

## Buddhism [History Notes for UPSC & Govt. Exams]

In the sixth century BCE, the socio-religious norms that were well established & followed were criticised by the then great scholars like Confucius in China, Zoroaster in Iran, Parmenides in Greece. They laid emphasis on ethical and moral values. India also witnessed the emergence of two alternate religions - Buddhism & Jainism. Both these religions believed and propagated non-violence, good social conduct, charity & generosity. These religions emphasised that true happiness does not lie in materialism or performance of rituals.

### Buddhism & Jainism - Causes for Growth

The various causes that led to alternative religions are:-

1. **Kshatriya class' resentment towards the domination of the priestly class (Brahmanas) -**
  - The order of hierarchy in the Varna system was-Brahmanas, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras. The Kshatriyas who were ranked second strongly objected to the ritualistic domination of the Brahmanas and the various privileges enjoyed by them. It should also be noted that both Buddha and Mahavira belonged to the Kshatriya varna. It is important to mention that the Buddhist Pali texts at many places reject the Brahmanical claim to superiority and places itself (Kshatriyas) higher than the Brahmanas.
2. **Rise of the new agricultural economy that needed animal husbandry-**
  - In the sixth century BCE, there was a shift of the centre of economic and political activity from Haryana and western U.P to eastern U.P and Bihar where the land was more fertile due to abundant rainfall. It became easier to utilize the iron reservoir of Bihar and its adjoining areas. People started using more and more iron tools like ploughshare for agricultural purposes. The use of iron ploughshare required the use of bullocks, which meant that the age-old custom in the Vedic age of killing animals as sacrifices would have to be abandoned for this agricultural economy to stabilize. Furthermore, the flourishing of animal husbandry became imminent to raise a potential animal population to take up the work that was required to uphold the agricultural sector development. Both Buddhism and Jainism were against any kind of sacrifices, so the peasant class welcomed it.
3. **The Vaishyas and other mercantile groups favoured Buddhism and Jainism as they yearned for a better social and peaceful life-**
  - The agricultural boom led to the increased production of food which also helped in the development of trade, craft production and urban centres. The discovery of thousands of silver and copper Punch-Marked Coins (PMC) by the numismatists reflects the development of trade in this era. This period is known as the era of second urbanisation. As many as sixty towns and cities like Rajagriha, Shravasti, Varanasi, Vaishali and Champa developed between 600 and 300 BCE. The Vaishyas and other mercantile groups rose to a better economic position and preferred to patronise non-Vedic religions like Buddhism and Jainism through substantial donations. As both Buddhism and Jainism promoted peace and non-violence, this could put an end to wars between different kingdoms and consequently promote further trade and commerce, which was beneficial for this economic class.
4. **Acceptance of simple and peace centred principles of Buddhism and Jainism by people-**
  - The common masses welcomed the new religions as they preached peace and social equality, simple and ascetic living. People wanted relief from the growing social problems and yearned to live a peaceful and uncorrupt life.

**Understand the differences between Buddhism and Jainism in the linked article.**

## Gautama Buddha & Buddhism

The early Buddhist literature is divided into canonical and non-canonical texts:

1. **Canonical texts:** are believed to be the actual words of the Buddha. Canonical texts are books which lay down the basic tenets and principles of Buddhism such as the Tipitakas.
2. **Non-canonical texts or semi-canonical texts:** these are commentaries and observations on canonical texts, quotes, definitions, historical information, grammars and other writings in Pali, Tibetan, Chinese and other East Asian languages. Some important ones are:
  - a. Mahavastu (written in Sanskrit-Prakrit mixed) - it is about the sacred biography, i.e hagiography of the Buddha.
  - b. Nidanakatha - first connected life story of Buddha.
  - c. The Dipavamsa & the Mahavamsa (both in Pali) - both give historical and mythical accounts of the Buddha's life, Buddhist Councils, Asoka and the arrival of Buddhism to Sri Lanka.
  - d. Visuddhimagga (the path to purification written by Buddhaghosa) - deals with the development from the purity of discipline to enlightenment (Nibbana).
  - e. Milindapanho (in Pali) - consists of a dialogue between the Indo-Greek king Milinda/Menander and the monk Nagasena on various philosophical issues.
  - f. Nettipakarana (The book of guidance) - which gives a connected account of the Buddha's teachings.

