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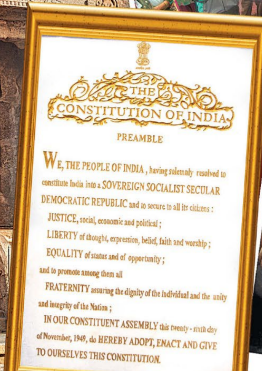
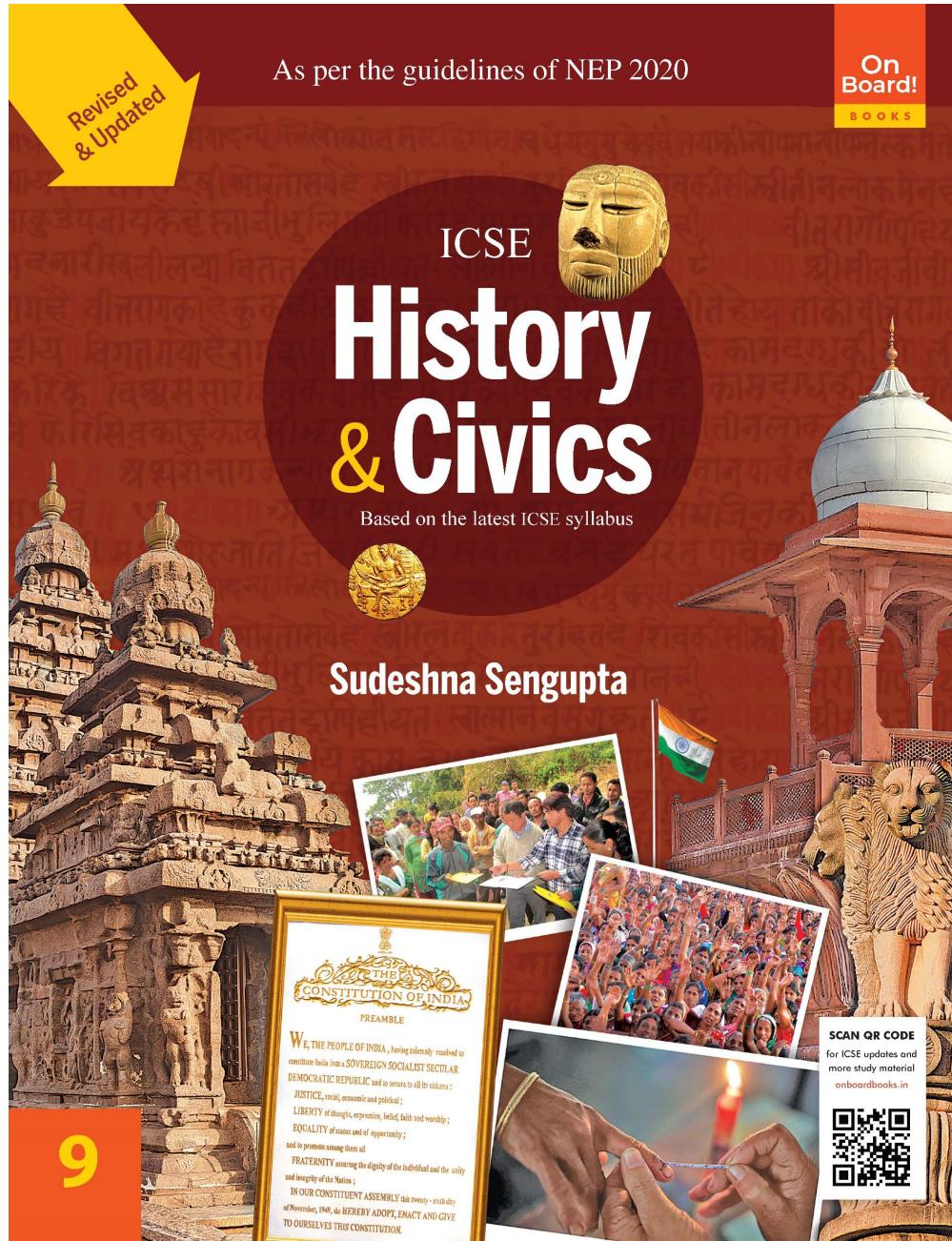
History & Civics

Based on the latest ICSE syllabus



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History 9

Chapter 3: Jainism and Buddhism

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Chapter 3: Jainism and Buddhism

Due to the intellectual and religious ferment of the sixth century BC, two new sects, essentially anti-brahmanical in nature—Jainism and Buddhism emerged in India.

