He preached his teachings in Prakrit, the language of the common people.
- According to a late tradition, the spread of Jainism in Karnataka is attributed to Chandragupta Maurya (322– 298 BC). The emperor became a Jaina, gave up his throne, and spent the last years of his life in Karnataka as a Jaina ascetic.
- second cause of the spread of Jainism in south India is said to have been the great famine that took place in Magadha 200 years after Mahavira's death.
- The famine lasted for twelve years, and in order to protect themselves, many Jainas migrated to the south under the leadership of Bhadrabahu, though the rest of them stayed back in Magadha under the leadership of Sthalabahu. the southerners began to be called *digambaras* and the Magadhans *shvetambaras*.
- Jainism spread to Kalinga in Orissa in the fourth century BC, and in the first century BC it enjoyed the patronage of the Kalinga king Kharavela who had defeated the princes of Andhra and Magadha.
- In the second and first centuries BC, it also seems to have reached the southern districts of Tamil Nadu. In later centuries Jainism penetrated Malwa, Gujarat, and Rajasthan

Contribution of Jainism

- The early Jainas discarded the Sanskrit language principally patronized by the brahmanas. They adopted instead Prakrit, the language of the common people to preach their doctrines.
- Their religious literature was written in Ardhamagadhi, and the texts were eventually compiled in the sixth century AD in Gujarat at a place called Valabhi, a great centre of education. The adoption of Prakrit by the Jainas helped the growth of this language and its literature.
- The Jainas composed the earliest important works in Apabhramsha and compiled its first grammar.



- Most famous thinker of the Jainas, Vardhamana Mahavira, also spread his message around this time, i.e. 2500 years ago. He was a *kshatriya* prince of the Lichchhavis, a group that was part of the Vajji *sangha*.
- Prakrit spoken in Magadha was known as Magadhi word Jaina comes from the term Jina, meaning conqueror.
- According to Jaina teachings, the cycle of birth and rebirth is shaped through karma. Asceticism and penance are required to free oneself from the cycle of karma. This can be achieved only by renouncing the world; therefore, monastic existence is a necessary condition of salvation.

Gautama Buddha and Buddhism

- Gautama Buddha, or Siddhartha, was a contemporary of Mahavira.
- According to tradition he was born in 567 BC in a Shakya kshatriya family in Lumbini in Nepal near Kapilavastu, which is identified with Piprahwa in Basti district and is close to the foothills of Nepal.
- Gautama's father seems to have been the elected ruler of Kapilavastu, and headed the Shakya republican clan. His mother was a princess from the Koshalan dynasty.
- At the age of 29, he left home. He wandered from place to place for about seven years and then attained enlightenment at the age of 35 at Bodh-Gaya under a *pipal* tree. From this time onwards he began to be called the Buddha or the enlightened one.
- Gautama Buddha delivered his first sermon at Sarnath in Banaras. Gautama Buddha passed away at the age of 80 in 487 BC at a place called Kusinagara, coterminous with the village called Kasia in Deoria district in eastern UP.

Doctrines of Buddhism

- He said that the world was full of sorrows and that people suffered on account of desires. If desires are conquered, nirvana is attained, that is, man is free from the cycle of birth and death.
- Gautama Buddha recommended an eightfold path (*ashtangika marga*) for the elimination of human misery. This path is attributed to him in a text of about the third century BC. It comprised right observation, right determination, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right awareness, and right concern.
- If a person follows this eightfold path, he would free himself from the machinations of priests, and would reach his destination.
- The principal tenets are:
 - (i) do not commit violence,
 - (ii) do not covet the property of others,
 - (iii) do not use intoxicants,
 - (iv) do not tell a lie, and
 - (v) do not indulge in sexual misconduct and adultery.

Features of Buddhism and the Causes of its Spread

- People were accepted by the Buddhist order without any consideration of caste, and women too were admitted to the sangha and thus brought on a par with men. In comparison with Brahmanism, Buddhism was liberal and democratic.
- The personality of the Buddha and the method adopted by him to preach his religion helped the spread of Buddhism. He sought to fight evil by goodness and hatred by love and refused to be provoked by slander and abuse. He maintained his poise and calm under difficult circumstances and tackled his opponents with wit and presence of mind.
- The use of Pali, a form of Prakrit, which began around 500 BC, contributed to the spread of Buddhism. It facilitated the spread of Buddhist doctrines amongst the common people. There are thus three principal elements in Buddhism: Buddha, dhamma, and sangha.
- Ashoka spread Buddhism into Central Asia, West Asia, and Sri Lanka, and thus transformed it into a world religion. Even today Sri Lanka, Burma (Myanmar), Tibet, and parts of China and Japan profess Buddhism.