### The Tipitakas (Canonical Texts)

The earliest compilation of Buddhist teachings which were written on long, narrow leaves is “The Tipitakas” (in Pali) and “Tripitaka” (in Sanskrit). All the branches of Buddhism have the Tripitakas (also called three baskets/collections) as part of their core scriptures, which comprise three books -

- The Sutta (conventional teaching)
  - The Vinaya (disciplinary code)
  - The Abhidhamma (moral psychology)
1. The Sutta Pitaka (Basket of Discourses) - these texts are also known as Buddha Vacana or the word of the Buddha. It contains Buddha's discourse on various doctrinal issues in dialogue form.
  2. The Vinaya Pitaka (Discipline Basket) - this contains rules for monks and nuns of the monastic order (Sangha). It includes the Patimokka - a list of transgressions against monastic discipline and atonements for these. The Vinaya text also includes doctrinal expositions, ritual texts, biographical stories and some elements of Jatakas or “birth stories”.
  3. The Abhidhamma Pitaka (Basket of Higher Teachings) - this contains a thorough study and systematisation of the teachings of the Sutta Pitaka through summaries, questions and answers, lists, etc.

### The Tipitakas are divided into Nikayas (books):

Sutta Pitaka (5 collections)	Vinaya Pitaka (3 books)	Abhidhamma Pitaka (7 books)
1. Digha-Nikaya	1. Sutta Vibhanga	1. Dhamma-

2. Majjhima Nikaya 3. Samyutta Nikaya 4. Anguttara Nikaya 5. Khuddaka Nikaya 1. Further subdivided into 15 books	1. Maha-Vibhanga 2. Bhikkuni-Vibhanga 2. Khandaka 1. Mahavagga 2. Cullavagga 3. Parivara	sangani 2. Vibhanga 3. Dhatu-katha 4. Puggala-pannati 5. Kayha-vatthu 6. Yamaka 7. Patthana
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## The Buddha - Biography

### Hagiography

The Gautama Buddha was born to Suddhodana (chief of republican Sakya clan) as Siddhartha in 563 BCE on Vaishakha Poornima day at Lumbini (Nepal). He lost his mother (Mahamaya) just a few days after his birth and was brought up by his stepmother Gautami. There were 32 birthmarks on his body and Brahmanas predicted that either he would be a world conqueror or a world renouncer. He lived a life of luxury and comfort in his early years.

- He was married to Yashodhara at the early age of 16 and had a son named Rahula. At the age of 29, he left his palace and decided to become a wanderer. He along with Channa, his charioteer and his horse, Kanthaka, wandered for six long years in search of truth (**Mahabhinishkramana**/Great Renunciation).
- He first meditated with Alara Kalama and then Uddaka Ramaputta. They were considered to be the established teachers of that era but he was not convinced with their teachings that liberation from sorrow can be obtained by mental discipline and knowledge only.
- The Buddha later joined five wandering ascetics - Assaji, Mahanama, Vappa, Bhaddiya and Kondanna. He practised severe austerities until his body was almost emaciated and realising that austerities could not lead to realisation, he left them. He then moved towards the village of Senani and took a seat under a peepal tree facing east. He then resolved not to rise until enlightenment was achieved.
- As Gautama sat in deep meditation - Mara, the Lord of illusions, recognising that his power was about to be broken, tried to distract him. The Buddha touched the earth, calling it to bear witness to the countless lifetimes of virtue that had led him to this place of enlightenment. The earth shook, on hearing the truth of Gautama's words. Mara then unleashed his army of demons. In the epic battle that ensued, Gautama's wisdom broke through the illusions and the power of his compassion transformed the demon's weapons into flowers. Mara and his army fled in disarray. Thus, at the age of 35, he ultimately attained Nirvana/enlightenment at Gaya, Magadha (Bihar) under a peepal tree (Bodhi tree), on the banks of river Niranjana and came to be known as the Buddha - the Enlightened One. It is believed that Ashoka's queen was envious of the Bodhi tree, and tried to kill it but it grew again. The tree was cut down many times, but it grew again at the same place and is still revered by Buddhists.
- The Buddha delivered his first sermon on deliverance from sufferings to his five former companions at Sarnath. This event is known as **Dhamma Chakra-Pavattana**, which means turning the wheel of dharma. The Buddha wandered about for over four decades, and established an order of monks and nuns known as Sangha. He attained **Parinirvana** at the age of 80 at Kusinara (of the Mallas). His last words were "All composite things decay, strive diligently".
- The five forms that represent Buddha are:
  - Lotus and Bull - Birth
  - Horse - Renunciation