CAUSES FOR THE RISE OF JAINISM AND BUDDHISM

- Jainism and Buddhism emerged as a reaction to brahmanism. With the caste system becoming more rigid, the brahmins became the most important class in the society, followed by the kshatriyas. This was deeply resented by the vaishyas, for while they were an important economic class, politically and socially they were not accorded any importance. The shudras were also a disgruntled lot, for they were treated as untouchables. Thus people started looking for an alternative which could liberate them from their woes.
- The complexities of religious observances, not within the comprehension of the common people, naturally made the priestly class, that is, the brahmins the sole trustees of common man's religion. The priests were given an autocratic control over the society.
- Yajnas, animal sacrifice, and other rituals were considered to be the best method of following religion.
- Most of the Vedic hymns were in Sanskrit. They could not be understood by the common people, without the help of the brahmins. Thus people wanted a religion which could be easily understood.

It was against this background that Jainism and Buddhism became popular.

VARDHAMANA MAHAVIRA AND JAINISM

Vardhamana Mahavira to whom Jainism owes its establishment as a religion probably lived from 540 to 468 BC. According to Jain traditions, there were altogether twenty-four Tirthankaras, i.e. prophets Mahavira, the twenty-fourth Tirthankara, is associated with Jainism.

Mahavira preached Jainism for thirty long years in Magadha, Mithila, Anga, Kosala, and other places. He died in 468 BC at the age of seventy-two in Pavapuri (near Rajgir in Bihar).

Teachings

- The twenty-third Tirthankara Parsvanatha had left four tenets namely, non-violence, non-lying, non-stealing and non-attachment. To these, Mahavira added the tenet of celibacy or brahmacharya.
- Mahavira exhorted his followers to attain Siddhasila, i.e. blissful abode or moksha, which meant freedom of the soul from rebirth and its attendant sorrows and miseries.
- According to Mahavira, moksha could be achieved through the Tri-ratnas, which are—right belief, right knowledge and right action. Thus, purification of the soul was the sole purpose of one's life.
- Mahavira said that an individual was born into a particular life, according to the good and bad deeds of his previous birth. He, however, taught that anyone, irrespective of his caste, can attain liberation through good actions.
- To Mahavira, a perfect human soul is divinity. According to him, good work, austere life, penance and celibacy can lead to improvement of the soul and when the soul becomes perfect by following all that Jainism enjoins, it will attain moksha.

Purvas and Angas

Mahavira's teachings are preserved in fourteen *Purvas*, i.e. volumes. Later, a religious convention was summoned at Pataliputra wherein Mahavira's teachings were arranged in twelve volumes, called the Angas. In the fifth or the sixth century AD, another religious convention was summoned at Gujarat wherein the entire corpus of Jain religious principles and tenets was compiled under the heads—*Angas*, *Upangas* and *Sutras*.

Sects

Mahavira carried the tenet of non-attachment to the extreme and recommended giving up everything, even clothes. Those who followed this came to be known as the Digambara (sky-clad) Jains. They were the orthodox followers who kept long fasts and led an extremely austere life. In the third century BC, there arose among the Jains a sect known as the Svetambara (white-clad) who wore clothes. They kept fasts but did not believe in extreme penance or austerities.

Spread of Jainism

Jainism at first was limited to south Bihar only. Gradually it spread from Odisha in the east to Gujarat in the west and also in the south, as far as Mysuru. Later it spread to Rajasthan, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. The Jain monks established monasteries at all these places.

However, the extreme obsession with non-violence checked the spread of Jainism. Further, Jainism did not get the kind of royal patronage that Buddhism received. This also affected the popularity of Jainism.

Jain literature

Jainism has contributed to India's classical and popular literature.

