

FRUITION OF INDIAN PHILOSOPHY

(Religious Protest in 6th Century B.C.)

The conditions that favoured the rise of religions like Jainism and Buddhism

(1) **Religious discontent.**—The religion of the Vedas gave undue emphasis to performances of a wide variety of rituals and ceremonies which were costly, complicated and dominated by the priestly class. The Upanishads reacted against the meaningless rituals and practices. There was a call for spiritual knowledge. The Upanishads attached very little importance to ceremonies and austerities and advocated principles of *Brahma* and *Atma*, *Maya*, *Punarjanma* and *Karma*—A highly complicated nature of the sacrifices to be performed by the priests—each specialising in a special type of sacrifice. There were four classes of sacrificing priests namely *Hoti*, *Udgarti*, *Adhvaryu* and *Brahman*. Animal sacrifices created unrest among the people.

(2) **It was a period of racial synthesis.**—Certain social adjustments were taking place. The superiority of Aryans was being questioned and non-Aryans resisted the advance of Aryans.

(3) **Caste rigidity.**—The new religions show a reaction against the rigidity of caste. They denounced caste. There was conflict between Kshatriyas and Brahmins regarding the spiritual leadership. The politics of this time was to a great extent responsible for the success of new religions.

(4) **New Social Classes.**—The improvement of agriculture led to agriculture surplus. Towns increased. Trade and commerce were promoted. Arts and crafts were diversified. New social classes appeared. These classes attacked the supremacy of the priests and revolted against the religious rituals.

(5) **Republics.**—The republic people revolted against monarchies. Monarchs favoured the Vedic religious *Yagas* and *Yagnas* and sacrifices. The republic people accepted the new religious cults against the Vedic religion.

As a result of the dissatisfaction of the Vedic religion, new schools of philosophy like Ajivikias, Charvakas, Jainism and Buddhism influenced the urban people.

Ajivikias.—The Ajivikias were the religious thinkers that preached in the sixth century B.C. in North-Eastern India. The exponent of this sect was Makhalli Gosala, who hailed from a humble family. He was the contemporary of Buddha and Mahavira and is said to have died around 487 B.C. He roamed about naked and drunk. He advocated a philosophy of extremism. Therefore, he could not have much following.

The Ajivikias derived the basic concept of Hindu thought i.e., the theory of Karma. They preached the philosophy of pre-determination. According to them, the soul had to pass through a predetermined cycle of rebirths, irrespective of any action by the body. They believed in destiny. It controlled every part of human action. Nothing could stop destiny.

The Ajivikias believed that the whole universe was conditioned and determined by an impersonal cosmic principle *Niyati* or destiny and it was impossible to influence the course of transmigration in any way. The Ajivikias were organised into a body of monks.

Charvakas and Lokayats.—Charvakas and Lokayats were another group of religious thinkers of sixth century B.C. Their ideas were derived from the teachings of Ajita Keshakambatin who said that man was formed of four elements, which would return to dust after he died. The Charvak system believes only in materialism. The materialists totally rejected the rituals that were performed by the Vedic Brahmins as they regarded them to be meaningless.

The Charvakas believed that the physical body composed of material elements is the only essence of man. Death only is the end of man; and enjoyment of pleasures are the only objects in life. There is no life beyond death, no heaven or hell, no 'Law of Karma' and no rebirth. The Charvaka system does not believe in soul, God, or any other life beyond the present one.

Jainism

Jainism has great antiquity represented by a succession of twenty-four Tirthankaras. The first Tirthankara was Rishabhath. The twenty-third Tirthankara was Paraswanatha. Vardhamana Mahavira is the twenty-fourth and last Tirthankara and the founder of Jainism.

Mahavira was born in Kundagrama near Vaisali in 540

B.C. His father was Siddhartha. He was the head of Jnatrika clan. His mother was Trisala. Mahavira married Yasoda and they had a daughter Priyadaršana. After the death of his parents, he became an ascetic at the age of 30. At the age of 42 he attained *Kaivalya* i.e., the supreme knowledge. He was known as Kewalin and Jina. He preached his doctrines in different parts of Northern India. He passed away at Pava near Rajagriha about 468 B.C. at the age of seventy two.

Vardhamana Mahavira accepted four doctrines of Paraswanatha namely (i) non-injury to living beings, (ii) speaking the truth, (iii) non-possession of property, (iv) not stealing and added a fifth one, namely celibacy. As an example of complete renunciation and free from any possessions, Mahavira asked his followers to discard even their clothes.