- Bodhi Tree - Mahabodhi
- Dhammachakra Pravartana - First sermon
- Footprints - Nirvana

## Doctrines of Buddhism

The core of Buddha's doctrine is expressed in the Ariya-Sacchani (four noble truths), Ashtangika-Marga (Eight Fold Path), Middle Path, Social Code of Conduct, and Attainment of Nibbana/Nirvana.

Buddha urges that one should not cling to anything (including his teachings). The teachings are only Upaya (skillful means or expedient tools) and are not dogma. It is fingers pointing at the moon and one should not confuse the finger for the moon.

### The three pillars of his teachings are:

- Buddha - Founder/Teacher
- Dhamma - Teachings
- Sangha - Order of Buddhist Monks and Nuns (Upasakas)

The **four noble truths** form the core of the teachings of Buddhism, which are:

1. Dukha (The truth of suffering) - As per Buddhism, everything is suffering (Sabbam Dukham). It refers to the potential to experience pain and not only the actual pain and sorrow experienced by an individual.
2. Samudaya (The truth of the cause of suffering) - Trishna (desire) is the main cause of suffering. Every suffering has a reason and it is a part and parcel of living.
3. Nirodha (The truth of the end of suffering) - the pain/sorrow can be ended by the attainment of Nibbana/Nirvana.
4. Ashtangika-Marga (The truth of the path leading to the end of suffering) - the end to the suffering is contained in the eightfold path.

## Eight-Fold Paths

The Eight-Fold Path is more about unlearning rather than learning, i.e., to learn in order to unlearn and uncover. The path consists of eight interconnected activities and is a process that helps one to move beyond the conditioned responses that obscure one's nature. The Ashtangika-Marga consists of the following:

1. Right Vision (Samma-Ditthi) - it is about understanding the nature of reality and the path of transformation.
2. Right Thought or Attitude (Samma-Sankappa) - it signifies having emotional intelligence and acting from love and compassion.
3. Right or Whole Speech (Samma-Vacca) - it signifies truthful, clear, uplifting and unharmful communications.
4. Right or Integral Action (Samma-Kammanta) - it signifies an ethical foundation of life, on the principles of non-exploitation of oneself and others. It consists of five rules, which form the ethical code of conduct for the members of the monastic order and the laity. These are:
  - Do not commit violence.

- Do not covet the property of others.
- Do not indulge in corrupt practices or sensual behaviour.
- Do not speak a lie.
- Do not use intoxicants.

In addition to these, monks and nuns were strictly instructed to observe the following three additional precepts-

- To avoid eating after mid-day.
  - To refrain from any sort of entertainment and use of ornaments to adorn oneself.
  - To refrain from using high or luxurious beds, and from handling gold and silver (including money).
5. Right or Proper Livelihood (Samma-Ajiva) - it lays emphasis on livelihood based on correct action and on the ethical principles of non-exploitation. It is believed that this forms the basis of an ideal society.
  6. Right Effort or Energy (Samma-Vayama) - it signifies consciously directing our life energy to the transformative path of creative and healing action that fosters wholeness thus moving towards conscious evolution.
  7. Right Mindfulness or Thorough Awareness ( Samma-Sati) - it means knowing one's own self and watching self behaviour. There is a saying by the Buddha, "If you hold yourself dear, watch yourself well".
  8. Right Concentration or Meditation (Samma-Samadhi) - samadhi literally means to be fixed, absorbed in. It means getting one's whole being absorbed in various levels or modes of consciousness and awareness.

