

Chapter 4

Thinkers, Beliefs and Buildings Cultural Developments

- In the reconstruction of the history of India from 600 BCE to 600 CE, the historians took the invaluable information from Buddhist, Jain and Brahmanical texts.
- Besides these texts, temples, stupas, monuments, etc also provide authentic information.
- The rulers of Bhopal, Shahjahan Begum and her successor played a significant role in the preservation of the Sanchi Stupa.
- Annans the new sect, that emerged in India in 6th century BCE. Buddhism and Jainism were most popular.
- Lord Mahavira is regarded as the real founder of Jainism.
- The founder of Buddhism was Lord Buddha.
- Jainism remained continued to India, but Buddha spread to the other countries.
- Ashoka and Kanishka of Buddhism in distant land.
- Both Jainism and Buddhism gave a rich legacy in different fields of Indian Society.
- During this period, i.e., 600 BCE to 600 CE, two Brahmanical sects. Vaishnavism and Shaivism made considerable progress.

In the reconstruction of the history of India from 600 BCE to 600 CE, the historians had taken information from Buddhist, Jaina and Brahmanical texts. Besides this a large number of monuments and inscriptions provided significant information.

The Background of Different Religions:

- Tire mid-first millennium BCE is often regarded as a turning point in world history since it saw the emergence of thinkers like Zarathustra in Iran, Kong Zi in China, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle in Greece and Mahavira and Gautama Buddha in India.
- They tried to understand the mysteries of existence and the relationship between human beings and the cosmic (connected with the whole universe) order.
- There were several pre-existing traditions of thoughts, religious beliefs and practices. All these we know from Rigveda which compiled between 1500 and 100 BCE.
- Sacrifices were performed by the heads of the households for the well-being of the domestic unit.

- More elaborate sacrifices like Rajasuya and Ashvamedha were performed by chiefs and kings with the help of Brahmana priests.
- Ideas contained in the Upanishads generated a variety of questions about life especially meaning of life and possibility of life after death and rebirth.
- Lively discussions and debates took place in Kutagarashala, a hut where travelling mendicants took shelter.
- Thinkers like Mahavira and Buddha questioned the authority of the Vedas.

The Message of Mahavira:

- According to Jainism, entire world is animated, i.e even stones, rocks and water have life.
- Non-injury to living beings is central to Jaina philosophy. According to Jainism, the cycle of birth and rebirth is shaped through Karma.
- To free oneself from the cycle of Karma, asceticism and penance are required. Jaina monks and nuns took five vows. These are:
 - to abstain (to decide not to do something) from killing
 - to abstain from stealing
 - to abstain from lying
 - to observe celibacy (not married and not naring sex)
 - to abstain from possessing property.
- Jainism spread to many parts of India. Jaina scholars produced a wealth of literature in Prakrit, Sanskrit and Tamil languages.

The Buddha: The Enlightened Soul

- Gautama Buddha was one of the most influential teachers of that time whose message spread across the sub-continent, Central Asia to China, Korea, Japan, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand and Indonesia.
- Siddhartha was the son of a chief of the Sakya clan. He was deeply shocked when he saw an old man, a sick man and a corpse. He left the palace and set out in search of his own truth.
- After attaining enlightenment, he came to be known as the Buddha or the enlightened one.
- For the rest of his life, he taught dhamma or the path of righteous living.

The Teachings of Buddha:

- According to Buddhism, the world is transient (anicca) and constantly changing and it is also soulless (anatta). Within this transient world, sorrow (dukkha) is intrinsic to human existence.
- Buddha emphasised individual agency and righteous action as the means to escape from the cycle of rebirth and attain self-realisation and nibbana.

Followers of the Buddha:

- Buddha founded a 'Sangha', an organisation of monks who became teachers of 'dhamma'. As they lived on alms, they were known as 'bhikkhus'.
- Later women also entered the 'Sangha' and were known as bhikkhuni. Buddha's foster mother, Mahapajapati Gotami was the first woman to become 'bhikkhuni'. Buddha's followers included kings, wealthy men, gahapatis and also ordinary people like workers, slaves and craft people.
- Buddhism appealed to many people dissatisfied with existing religious practices and confused by the rapid social changes taking place around them.