Jains did not believe in God and the creation of the world by God. At the same time they did not deny the existence of God. The world for Jains is not created, maintained or destroyed by a God but functions through a universal or eternal law. The universe is eternal. Its existence is divided into cycles of progress (*utsarpiņi*) and declines (*avasarpiņi*). The universe functions through the interaction of living souls (*jiva*) and every thing in the universe has a soul. The purification of the soul is the purpose of living, for it is only the pure soul after being released from the body that resides in bliss. The souls are found not only in the living beings like animals and plants but also in stones, rocks, water etc. The soul which has finally set itself free rises at once to the top of the universe, above the highest heaven, where it remains in an inactive omniscient bliss through eternity. This for Jains is *Nirvana*.

Mahavira codified the Jain beliefs into rigid rules of conduct. He referred to the perishable and the imperishable natures of man. Good and bad acts, have their effects on man's life. According to Jainism, the ultimate aim of man is to attain *salvation* (purification of the soul). Salvation can be attained by freeing the soul from bondage. The three *Ratnas* or three Jewels—(i) Right faith, (ii) Right knowledge, and (iii) Right action—are the means of attaining salvation. One should avoid evil *Karmas*, prevent all kinds of fresh *Karmas* and destroy the existing one. Salvation can be attained through five vows—(i) Ahimsa (non-injury) (ii) Satya (speaking truth), (iii) Asteya (non-stealing) (iv) Brahmacharya (non-adultery) and (v) aparigraha (non-possession). Salvation is possible only by abandoning all possessions, a long course

of fasting, self-modification, study and meditation. Hence monastic life is essential for salvation. Some extremists consider even an unconscious killing of small insects as committing a sin.

Mahavira rejected the authority of the Vedas. But he accepted the Hindu theory of Karma. He condemned sacrifices. He was against the supremacy of the priestly class in the society. He was for social equality irrespective of caste or creed. Jainism did not condemn varna system. Mahavira postulated that a person is born into a higher or lower varna because of the virtues or sins committed by him in his previous life. Thus, only a pure and meritorious life could lead to liberation for members of the lower orders too.

Jainism later got divided into two sects—*Digambaras* (those who were stark naked) and *Swetambaras* (those who put on white robes).

Buddhism

Buddhism was founded by Gautama Buddha, whose original name was Siddhartha. He was born in 566 B.C. His father, Suddhodhan, was the king of Sakya republic whose capital was Kapilvastu. His mother was Mayadevi, who died after seven days of his birth. He left his house at the age of 29 and renounced the worldly life. He was moved by the misery of the world and left his home in search of truth. He studied for some time in philosophical schools and took to asceticism as a means of salvation and rejected it. Thereafter, he meditated for six years. He eventually achieved enlightenment under the Bodhi tree at Gaya and became the Buddha i.e., the enlightened one.

Buddha delivered his first sermon at Sarnath. He met his first five disciples at this place. His first sermon is known as "Dharma Chakra Pravartana" or the "Turning of the Wheel of Law". The essence of the teaching of the Buddha lies in this.

The fundamental principle of Buddha's teaching are represented by the four noble truths (Arya-Satyas) they are : (i) the world is full of sorrow (Dukkha), (ii) desire is the cause of suffering (Dukkha Samuddaya), (iii) suffering can be removed (Dukkha Nirodha) and (iv) path leading to cessation of sorrow (Dukkha nirodhayamini-pratipada).

According to Buddha, the root of all human misery was 'desire' (trishna) and annihilation was the surest way of ending unhappiness. He held that death was no escape from it, as it

leads to rebirth and further suffering. One could get out of this chain of suffering and achieve the final salvation (*nirvana*), by following the eight fold path.

These eight fold paths (*Ashtangika-marga*) are (i) right speech, (ii) right action, (iii) right means of livelihood, (iv) right exertion, (v) right mindfulness (vi) right meditation, (vii) right resolution, and (viii) right view. The ultimate aim of life is to attain *nirvana*, the eternal state of peace and bliss, which means freedom from further birth and death.

Buddha says that desire is the root cause of suffering. Desire springs from ignorance. Ignorance can be eradicated by adopting *middle path* (*Madyama Pratipat* or *Tathagarh Marg*) where individual should avoid both the extremes *i.e.*, self indulgence or self mortification (life of comforts and luxury or a life of severe ascetism).

The moral doctrine preached by Buddha were quite simple. Man is arbiter of his own destiny and not any God or Gods. If he does good deeds in his life, he will be reborn in a higher life and so on till he attains salvation or the final emancipation from the evils of birth. On the other hand, evil deeds are sure to be punished and the man will be reborn into lower and lower life, each life taking him further away from *nirvana*. He laid stress on truth, charity, purity and control over passions. Buddhism laid great stress on love, compassion, equanimity and non-injury to the living creatures in thought, word and deed.