The teachings of the Buddha follow the middle path (the one between extreme indulgence and extreme asceticism). Buddha has emphasised that if a person follows the eightfold path, then he will reach his destination (Nirvana) without the involvement of the monks/nuns. In the above-eightfold path, the word “right” signifies “whole”, “integral”, “complete”, “perfect”.

The ultimate aim of the Buddha's teachings is the attainment of Nibbana/Nirvana. The Nibbana is a Pali word formed of ‘Ni’ and ‘vanna’, ni means negative and vanna refers to lust or craving. So, Nirvana means departure from cravings and lust. It signifies dying out or extinction of desire, greed, hatred, ignorance, attachment and the sense of ego. In Nibbana, nothing is eternalised nor is anything annihilated, other than the suffering. It is a supramundane state and an attainment (Dhamma) which is within the reach of all, even in this present life. The main difference between the Buddhist conception of Nibbana and the non-Buddhist concept is that Nibbana can be attained during life also. In the non-Buddhist concept, eternal heaven is realised only after death or union with God. When Nibbana is achieved in this life, it is called Sopadisesa Nibbana-dhatu. When an Arhat attains parinibbana (used for the death of enlightened beings such as Buddha), after the dissolution of his body, it is called Anupadisesa Nibbana-dhatu.

The philosophy of Buddha accepts impermanence and transmigration but denies the existence of God and believes that the soul is a myth. Buddhism teaches the existence of ten realms of being and one can be born as any one of them. At the top is Buddha followed by Bodhisattva (an enlightened being destined to be a Buddha but purposely remains on earth to propagate teachings), Pratyeka Buddha (a Buddha on their own), Sravaka (disciple of Buddha), heavenly beings (superhumans, angels), human beings, Asura (fighting spirits), beasts, Preta (hungry ghosts) and depraved men (hellish beings). These ten realms of existence are “mutually immanent and mutually inclusive”, each one having in it the

remaining nine realms, e.g., the realm of human beings has all other nine states - from hell to Buddhahood in it. A man can be selfish or can rise to the enlightened state of Buddha. In Buddhism, karma is the result of actions depending on the intentions more than the action itself. Rebirth is the result of the karma of the previous life. Though Buddhism lays emphasis on non-violence, it doesn't forbid masses from eating meat.

### Other Important Aspects of Buddhism

Some other important aspects of Buddhism include:

- The Five Aggregates (Pancha-khanda or Panch skandha).
- The Law of Dependent Origination (Paticca- samuppada).

#### *The Five Aggregates*

The Buddha believed that a human being is a collection of Five Aggregates and a proper understanding of these is an essential step towards the attainment of freedom from suffering:

1. Material Form (Rupa) - It includes the five physical organs (ear, eye, tongue, nose & body) and the corresponding objects of the sense organs (sound, sight, taste, smell and tangible objects).
2. Feeling or Sensation (Vedana) - The aggregate of feelings arising out of contact with the objects of the senses is of three kinds-pleasant, unpleasant and indifferent.
3. Perception (Sanna) - This aggregate is the capacity to recognise & conceptualize things by associating them with other things.
4. Mental formation (Santharas) - This aggregate may be described as a conditioned response to the object of experience. In this sense, it partakes the meaning of habit as well. However, it not only has a static value, but dynamic value as well.
5. Consciousness (Vinnana) - The aggregate of consciousness is an indispensable element in the prediction of experience. It is essential to understand that consciousness depends on the other aggregates and does not exist independently.