Causes of the Decline of Buddhism

- Buddhism underwent a similar metamorphosis. It became a victim to the evils of Brahmanism against which it had initially fought. By the seventh century, the Buddhist monasteries had come to be dominated by ease-loving people and became centres of corrupt practices which had been prohibited by Gautama Buddha. The new form of Buddhism was known as Vajrayana. Several instances of persecution occur in the sixth–seventh centuries.

Significance and Influence of Buddhism

- Buddhism also taught that if the poor gave alms to the monks, they would be born wealthy in the next world. Undoubtedly the objective of Buddhist teaching was to secure the salvation of the individual or nirvana.
- Those who found it difficult to adjust themselves to the break-up of the old egalitarian society and the rise of gross social inequalities on account of private property were provided with some way of escape, but it was confined to the monks.
- Buddhism made an important impact on society by keeping its doors open to women and shudras. In a second-century sculpture from Bodhi-Gaya, the Buddha is depicted ploughing with oxen.
- With its emphasis on non-violence and the sanctity of animal life, Buddhism boosted the cattle wealth of the country. The earliest Buddhist text, *Suttanipata*, declares cattle to be givers of food, beauty, strength, and happiness (*annada, vannada, balada, sukhada*), and thus pleads for their protection.
- Buddhism created and developed a new awareness in the field of intellect and culture. It taught the people not to take things for granted but to argue and judge them on merits.
- In the first three centuries of the Christian era, by blending Pali and Sanskrit, the Buddhists created a new language which is called Hybrid Sanskrit. The Buddhist monasteries developed as great centres of learning, and can be called residential universities. Mention may be made of Nalanda and Vikramashila in Bihar, and Valabhi in Gujarat.

- Buddhism left its mark on the art of ancient India. The first human statues worshipped in India were probably those of the Buddha. The panels at Bodh-Gaya in Bihar and at Sanchi and Bharhut in MP are illuminating examples of artistic activity.
- From the first century onwards, panel images of Gautama Buddha began to be made. The Greek and Indian sculptors worked together to create a new form of art on the north-west frontier of India known as Gandhara art.
- For the residence of the monks, rooms were hewn out of the rocks, and thus began the cave architecture in the Barabar hills in Gaya and also in western India around Nasik.



- The most wonderful ancient buildings in the state of Bhopal are at Sanchi Kanakhera.
- The *kutagarashala* – literally, a hut with a pointed roof – or in groves where travelling mendicants halted
- The Buddha's foster mother, Mahapajapati Gotami was the first woman to be ordained as a *bhikkhuni*. Buddha's life – where he was born (Lumbini), where he attained enlightenment (Bodh Gaya), where he gave his first sermon (Sarnath) and where he attained *nibbana* (Kusinagara).
- The stupa (a Sanskrit word meaning a heap) originated as a simple semi-circular mound of earth, later called *anda*. Gradually, it evolved into a more complex structure, balancing round and square shapes. Above the *anda* was the *harmika*, a balcony like structure that represented the abode of the gods. Arising from the *harmika* was a mast called the *yashti*, often surmounted by a *chhatra* or umbrella. Worshippers entered through the eastern gateway and walked around the mound in a clockwise direction keeping the mound on the right, imitating the sun's course through the sky. Later, the mound of the stupas came to be elaborately carved with niches and sculptures as at Amaravati, and Shahji-ki-Dheri in Peshawar (Pakistan).
- In 1854, Walter Elliot, the commissioner of Guntur (Andhra Pradesh), visited Amaravati and collected several sculpture panels and took them away to Madras. (These came to be called the Elliot marbles after him.)
- An archaeologist named H.H. Cole wrote: "It seems to me a suicidal and indefensible policy to allow the country to be looted of original works of ancient art." He believed that museums should have plaster-cast facsimiles of sculpture.
- When Sanchi was "discovered" in 1818, three of its four gateways were still standing, the fourth was lying on the spot where it had fallen and the mound was in good condition.
- Many early sculptors did not show the Buddha in human form – instead, they showed his presence through symbols. The empty seat was meant to indicate the meditation of the Buddha, and the stupa was meant to represent the *mahaparinibbana*. Another frequently used symbol was the wheel. This stood for the first sermon of the Buddha, delivered at Sarnath.
- A *shalabhanjika*- According to popular belief, this was a woman whose touch caused trees to flower and bear fruit. It is likely that this was regarded as an auspicious symbol and integrated into the decoration of the stupa. The *shalabhanjika* motif suggests that many people who turned to Buddhism enriched it with their own pre-Buddhist and even non-Buddhist beliefs, practices and ideas.

