

Class-6th

History

Lesson-7 New Ideas and New Religions.

Summary of the Chapter.

The Rise of New Religions.

There were many causes that led to the rise of new religions. First, Vedic philosophy was primarily focused on expensive rituals and sacrifices performed by Brahmin priest. The practice of killing animals in the name of sacrifices was becoming a cause of harm to the agricultural economy, thereby affecting livelihood of the poor, who were mostly treated badly.

Secondly, the varna-divided society was opposed by many people from the lower classes. The Brahmins dominated almost every aspect of social life and enjoyed special privileges. The people were not treated equally because the Brahmins enjoyed all the benefits.

Thirdly, most of the religious literature was in Sanskrit and could not be understood by the common people. So most of the people couldn't take part in religious ceremonies.

Lastly, as societies and communities were getting urbanized, some people wanted to live a simple life and not give much importance to material life.

This was the period when more than 60 schools of thought emerged. Three out of these, attracted the people and were well received by them. They were Buddhism, Jainism and the teachings of the Upanishads.

The Upanishads.

The term 'Upanishad' is derived from three words upa (near), ni (down) and shad (to sit). The Upanishads were created when groups of students sat near a sage (sadhu), in the middle of the forest, and learnt age-old wisdom from the sage. They were presented in simple dialogues between a sage and his students. The Upanishads were composed in Sanskrit language, during the later Vedic period. They contained the essence of the Vedas. There are over 200 Upanishads. Some important ones are the Isha Upanishad, the Katha Upanishad, the Madhukya Upanishad and the Prashna Upanishad. The Upanishads deal with the relationship of an individual with the universe. They contain detailed instructions concerning good conduct of the individual and explain how moksha or salvation can be attained from the cycles of births and rebirths. Men particularly Brahmins and Kshatriyas were the main participants. In some instances, women also participated. Poor people did not partake in these dialogues except in some instances, where the son of a slave woman was accepted as a student by a Brahmin and went on to become one of the greatest thinkers of the time. His name was Satyakama Jabala.

Jainism

One of the oldest religions in the world, Jainism, derived its name through the Sanskrit verb root ji, meaning 'to conquer'. The person who has achieved enlightenment is known as Jina, or the conqueror of self. According to the traditions of Jainism, there were 24 Jinas, also known as tirthankaras, in history. The last of them was Mahavira, who is regarded as the real founder of Jainism. The followers of Jainism are known as Jains.

Vardhaman Mahavira was born in 540 BCE in Kundagrama near Vaishali in present day Bihar. He was a prince, the son of King Siddhartha and Queen Trishala. When Mahavira reached 30 years of age, both his parents died. He decided to renounce(sacrifice) the

world and left the comforts of the palace life for the life of hard penance. He finally attained salvation after more than 12 years of meditation and penance and began to be known as a Jina.

Teaching of Jainism.

The main teachings of Jainism include.

1. Ahimsa meaning non-violence. Jainism believes in being non-violent towards all beings. To avoid injuring any living creature, many Jains walk barefoot, and even cover their mouths with a cloth, so that they do not harm even the tiniest of insects. They even take care not to damage any plant or tree.
2. Jainism does not believe in performing yagna, sacrifices and rituals. Mahavira made the religion simple and free of rituals.
3. Jainism forbids class distinctions and does not accept the caste system. It preaches equality for all human beings.
4. Jainism promotes simple living, a life free from material wealth. The followers have to give up everything that they own.
5. Jainism focuses on speaking the truth and not stealing. They believe that the actions of a person in the past decide that person's afterlife.

Jainism was difficult to follow as it had very strict rules. It was limited to a few sections of people. Farmers found it difficult because they had to kill insects during agricultural activities. However, this religion had the support of many traders.

Jainism Literature.

The Angas and the Purvas are some literary sources to study Jainism. Apart from these, Tamil and Kannada literature also deal with the religious beliefs of the Jains and serve as literary sources of the

period. Some of the archaeological sources include Ellora caves in Maharashtra and the Dilwara temples in Mount Abu, Rajasthan.

Buddhism

Buddhism began in India, around 2500 years ago. The founder was Gautama Buddha, who was born around 566 BCE in Lumbini near Kapilavastu the border of present day Nepal. Prince Siddhartha, as he was known before he became Buddha or the enlightened one, belonged to the Shakya clan. His father was King Suddhodana, the ruler of Kapilavastu, and his mother was Queen Maya. When Prince Siddhartha was young, he saw four sights that changed his life. The first was that of a sick man crying in pain. The second was of an old man and third was of a dead man. These three sites made him sad and he found that he could never enjoy the pleasures of the palace while the people of his kingdom suffered. The fourth site was that of an ascetic (sadhu) who had renounced the world and was meditating under a tree. Seeing the ascetic, the prince decided to leave the palace and wander around like a monk, trying to find a solution for the sufferings of the world. Prince Siddhartha then wandered from place to place for six years in search of the truth. He finally achieved enlightenment while meditating under a peepal tree in Bodh Gaya in Bihar and came to be known as Buddha, the enlightened one.

According to Buddha, the world is full of suffering, caused by human desires. Renunciation of desires is the path for attaining salvation. Salvation, according to the Buddha, can be achieved by following the Eight Fold Path. This Eight Fold path, as preached by Buddha included:

- Right action
- Right determination.
- Right exercise.
- Right livelihood
- Right meditation

- Right memory
- Right observation
- Right speech

Like Mahavira, Buddha also propagated the theory of Ahimsa or non-violence.

The Spread and Growth of Buddhism

Buddhism was taught in Prakrit, which is the language of the ordinary people so that everyone could understand the message of the Buddha. The Disciples of Buddha formed Sanghas or associations and travelled from place to place to propagate Buddhism. As a result, many tradesmen and craftsmen became followers of this religion.

Apart from India, Buddhism spread to many countries of Central Asia. In fact, Buddhism continues to be a popular religion in Japan, Korea, Thailand and China. Buddhism became an important aspect of the Chinese life. Many scholars went to China and Chinese monks came to India to learn Buddhism.

Sources of Buddhism

Tripitaka, a Sanskrit word which means 'three baskets' are the Buddhist scriptures. The three categories of the Tripitakas include the Sutra Pitaka, the Vinaya Pitaka and the Abhidhamma Pitaka. These Pitakas contain the teachings of Buddha and tell us about his life.

The Jataka tales contain stories regarding the previous births of Buddha in both human and animal form.

These archaeological sources to study Buddhism include the Buddhist viharas or monasteries and the Mahabodhi Temple in Gaya. The early Buddhist monks lived in caves. Later, viharas or monasteries were built for them. These monks lived and preached from the monasteries.

Sanghas and Monasteries

Both Buddhism and Jainism stressed on the importance of giving up material wealth and property to attain happiness. These people who left their homes in search of happiness are called the sangha. These people led simple lives. They meditated most of the times and begged for their food. They were encouraged to help each other and also to spread the message of Buddhism to the people.

During the period when they did not travel, for instance, during the rainy season, they retire in caves or temporary houses built by their supporters. Eventually they felt the need for more permanent homes and so monasteries or viharas were built.

Ashramas

During this period, when Buddhism and Jainism were becoming popular, the Brahmins devoted the system if **ashrama** which outlines special guidelines for Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas. According to the system of ashrama, life is divided into four stages.

- Brahmacharya: the student life.
- Grihastha: the family life.
- Vanaprastha: when man contemplates or meditates in the forest.
- Sanyasa: when man gives up all worldly things and becomes a sanyasi.

End of the Chapter