All the Five Aggregates of experience are impermanent and constantly changing, like our perceptions change over time. Buddha stresses that the utility of the five aggregates is to make people understand them in terms of impersonal processes and through this understanding, they can get rid of the idea of self and can overcome hope and fear. They can regard happiness and pain, praise and blame and everything with equanimity, with even-mindedness and thus will then no longer be subject to the imbalance of alternating between hope and fear.

#### *The Law of Dependent Origination (Paticca- Samuppada)*

The Law of Dependent Origination explains the reason of suffering (Dukkha), as well as the key to its liberation. The law is associated with twelve links (Nidanas)-all arranged in a wheel and one leading to the next. This principle can be given in a short formula of four lines-

When this is, that is

This arising, that arises

When this is not, that is not

This ceasing, that ceases.

This law emphasizes an important principle that all phenomena in this universe are relative, conditioned states and do not arise independently of supportive conditions.

The twelve links of the Dependent Origination are:

1. Ignorance (Avija)
2. Mental formation (Sankhara)
3. Consciousness (Vinnana)
4. Name & Form (Nama-Rupa)
5. The six senses (Salayatana)
6. Contact (Phassa)
7. Feeling (Vedana)
8. Craving (Tanha)
9. Clinging (Upadana)
10. Becoming (Bhava)
11. Birth (Jati)
12. Aging & death (Jara-marana)

All the links are interrelated and dependent on each other, thus there is no starting point nor end point-a cyclic phenomenon.

Dividing the 12 links into three groups-

1. Defilement (Klesha)- ignorance, craving and clinging. Defilement is the impurities of mind resulting in actions.
2. Action (Karma)- mental formation and becoming.
3. Suffering (Dukkha)- consciousness, name & form, the six senses, feeling, birth, aging and death.

Together, the defilements and actions explain the origin of suffering and particular circumstances in which each one of us finds ourselves, or in which we are born. The Buddha emphasizes that he who sees Dependent Origination sees the Dharma and he who sees the Dharma sees the Buddha. If one can see and understand the functioning of dependent origination, he can then set about breaking this vicious circle of dependent origination by removing the impurities of the mind - ignorance, craving and clinging. Once these impurities are eliminated, actions will not be performed, and habit-energy will not be produced. Once actions cease, rebirth and suffering will also cease.

## Reasons for Spread & Popularity of Buddhism

Buddhism gained wide acceptance and popularity and spread like a wildfire throughout India. With the support of emperor Ashoka, it spread its wings to central Asia, west Asia and Sri Lanka. Various causes for the rise and spread of Buddhism are:

1. **Liberal & democratic** - Unlike Brahmanism, it was far more liberal & democratic. It won the hearts of the lower class as it attacked the varna system. It welcomed people of all castes and even women were admitted to the Sangha. The people of Magadha readily accepted Buddhism as they were looked down upon by the orthodox Brahmanas.
2. **Simple language** - The Buddha spread his message in the simple language of the masses. The Pali language which Buddha used was the spoken language of the masses. The Vedic religion was understood only with the help of Sanskrit language which was the monopoly of the Brahmins.
3. **The personality of the Buddha** - The personality of the Buddha endeared him and his religion to the masses. He was kind and ego-less. His calm composure, sweet words of simple philosophy and his life of renunciation drew the masses to him. He had ready moral solutions for the problems of the people.
4. **Royal patronage** - Royal patronage of Buddhism also accounted for its rapid rise. Kings like Prasenjit, Bimbisara, Ashoka, Kanishka patronised Buddhism and helped its spread throughout India and outside as well. Ashoka deputed his children to Sri Lanka for the spread of Buddhism.
5. **Inexpensive** - Buddhism was inexpensive, without the expensive rituals that characterised the Vedic religion. It advocated a spiritual path without any material obligation of satisfying gods and Brahmins through gifts and rituals.

Buddhism tried to mitigate the evils resulting from the new material life of the sixth century BCE. Since the Buddhists had a keen awareness of the problems (social & economic disparities), they presented innovative solutions to these concerns. Buddhism asked people NOT to accumulate wealth, indulge in cruelty or violence - ideas that were welcomed by the people.