The similarities and the distinctions between the two are as follows:

Similarities:

- ✓ Both possessed the background of the Aryan culture and were inspired by the ascetic ideals and the philosophy of the Upanishads, particularly that of Sankhya-Yoga. Neglect of God or an atheistic attitude, pessimism or conviction that human life is full of misery, the doctrines of transmigration of soul and Karma (action or deed) and a kind of dualism between spirit and matter are common to Hindu-Sankhya philosophy, Jainism and Buddhism. Thus, the source of the philosophies of both was the same though both of them made certain changes in it.
- ✓ Both were the products of intellectual, spiritual and social forces of their age and therefore, both stood up as revolts against the prevalent Brahmanical religion.
- ✓ Both emerged in eastern India which by that time had successfully retained some features of the pre-Aryan culture. This partly explains the reason of their common place of origin and publicity'.
- ✓ Both were started by the members of the Kshatriya caste and both appealed to the socially down-trodden, the Vaishvas who were not granted social status corresponding to their growing economic power, and the Sudras who were definitely oppressed.
- ✓ Both, Mahavira and Buddha, the founders of Jainism and Buddhism respectively were Kshatriya princes and were able to get support for their cause from the contemporary ruling class, different Kshatriya rulers and economically prosperous Vaishvas.
- ✓ Though both did not attack the caste system, they were opposed to it.
- ✓ Both opposed the ritualism and the sacrifices of Brahmanism and also challenged the supremacy of the Brahmanas over other classes.
- ✓ Both believed that Nirvana or salvation of an individual meant his or her deliverance from the eternal chain of birth and death.
- ✓ Both denied the authenticity of the Vedas as an infallible authority.
- ✓ Both laid great stress upon a pure and moral life rather than practice of ritualism or even devotion to and worship of God as a means to attain salvation.
- ✓ Both emphasized Ahimsa or non-violence.
- ✓ Both accepted the doctrines of the transmigration of soul and Karma and emphasized the effects of good and bad Karmas (deeds) upon an individual's future births and ultimate salvation which was accepted as the highest goal of life.
- ✓ Both preached their religion in the common language of the people and discarded Sanskrit as the language of their early religious texts. The early Buddhist-texts were written IN Pali and Jaina texts were written in Prakrat.
- ✓ Both encouraged the idea of giving up the world and urged to lead the life of an ascetic.
- ✓ Both organised orders for monks and nuns.

Distinctions:

Though Jainism and Buddhism resembled each other very much, yet, there were and are distinctions between the two as follows:

- ✓ Jainism is a much more ancient religion as compared to Buddhism. According to Jaina traditions it had twenty-four Tirthankaras and Mahavira was the last of them. That is why, while Mahavira has been regarded as a reformer of an already existing religion, the Buddha has been regarded the originator of a new one.
- ✓ The Jaina concept of soul is different from that of Buddhism. Jainism believes that everything in nature, even stone and water, has a soul of its own. Buddhism does not believe so.
- ✓ The concept of Ahimsa (non-violence) is different in Buddhism as compared to Jainism. While Jainism emphasized it very much, Buddhism remained liberal in its interpretation in foreign countries, and even permitted eating of animal flesh where it was a necessity or traditional diet of the people. Yet, the Buddhist concept of Ahimsa is more affirmative as compared to that of Jainism. Buddhism emphasized love to all beings which is a more positive virtue as compared to the concept of non-injury to all beings of Jainism.
- ✓ Buddhism emphasized elimination of caste distinctions more as compared to Jainism.
- ✓ Jainism advised practice of strict asceticism to attain salvation while Buddhism advised its Upasakas to follow the middle path or Tathagata marg.
- ✓ According to Jainism, women and men householders cannot attain salvation while, according to Buddhism, it is possible for both.
- ✓ In Digambara sect of Jainism, it is necessary for the monks to go naked while Buddhism denounced it.
- ✓ Buddhism emphasized the organisation of Sanghas more as compared to Jainism.
- ✓ According to Jainism, salvation is possible only after death while according to Buddhism it is possible during one's own life if one is able to detach oneself completely from the worldly existence. Thus, while Jainism describes Nirvana as freedom from body. Buddhism describes it as destruction of the self or detachment from worldly existence.
- ✓ Buddhism proved more adaptable to circumstances as compared to Jainism. That is why while Buddhism spread all over Asia and accommodated the traditions of the local populace, Jainism remained confined to India alone.
- ✓ In practice, Jainism remained closer to Hinduism than Buddhism. Therefore, conflicts between Jainism and Hinduism were negligible while Buddhism and Hinduism challenged each other and proved rivals to each other.
- ✓ Jainism never spread beyond the frontiers of India while Buddhism spread over distant countries of Asia. But, while Jainism is still a living force in India Buddhism has practically vanished from the land of its birth.