Sculpture of Buddha Period:

- The enlightenment of Buddha was showed by different symbols by many early sculptors. For e.g. the Bodhi trees (symbolises an event in the life of Buddha), the empty seat (indicates the meditation of the Buddha), the stupa (represents the mahaparinibbana), the wheel of dharma (shows first serman of the Buddha at Sarnath).
- Shalabhanjika was another feature of sculptural art which was regarded as an auspicious symbol and integrated into the decoration of the stupa.
- Some of the finest depictions of animals like elephants, horses, monkeys and cattle are also found in the stupas.
- Gajalakshmi, the Goddess of good fortune, and the serpent are also found.

New Religious Traditions During Buddha Period:

- Buddha was regarded as a human being who attained enlightenment and nibbana through his own efforts. Later the concept of Bodhisatta was developed.
- Buddhism was divided into Hinayana and Mahayana Buddhism. This period also saw the emergence of Shaivism and Vaishnavism.
- In such worship, the bond between the devotee and the God was visualised as one of love and devotion or bhakti. The temples to house images of Gods and Goddesses were being built with a tail-structure known as the Shikhara over the central shrine.
- One of the unique features of early temples was that some of these were hollowed out of huge rocks, as artificial caves.

Explanation of Religions:

- 19th century European scholars were more familiar with the statues of Buddha and Bodhisattas which were evidently based on Greek models. But they were sometimes could not understand the sculptures of gods and goddesses with multiple arms and heads or with combinations of human and animal forms.
- Art historians have tried to explain the meaning of sculptures with the help of textual references (e.g. Puranas), but it was not an easy task.
- Many rituals, religious beliefs and practices were not even recorded in a permanent visible form, these were only practised by the respective communities.

Stupas:

- Buddhist literature mentions several Chaityas which are places associated with the Buddha's life.
- Stupa contained relics (bodily remains of Buddha or objects used by him) regarded as sacred, the entire stupa came to be venerated as an emblem of both the Buddha and Buddhism.
- According to a Buddhist text 'Ashokavadana', Asoka distributed portions of the Buddha's relics to every important town and ordered the construction of stupas over them.
- By the second century BCE, a number of stupas in Bharhut, Sanchi and Sarnath were built.
- Stupas were built from the donations made by- king, guilds, common people 'bhikkhus' and 'bhikkhunis'.
- The structure of stupas comprised several parts, Anda (semi circular mound of Earth), Harmika (balcony-like structure), Yasthi (like mast) and Chhatri or umbrella.
- The early Stupas at Sanchi and Bharhut were plain but the gateways were richly carved and installed at the four cardinal points.

The Great Sanchi Stupa:

- The Great Stupa at Sanchi in the state of Madhya Pradesh is one of the most wonderful ancient buildings. 19th century Europeans were very interested in the Stupa at Sanchi.
- The rulers of Bhopal, Shahjehan Begum and Sultan Jehan Begum provided money to preserve the site of Sanchi Stupa.
- John Marshall wrote important volumes on Sanchi.

- The discovery of Sanchi has transformed our understanding of early Buddhism. It stands as an example of the successful restoration and preservation of ancient site by the Archaeological Survey of India.

Amaravati Stupas:

- In 1854, Walter Elliot visited Amaravati and collected several sculpture panels and discovered the remains of Western gateway.
- He came to the conclusion that the structure at Amaravati was one of the most significant Buddhist stupas.
- Unfortunately, Amaravati did not survive as sculptures from this site were removed from the site instead of preserving things where they were found

Important Terms:

- Vedic Sanskrit: A special kind of Sanskrit in which hymns and verses were composed.
- Rajsuya Yajna: A special kind of yajna in which sacrifices are performed by chiefs and kings who depended on the Brahman to conduct these rituals.
- Tripitaka: Three books of Buddhist sacred text.
- Sanghe: Monastic order.
- Tirthankar: A great teacher in Jainism.
- Stupa: A Sanskrit word which means a heap. Stupa originated as a simple semi-circular mound of earth, later called ande.

Time Line:

- 468 B.C. Mahavira passed away and attained Nirwan at the age of 72.
- First century B.C.E. Jainism enjoyed the patronage of the Kalinga king Kharavela.
- Fourth century B.C.E. Jainism spread to Kalinga in Orissa (Odisha).
- 563 B.C.E. Gautama Buddha was born in a Shakya Kshatriya family in Kapilavastu.
- 487 B.C.E. The First Buddhist Council.
- 387 B.C.E. The Second Buddhist Council.
- 251 B.C. The Third Buddhist Council.

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