Buddha said everything is transient. There is no soul. He did not believe in the existence of God. He had no belief in prayer and sacrifice. He rejected Brahminical rituals and cults. But Buddha gave importance to the doctrine of Karma.

Buddha considered *Ahimsa* or non-violence as an important part of the practical morality and therefore laid more importance to the spirit of love than good deeds. In Buddha's teachings there was no place for caste system, because everything depended on the deeds or Karma of the individual.

The followers of Buddha fell into two categories— (i) *Bhikshus* or monks; and (ii) *Upasakas* or house holders. *Sanghas* were established primarily for the training of monks. The Buddhist *Sangha* was responsible for the spread of Buddhism. The nuns had separate *sanghas*. The monks and nuns had to practise spiritual exercises besides observing code of conduct and rules of morality.

Buddha died at the age of 80 in the year 486 B.C. at

Kushinagar.

Differences between Buddhism and Jainism

- (1) Buddhism was more practical in outlook than Jainism. Jainism contained more metaphysical discussion. Buddhist teachings were simple.
- (2) Jainism retained many Hindu practices such as caste system where as Buddhism rejected them.
- (3) The Jains followed painful practices as *Sallekhana*, but the Buddhists abstained from such severe ascetism.
- (4) The Jains pushed non-violence to the point of extremity, which was found to be difficult to practice, where as Buddhism tried to put the non-violence in practice.
- (5) Buddhism became an international faith. But Jainism remained a national religion.

Importance of Jainism and Buddhism

Both Jainism and Buddhism had risen as a protest against Brahminism which means animal sacrifices, domination of the priestly class and social inequality. Both the religions denied the Veda as a source of knowledge.

Jainism and Buddhism focused their attention mostly on the changed social relations of that period. They appealed to the people to reject the social evils that had come in light of the changed material conditions of towns and villages. In this period, much wealth was generated in towns. Buddha and Mahavira said that wealth would create sharp social distinction. Some people would be poor and others very rich. Buddha advised eradication of poverty, because it was the cause of hatred, cruelty and violence. The code of conduct for monks indicates a life of egalitarianism.

The doctrine of *Ahimsa* or non-violence was meant for saving the animal wealth as the cattle had become essential for agricultural increase. However, the Jains practised extreme form of non-violence which was against the agriculturists.

Both Jainism and Buddhism rebelled against the caste hierarchy. But they did not reject the caste system. They preached that all were eligible for *Nirvana*. The monks were free to take food from all the castes.

Both the religions adopted the same attitude towards trade. They received gifts from traders. Performance of worship of Jainism and Buddhism was not expensive and.

hence, many people were attracted towards these faiths.

The philosophies of non-violence and vegetarianism were derived from Buddhism. Though Buddhism and Jainism tried to democratise society, they could not bring about radical changes in the system.

The principles of Jainism and Buddhism had contributed to several changes in the social, economic and political conditions of the time. Many cultural patterns of today can be traced to the period of these religions.

Bhagavatism

Bhagavatism started with the teachings of the great teacher, Sri Krishna-Vasudeva, son of Devaki, of the Satvata or Vrisni tribe and became very popular during the later periods as Vaishnavism. The Supreme deity of Bhagavatism was Vasudeva, Krishna. He emphasized the need of bhakti or devotion to God as the best way to attain salvation. Bhagavatism is a great reform movement within the Vedic religious fold.

By the second century B.C., this new sect of Hinduism had spread in a large area as inscriptional evidence shows. The famous Basnagar (Madhya Pradesh) inscription mentions that Heliodorus the Greek ambassador of King Antialcidas, called himself *Bhagavata* and erected a *Garudadhvaja*, in honour of Vasudeva, at Basnagar. Other early inscriptions related to Bhagavatism came from Ghosundi (Rajasthan), Madhura (Uttar Pradesh) and Nasik (Maharashtra).

Bhagvatism preached the doctrine of incarnation, or avatar. In contradiction to atheistic religions, such as Buddhism and Jainism, there ran a counter movement of religious theism which, as it were would culminate in the establishment of Bhagavata cult. Bhagavata cult is the cult of devotion to Vishnu-theism with an emphasis on personal worship with devotion rather than sacrificial ritual. It spread as a Bhakti movement. The devotional aspect was formulated in a relationship between God and man based on love. The theism of the Bhagavata cult was derived from ideas in the Upanishads.