## Buddhism - Reasons for Decline

From the early 12th century, Buddhism began to disappear from the land of its birth. Various causes that led to the decline of Buddhism are:

1. **Corruption in Buddhist Sangha**- In the course of time, the Buddhist Sangha became corrupt. Receiving valuable gifts drew them towards luxury and enjoyment. The principles prescribed by Buddha were conveniently forgotten and thus started the degradation of the Buddhist monks and their teachings.
2. **Division among Buddhists**- Buddhism faced divisions from time to time. The division into various splinter groups like Hinayana, Mahayana, Vajrayana, Tantrayana and Sahajayana led Buddhism to lose its originality. The simplicity of Buddhism was lost and it was becoming complex.
3. **Use of Sanskrit language**- Pali, the spoken language of most people of India, was the medium for the spread of the message of Buddhism. But Sanskrit replaced these at the Fourth Buddhist Council during the reign of Kanishka. Sanskrit was the language of a few intellectuals, hardly understood by masses and therefore became one of the many reasons for the fall of Buddhism.
4. **Buddha worship**- Image worship was started in Buddhism by the Mahayana Buddhists. They started worshipping the image of the Buddha. This mode of worship was a violation of the Buddhist principles of opposing complex rites and rituals of Brahmanical worship. This paradox led people to believe that Buddhism was tending towards the fold of Hinduism.
5. **Persecution of Buddhists**- In course of time there was the rise of the Brahmanical faith again. Some Brahmana rulers, such as Pushiyamitra Shunga, the Huna king, Mihirakula (worshipper of Shiva) and Shaivite Shashank of Gauda persecuted the Buddhists on a large scale. The liberal donations to the monasteries gradually declined. Also, some rich monasteries were specifically targeted by the Turkish and other invaders.
6. **Muslim invasion**- The Muslim invasion of India almost wiped out Buddhism. Their invasions of India became regular, and repeated such invasions forced the Buddhist monks to seek asylum and shelter in Nepal and Tibet. In the end, Buddhism died away in India, the land of its birth.

## Important Terms in Buddhism for UPSC

Key Terms	Meaning
Pavarana	A Buddhist holy day celebrated on the full moon (Aashvin) of the lunar month, at the end of the rainy season (Vassa)
Upasakas	Male followers of Buddhism
Upasikas	Female followers of Buddhism
Pavrajya	“Going forth” from home, the determination to renounce the world and undertake an ascetic path
Chaityas	Prayer hall of monks
Viharas	Monasteries
Parajika	It includes four serious offences which result in expulsion from Sangha - sexual intercourse, taking what is not given, killing someone and making false claims of spiritual realisation
Upasampada	Ordination ceremony when the novice becomes a full-fledged member of the monastic community
Bodhisattva	An enlightened being who compassionately refrains from entering nirvana in order to save others and is worshipped as a deity
Bikkhu Sangha	Sangha of monks
Bhikkhuni Sangha	Sangha of nuns
Paribbajaka/ Parivrajaka	Wanderer
Shakra	God Indra
Sarvastivadin	One of the popular schools of Theravada, which basically relies on the dictum that “everything whether internal or external exists continuously in all the three phases of time”
Sautrantika	Sautrantikas consider only the Sutras as valid (Teachings of Buddha) and not commercial literature

## Buddhist Councils

Buddhist Council	Time	Place	Ruler	President	Specificity
First	483 BCE	Rajgriha	Ajatashatru	Mahakassappa	Buddha's teachings were divided into 3 categories or baskets (Pitakas)
Second	383 BCE	Vaishali	Kalasoka	Sabbakami	Division: Sthaviravadins - they felt they were keeping the original spirit of the Buddha's

					teachings.  Mahasanghikas  (The Great Community) – Interpreted Buddha's teachings more liberally.
<b>Third</b>	250 BCE	Pataliputra	Ashoka	Mogaliputta Tissa	Main aim was to purify the Buddhist movement from opportunistic factions.  Sent Buddhist missionaries to other countries.
<b>Fourth</b>	1 <sup>st</sup> Century CE	Kashmir	Kanishka	Vasumitra	Buddhism divided into Mahayana and Hinayana sects.