GAUTAMA BUDDHA AND BUDDHISM

Gautama Buddha was one of the most prolific thinkers of this period. He was born as Siddhartha in 563 BC. Though born into a royal family, Gautama did not find pleasure in the princely pursuits.

Prince Siddhartha is said to have seen four great sights which left a deep impact on him. He saw a sick man, an old man and a dead body. All these sights left him disturbed and uneasy. He then saw an ascetic who seemed equanimous in the face of misery, sorrow and pain that surrounded him. Four Great Sights, made Siddhartha see the impermanence of worldly pleasure. Soon after, he renounced the world. This was the Great Renunciation.

He attained supreme knowledge or enlightenment. He came to be called the Buddha or 'the Enlightened One'. The tree under which he had meditated is known as the Bodhi tree.

Teachings of Buddha

The Four Noble Truths

The four noble truths are:

- The truth of pain—Human beings are subject to sorrow, disease and death.
- The truth of the origin of pain—Every pain has a cause. The cause is greed or desire.
- The truth of the end of pain—Pain must be ended by eliminating desire which would then lead to nirvana or salvation.
- The truth of the elimination of desire—The path to be followed for the elimination of desire is the Eightfold Path.

His noble Eightfold Path was the Middle Path. The eight virtues recommended by Buddha in his Eightfold Path are:

- Right Belief
- Right Thought
- Right Speech
- Right Conduct
- Right means of Livelihood
- Right Effort
- Right Meditation
- Right Memory

Tripitakas

His disciples summoned a Buddhist Council at Rajagriha and divided Buddha's teachings into three Pitakas (baskets), i.e. the Sutta Pitaka wherein Buddha's sermons and activities were compiled, the Vinaya Pitaka which contained the rules of conduct to be followed by the Buddhist monks and nuns, and the Abhidhamma Pitaka that contained the philosophy of Buddhism.

Buddhist Sangha

The Sangha's main duty was to preserve, advance and spread the teachings of Buddha

Sects of Buddhism

During the reign of Kanishka the Buddhist Sangha was divided into the Hinayana (the 'lesser vehicle') and the Mahayana (the 'higher vehicle') sects.

HINAYANA

- ◆ Lesser vehicle
- ◆ Buddha not worshipped as God.
- ◆ Does not believe in idol worship.
- ◆ Believes in nirvana.
- ◆ Books written in Pali.

MAHAYANA

- ◆ Higher vehicle
- ◆ Buddha worshipped as God. Many bodhisattvas (earlier incarnations of Buddha) were also worshipped.
- ◆ Believes in idol worship and observance of outer forms of religion.
- ◆ Yearned for a place in swarga or heaven.
- ◆ Books written in Sanskrit.

Spread of Buddhism

Buddhism with its thrust on karma and a high moral character attracted a lot of followers. Consequently it spread not just within India, but also outside it.

Causes for the spread of Buddhism

- Buddha did not believe in the caste system. He believed that good deeds determined the life of people.
- Buddha exhorted that anyone who followed the Eightfold Path could achieve nirvana irrespective of one's social origin.
- Buddha preached in Pali, the language of the people as opposed to the chaste Sanskrit of the brahmans. This enabled the common people to understand Buddhism.
- Buddha converted Bimbisara, the ruler of Magadha to Buddhism. Buddhism also received royal patronage under Harshavardhana and later under the Palas of Bengal.

REASONS FOR THE DECLINE OF BUDDHISM

- ◆ The Buddhist religion had spread due to the royal patronage. In later times, when it lost this patronage it naturally began to lose its appeal with the people. After all, in those days the religion of the king was more or less the religion of the people.
- ◆ With ritualism creeping in, in Buddhist religion as well as formal worship of the image of Buddha in imitation of the Hindu worship, it became easier for Hinduism to bring back the Buddhists within the Hindu fold.
- ◆ Shankaracharya, Kumaril Bhatta and others brought about a revival of Hinduism which the decadent Buddhism could not resist.
- ◆ Last, the greatest blow to Buddhism was dealt by the Turkish invasion in the medieval period. As a result of the Turkish invasion whatever remained of Buddhism in India became extinct.