Among the trinity of Gods, Vishnu took up residence in the highest of heavens from where he observes the universe, and at times when evil is rampant, he assumes various forms or incarnations and enters the world of men in order to save them from evil.

The Vedic ritual cult was gradually shifted to the view

that a completely personal relationship between God and the devotee is possible. The monotheistic concept of God with Vishnu gained strength. The relationship was one where God could bestow his grace (*prasada*) on the devotee, and the degree of devotion (*bhakti*) varied from person to person.

The epic heroes, Rama and Krishna became incarnations of the God Vishnu and were given the sanctity of divine revelation. The Bhagavad-Gita, the interpolation of Mahabharata embodies the teachings of Lord Krishna. It is a remarkable theistic document.

The change in the theological attitude is perhaps expressed in the philosophy of the Gita. The doctrine of *Karma*, transmigration was the centre of belief at that time. Actions in the present life condition the next birth. This is not fatalism, since one can modify one's destiny by consciously performing *Dharma*.

Lord Krishna says to Arjuna in Kurukshetra war-field that each man must do his duty and act according to the sacred law without questioning the results of his action taken for the righteous cause. Lord Krishna says that one should remain balanced both in happiness and sorrow, in profit and loss and in victory and defeat. He tells that *Atma* is indestructible, neither weapons can pierce it nor fire burn it. Death is always that of body and not of Atman which takes another body as its abode. He says that God incarnates himself with a view to punish the wicked, but the man who acts according to god's will gets the moksha.

He further tells that one can attain moksha (salvation) in three ways-by acquiring highest knowledge (jnana), by devotion to God (bhakti) and by action (karma) i.e., selfless performance of one's duties without caring for reward.

The Shad Darshanas (Six systems of Salvation)

Among the six systems of philosophy there is some similarity and affinity between Nyaya (analysis) and Vaisesika (particular characteristics) Sankhya (enumeration) and Yoga (Application) and Mimansa (Inquiry) and Vedanta (end of Vedas). All these schools acknowledged the authority of the Vedas, accepted the principle of Karma and rebirth, adhered to the rules of varna and ashrama and believed in rhythmic progress towards cosmos.

(i) **Sankhya (Enumeration).**—Purna Kassapa was an exponent of the Sankhya system. It teaches the existence of 25 tattvas, being *prakriti* i.e., matter is the first. It believes that the evolution of universe is not due to God but due to the

inherent nature of prakriti. All things like, air, water, ether (akash), buddhi (intelligence) developed from prakriti. Purusa, the soul is also one of the tattvas. Purusa, is not dependent on prakriti. Prakriti is developed out of three gunas—Sattva, rajasa and tamas.

(ii) Vaisesika (Particular Characteristics).—Pakudha Katyayana was an exponent of vaisesika system of philosophy. It is a realistic, analytical and objective philosophy of the world. It tries to distinguish between the various kinds of ultimate things and to classify all the objects under five elements—earth, water, air, fire and ether—existing in the form of atom, time, space, mind and self. One of its fundamental doctrines is that of padartha which are divided into six categories viz., substance (dravya), quality (guna), activity (karma), generality (samanya) particularity (vives) and inherence (samavaya). It says the creation of the world begins when the atoms of the five elements start to combine, and when they disintegrate, the world comes to an end.

(iii) Nyaya (Analysis).—The first exposition of Nyaya philosophy is found in the sutras of Akasapada Gautama. Nyaya system says there are four methods or sources for the acquisition of knowledge *pramana viz.*, Pratyakasha (intuition) Anumana (inference), Upamana (comparison) and sabda (verbal testimony). Nyaya system accepts all the substances admitted by the vaisesika system and adds one Abhava (negation).

(iv) Yoga (Application).—Patanjali explained a methodical effort to attain perfection through the control of the physical, mental and astral elements of human nature through practising yama (self control) niyama, (observance) asanas (postures) pranayama (control of breath), pratyahara (restrain), dharma (steadying the mind), dhyana (meditation) and samadhi (deep meditation).

(v) Mimansa (enquiry).—The *mimansa* (enquiry) system is a philosophy of interpretation of the Samhita and Brahamana portions of Vedas.

(vi) Vedanta (end of Vedas).—In later period, Sankara brought the commentary of *Vedanta* on Upanishads, Brahamasutra Vedanta (End of the Vedas) also claimed origin in the Vedas and accepted the existence of the absolute soul in the things, the final purpose of existence being the union of the individual and the Absolute Soul after physical death.