Get a gist of all the Buddhist Councils and important texts [here](#).

### Important Buddhist Writers

1. Asvaghosha - Author of the 'Buddhacharita' (Acts of the Buddha) in Sanskrit. Contemporary of Kanishka. He was a scholar, poet, dramatist, musician and debater.
2. Nagarjuna - He is the founder of the Madhyamaka school of Mahayana Buddhism.
3. Asanga & Vasubandhu (brothers) - Vasubandhu's greatest work, Abhidharmakosa, is known as an Encyclopaedia of Buddhism. Asanga was an important teacher of Yogachara or Vijnanavada school founded by his guru, Maitreyanatha. Both the brothers spread Buddhism in Punjab in the fourth century CE.
4. Buddhaghosa - the Visuddhimagga- the path of purification, a comprehensive summary and analysis of the Theravada understanding of the Buddha's path to liberation, is considered to be his best work. He was a great Pali scholar.
5. Dinnaga - He is known as the founder of the Buddhist logic, the last intellectual of the fifth century.
6. Dharmakirti -He lived in the seventh century AD, and was a great Buddhist logician, a philosophical thinker and dialectician.

### Schools of Buddhism

1. **Hinayana (Theravada)**

1. It literally means “The Lesser path” and Theravada signifies “Doctrine of the Elders”.
  2. Hinayana is true to the teachings of The Buddha.
  3. Theravada was the original school of Buddhist philosophy.
  4. Its scriptures are in Pali.
  5. Doesn’t believe in idol worship.
  6. Believes an individual can attain salvation through self-discipline & meditation.
  7. At present, it is found in Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand and other parts of South-East Asia.
  8. Ashoka patronised Hinayana.
2. **Mahayana**
1. It literally means “The Greater Path”.
  2. The terms Hinayana & Mahayana were given by the Mahayana school.
  3. Mahayana has two main philosophical schools - the Madhyamika & Yogachara.
  4. Its scriptures are in Sanskrit.
  5. This school of Buddhism considers Buddha as God and worships idols of Buddhas & Bodhisattvas.
  6. It believes in universal liberation from sufferings for all beings, and spiritual upliftment.
  7. Salvation can also be attained by means of faith and devotion to the mindfulness of the Buddha. It believes in mantras.
3. **Vajrayana**
1. It literally means “Vehicle of Thunderbolt”.
  2. The Vajrayana or “Diamond Vehicle” is also called Mantrayana, Tantrayana or Esoteric Buddhism.
  3. It was established in Tibet in the 11th century.
  4. The “Two Truth Doctrine” is the central concept of Vajrayana. The two truths are identified as ‘conventional’ & ‘ultimate’ truths. Conventional truth is the truth of consensus, reality and common sense notions of what does exist and does not exist. Ultimate truth is the reality as perceived by an enlightened mind.
  5. Vajrayana texts use a highly symbolic language “sandhya-bhasa” or “twilight language”. It aims to evoke experiences considered to be most valuable, in their followers.
  6. Vajrayana believes that salvation can be attained by acquiring magical powers called vajra.
  7. It also lays importance on the role of Buddhistavas but favours fierce deities known as Taras.
  8. The rituals and devotion employ mantras (esoteric verbal formulas), mandalas (diagrams & painting for visualisation practices) and a complex array of other rituals.
  9. Much importance is given to the role of the guru called Lama who has mastered the philosophical and ritual traditions. There is a long lineage of lamas. The Dalai Lama is a well known Tibetan Lama.
  10. It is predominant in Tibet, Nepal, Bhutan and Mongolia.

Know the [differences between Mahayana and Hinayana Buddhism](#) in the linked article.

