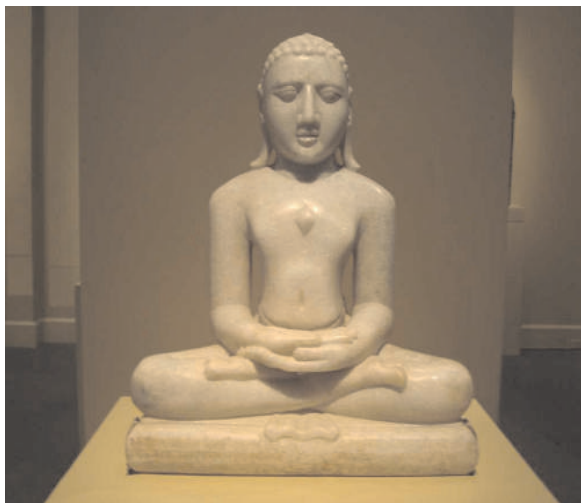


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## THE EMERGENCE OF JANISM AND BUDDHISM IN ANCIENT INDIA: A HISTORICAL NECESSITY

**Shesh Nath Vernwal and Le Dinh Son**

Ph.D. Scholars, Department of Buddhist Studies,  
Sanchi University of Buddhist-Indic Studies, Barla, Raisen, Madhya Pradesh (India)



### ABSTRACT

About six century B.C. India has seen a great change in social, economic, political and spiritual life of north India. It is a landmark in history which gave emergence of religions like Jainism and Buddhism. What are the factors, which leads these changes? Why from a Vedic Brahmanical religion to non-Vedic atheist religions were necessary to emerge in that scene? How the societal structure and complex rituals of prevalent religion helped to rebel a class for a more justified society. These questions were to try to answer with this research paper. It also focuses on the background of these changes which worked like change agents as necessities to emerge two new religions in the world.

**KEYWORDS :** Buddhism and Jainism, Iron ores, Urbanization, Brahmanism, Caste and class etc.

### INTRODUCTION

It's a historical fact that when the society reaches a particular phase of development, it gives birth to many such ruling classes which get more privilege than the common man. Religious and political ruling classes, who are the carriers of change and new ideas, become conservative and narrow minded in the state of their privilege. They want to maintain their high position in every situation. For this, they frame many rules, codes and divine laws as masses can accept their higher positions without any question. Even the religious class also gives sanction to the king's political power among the common mass to rule with those codes-bound laws, and puts the burden of those codes on them, too.

Due to this, social and economic progress of society gradually becomes stagnant, and the religious class becomes a burden and just a curb on the working class of society. In spite of these social influences, there are changes in physical, cultural, economic and technical, because the flow of time cannot be stopped.

When Buddhism and Jainism came into the Indian scene, common masses of the society were facing problems like caste system. Majority of the people in the society were deprived of basic amenities, while a few enjoyed all the rights and privileges. All these practices were in the name of religion. Therefore it is important to examine the situations and pushing factors which give rise of Jainism and Buddhism.

## TECHNOLOGICAL AND MATERIAL CHANGES

There have been basically two pushing factors for rapid change in ancient Indian history, one is technological advancement and other is emergence of new thoughts and ideas. It is not very evident that which is more important for historical change. It has been a much discussed topic that the use of iron as a technological tool how much responsible of the changes took place in six century B.C. Some says it was very much responsible for agricultural expansion and economic advancement leading to new cities. Historians D.D. Kosambi and R.S. Sharma's views are in agreement to the above hypothesis. D.D. Kosambi thinks that the eastern movement of Indo-Aryans was in order to reach the iron ores in south Bihar, and that was responsible for the political dominance attained by the state Magadha<sup>1</sup>. R.S. Sharma highlighted the role of iron axes in clearing the forests of the Ganga valley and iron ploughs in agricultural expansion in this area. He argued that the use of these implements was responsible for generating an agricultural surplus, which paved the way for the second phase of urbanization. Religions such as Buddhism were a response to the new socio-economic milieu generated by iron technology. There is not a general consensus among the historians with these views, although.

## ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

The rise of many entrepreneurial classes leads to an increase in technology, agriculture and trade, which leads to economic prosperity and the development of new cities. With the increase in the aspiration of the vast majority of the population, old rules and traditions remain undisturbed. In such a situation, time is demanded that there is the emergence of such ideas and movements that liberate working and middle classes from these injuries and open the spiritual path for a new lifestyle and happiness.

About the end of the Post Vedic period, almost similar situation arose in North India. The privilege and superiority of the Brahmins in the society was established. Special emphasis was placed on the practice of self-role of Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra which was very discriminatory and against rationality. As mentioned in History of Ancient India by K.C. Chaudhury, "*Religious formalities were prized above devotion, honesty, truth and real faith. The complexities of religious observance, not within the comprehension of the common people, naturally made the priestly class, that is, the Brahmanas the sole trustees of common man's religion.*"<sup>2</sup> Brahmanism was based on highly ritualistic, complex, expansive and animal sacrifice. The priest class started performing religious rites on behalf of person and family members. It was believed a person or family would be free from sin and will get prosperity on behalf of the performance done by the priest. *This common belief naturally gave the priests an autocratic control over the society.*<sup>3</sup> In society, the social status and prestige of Vaishya and Shudra decreased, while their consciousness increased due to economic progress and urban development.

## RESISTANCE AGAINST SOCIAL INFERIORITY

In the society, Vaishyas (traders, artisans and other productive classes) were enriched, but they did not get prestige on the basis of skills and prosperity in the in the society, although sacrifices of animal, extravagant rituals of Brahmanism continued. The trader and financially competent class was well-off for social prestige. On the other hand, animal sacrifice was causing damage to agricultural production.