Buddhist literature

Buddha had preached in Pali language. The stories about the birth of the Buddha in his previous lives are preserved in the Jatakas, which forms an important part of the Buddhist literature. These stories, about 550 in number, were written in Pali and included moral lessons and ethical teachings. They also form the subjects of sculpture in the railings of the famous stupas (dome-shaped structures where relics of the Buddha and other Buddhist monks are kept). These stories are historically important as they throw light on the common life of the people, their economic conditions, social manners and customs. They have been translated into many foreign languages.

IMPORTANCE OF JAINISM AND BUDDHISM

- By stressing on the formation of a moral character, peace, charity and brotherhood, Jainism and Buddhism made people realize that religion was not about outward observance, but deep devotion and leading an ethical life.
- Both Mahavira and Buddha believed in the equality of all. They believed that religion had nothing to do with caste.
- Buddha's religion drew within its fold both high and low, rich and poor alike.
- Since Buddha and Mahavira preached in Pali and Prakrit respectively, they enriched the language and literature of the period. The Jatakas are a case in point.
- Jainism and Buddhism also influenced the art and architecture of India. For example, stupas like the Sanchi Stupa at Sanchi.

SIMILARITIES BETWEEN JAINISM AND BUDDHISM

They shared many common features like:

- Did not believe in the existence of God.
- The ultimate aim of both the religions was to attain nirvana or moksha.
- Both had non-violence as their basic principle.
- Both believed that karma decided the retribution of the soul and the rebirth.
- Did not believe in the divine character of the Vedas.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN JAINISM AND BUDDHISM

JAINISM	BUDDHISM
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Laid too much stress on penance and austerity which was difficult for the common people to follow. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ As Buddha stressed on the Middle Path it was more acceptable to the ordinary people.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ The belief in non-violence was carried to the domain of stones and metals as well. It was very rigid. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ The Buddhists believed that non-violence against all living things is important, but they were not as rigid as the Jains.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ The Jains did not have a Sangha. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ The Sangha was an inseparable part of the Buddhist organization.

To Remember

Introduction—The sixth century BC witnessed sweeping changes in the then India.

Causes for the rise of Jainism and Buddhism—Reaction against brahmanism, against rituals and yajnas, elaborate sacrifices, autocracy of the priests, common man found the religion incomprehensible.

Vardhamana Mahavira—Born as Vardhamana in 540 BC, was a kshatriya prince, he left home in search of truth, after intense meditation he attained supreme knowledge, came to be called Jina, his followers were called Jains, Teachings: To the four tenets of Jainism, so formulated by Parsvanatha, Mahavira added the fifth tenet of celibacy, Mahavira was against rituals, preached the Tri-ratnas, believed that purification of soul was the sole purpose of man's life, *Purvas* and *Angas*: Mahavira's teachings are preserved in *Purvas* and *Angas*, Sects: Jainism was divided into Digambaras and Svetambaras, Spread: Jainism initially was restricted to south Bihar, later it spread to Gujarat, Mysuru, Rajasthan, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh, but extreme stress on non-violence and lack of royal patronage checked the spread of Jainism.

Gautama Buddha—Born as Siddhartha in 563 BC, son of a kshatriya chief, The Four Great Sights: He was greatly disturbed, the Great Renunciation followed, received enlightenment under the pipal tree, then called Buddha or the Enlightened One, first sermon in the Deer Park near Sarnath, Teachings: The Four Noble Truths, the Eightfold Path formed the crux of Buddha's teachings, Tripitakas: His teachings are preserved in the three Pitakas, Buddhist Sangha: Buddha established the Buddhist Sangha or the monastic order which preserved and advanced the teachings of Buddha, Sects: Buddhism was divided into Hinayana and Mahayana sects, Spread: Buddhism spread not only within India, but also outside India, various causes like royal patronage, simple language, thrust on good deeds and not on the caste system were responsible for the spread of Buddhism.

Importance of Jainism and Buddhism—Emphasis on simple life, formation of a high moral character, casteless society, equality among all men, the Sangha helped the weak and the unfortunate.

Similarities between Jainism and Buddhism—Did not believe in the existence of God, both aimed at attaining *nirvana* or *moksha*, non-violence was their basic principle, both believed in the importance of *karma* and both negated the divine character of the *Vedas*.

Thank You