### Buddhism & Brahmanism

Brahmanism is the religion that developed out of the historical Vedic religion, based on Vedas and Upanishads and an outcome of the ritualistic system led by brahmin priests in the Hindu society. Buddhism has developed from the teachings and philosophy of the life of The Buddha.

Brahmanism strongly advocates rituals to lead a good life whereas Buddhism denies all rituals & emphasizes self-development, self-exploration through dhamma, the precepts, the practice, the Four Truths, and the Eight-Fold Path.

The main difference between Buddhism & Brahmanism is the notion of belief in there being a soul (Brahmanism) and no soul/non-self (Buddhism).

Brahmanism believes that one is born into a caste system (varna system), however, Buddhism does not practise the caste system. The Sangha had members from all castes such as Upali (who was a barber), Chunda (a blacksmith who fed Buddha his last meal), Anirudha (prominent Kshatriya monk). The Pali canon also reverses the order of rank and places the Kshatriya varna higher than the Brahmanas. Even though Buddhism was more inclusive than the Brahmanical tradition, yet it supported social order based on classes and did not aim at abolishing social differences. Buddhists maintained status quo in certain traditions e.g., there were restrictions on the entry of debtors, slaves and soldiers without permission from their respective masters. Both (Brahmanism & Buddhism) did not participate directly in production and lived on alms given by society.

## Eight Great Bodhisatvas

### 1. Manjushri

- Manjushri embodies wisdom.
- Depiction - In his right hand, Manjushri holds a flaming sword which symbolises the wisdom that cuts through ignorance. In his left hand, he holds the Prajnaparamita sutra, a scripture that signifies his mastery of prajna. Often, he appears sitting on a lion or lion skin which symbolises the wild mind, which can be tamed through wisdom.

### 2. Avalokiteshvara/Padmapani/Lokesvara

- The Bodhisattva that represents infinite compassion. He is regarded as the manifestation of Amitabha - The Buddha of infinite light.
- Usually depicted as holding a lotus and is white in colour.

### 3. Vajrapani

- The Bodhisattva of power and great energy.
- He is usually depicted as standing in a warrior pose and surrounded by fire, which represents the power of transformation. Vajrapani is wreathed in flame with a fierce pose and fiercer face.
- Vajrapani is blue in colour and can be seen holding a lightning bolt (Vajra).

### 4. Kshitigarbha

- Kshitigarbha is known for saving the souls of all beings, between Buddha's death and the age of Maitreya (future Buddha), including the souls of children who died young and those in hell.
- Kshitigarbha wears simple monk's clothes and holds a staff in one hand to open the gates of hell, and in another, he holds a jewel (cintamani) that has the strength to light up darkness and fulfill wishes.

### 5. Akashagarbha

- Akashagarbha is known for wisdom and the ability to purify transgressions. He is the twin brother of Kshitigarbha.
- He appears in a serene meditation pose sitting cross-legged on a flower of lotus or standing peacefully on a fish in the middle of the ocean carrying a sword to cut through negative emotions.

### 6. Samantabhadra

- He is famous for his ten vows. He is a part of the Shakyamuni Trinity with Shakyamuni Buddha (Gautama Buddha) and Bodhisattva Manjushri.
- He is seen riding an elephant with six tusks which represent the Paramitas (six perfections) - patience, diligence, morality, charity, contemplation and wisdom.

### 7. Sarvanivarana - Vishkambhin

- The Bodhisattva purifies both internal and external wrongdoings and obstructions, that are faced by the people on their path to enlightenment.

- Usually depicted as seated on a lotus and holding a wheel of jewels with deep blue skin that represents royalty. The Bodhisattva may also appear yellow when he has to provide sufficient provisions, or white when his role is to relieve calamities.
8. **Maitreya**
- Also known as a future Buddha who has not lived yet but is predicted to arrive as a saviour in the future to bring true Buddhist teachings back into the world after its decline.
  - He is usually depicted as sitting and waiting painted orange or light yellow wearing a traditional scarf made of silk (khata) and holding an orange bush, symbolising his strength to clear all the distractions and destructive emotions.