Due to the rigors of caste system, productive groups were deemed inferior in spite of their economic condition and intellectual consciousness. Although the agricultural class did not explicitly protest against the Brahminic system, it was in the opposition of the animal sacrifice in yajñ. On the

other hand, Kshatriyas also not ready to accept their superiority in society only because of the Vedic and ritualistic knowledge. Therefore, it can be said that in the 6th century BC, there was a rise in social, religious and economic condition of Vaishya which also got support from Kshatriya and opposed Brahmanism. These two new classes rejected the monopoly of Brahmins on knowledge and supremacy of him.

Although, further, it is interesting to observe as Singh pointed out that the condition of two higher varnas were reversed and not alteration made on two lower varnas. The Social order of the later Vedic age in respect of varna organization appears to have been little reversed by the Jain and Buddhist scholars. In early Buddhist texts and the Jain canonical and Puranic literature, the order of the first two varnas was reversed with the result that the ksatriyas came to be placed first and brahmanas just next to them from the point of view of social grades. As regards the remaining two varnas the order was left undisturbed.<sup>4</sup>

### **NECESSITY OF A NEW SPIRITUAL PATH**

In order to protect agriculture and increase trade, there was a need for such a spiritual path which is simple and emphasizes on karma. In the new sections of society, traders, artisans and other people were aspiring to change in the contemporary society, but it is also true that despite the consciousness of the common masses the people do not even resort to extreme change. Therefore, great men/ women are born for such actions, or a person changes himself as a great man/ woman.

It is the time to think, why such great men/ women are the first ones to understand the circumstances and thoughts already prevail, although may not be very distinct, in the environment. I think the great man/ woman of the time is one who have sense to understand the aspiration of the masses and have courage to express it through himself/ herself. The society considers such pioneer as leader and follow the path guided by him/ her. These conditions were the background of the birth of non-Vedic or non-Brahmin religion at that time.

It is also believed that Indian society very much a spiritual society and cannot live without following Dharma which is universal nature about good over evil and duty to performed for a good life. As this concept correctly explained by Vibha Chaturvedi in Dharma and Ethics: The Indian Ideal of Human Perfection, *“Dharma is one of the most important concepts in Indian thought, understood as the foundation of the good life.”*<sup>5</sup>

In India, basically, there are three kinds of religions we find, one religion which developed from holy texts compiled by various Vedic Rishis through a long tradition of recitation from Guru to Shishya, second one is the *‘natural religions which developed from the observation of natural phenomena and from the study of relation between causes and effects’*<sup>6</sup> and last one is revealed religions based on the teachings of Prophets who received knowledge and orders directly from their God. Jainism and Buddhism come under the second one.

The religion which the Buddha and Mahavira had interpreted was simple, intelligible, understandable and very much based on reasoning. The Buddha and Mahavira opposed discrimination on the basis of birth and established the importance of karma. They condemned casteism, Brahminism, wastage of money and animal as sacrifices and all types of violence. They emphasized ethics, and not on God, super-mundane things and miracles. They preached in commons man languages the principles of Satya (truth), Ahimsa (nonviolence), Achaurya (not to steal), Aparigraha (not to collect), Brahmcharya (celibacy), rational thinking etc. and emphasized personal social ethics which fulfilled the spiritual needs according to the social situations.

## EMERGENCE OF NEW IDEA AND THINKING

There was many of kinds of spiritual and philosophical ideas emerged in the society which led to the intellectual discourses and creating a variety of ideologies. As a result of development of ideologies from Upanishad, the useless rituals and complex ceremonial practices of the Brahmins were opposed.

The six century B.C. was particularly noted for the rise of a number of new religions, but Jainism and Buddhism were the most important two.<sup>7</sup> We find six prominent teachers of their own ideologies in the six century BC named Puran Kashyap, Makhalipt Gosai, Ajit Kesambali, Kukudh Kachchayan, Niganth Nathput and Sanjay Velthiput in Buddhist literary sources. In the Brahmajal Sutra, we find 62 philosophical opinions of the Shramans and the Brahmins before the rise of Buddhism and their number 363 in Jain texts Sutra Kritang. These details make us understand that the ideological and philosophical background was already there in the environment which contributed to emerge Buddhism and Jainism due to most relevant application of their spiritual leaders. Although Buddhism and Jainism has become most popular due to the complete spiritual insight and favorability of the situations available at that time. The charm of Buddha and Mahavira's personalities were additional factors for making them most appropriate of the time.

Buddha, the founder of Buddhism and Mahavira, the promoter of Jainism, both were from royal families and belonged to Kshatriya class. They choose spiritual path just because they want to make society free from misery and can leave life peacefully. In search of truth, they had to perform penance for many years in the wilderness and to endure suffering, although they were from royal families and it was easy for them to become kings and live a life with all luxuries and comforts, but they chose not easy way. They were highly concerned about the misery of the common people and also proved it through their efforts. These facts made their personalities charismatic.

## THE SUCCESS OF JAINISM AND BUDDHISM

There were certain suitability of Jainism and Buddhism which made these two religions most popular spiritual pathways among new emerging classes and common mass. Jainism was a welcome which gave up Vedic social bureaucracy, yajna and other useless rituals. As rightly explained by Kasibhatta and Murty in the book *'The Aryans and After'*. They write, *"Jainism was successful not only in condemning the Vedic ideals but also identified on the most firm grounds the certainty of the only perceptible for the regular way of life detaching the self by the promotion of celibacy. The virtue with Jainism was not only celibacy but also non-commitment to certain unseen concepts like God. Unlike Carvaka system, Jainism argued in favor of Karma and rather Karma only. But the result of Karma does not lie with the fruits in material form, but the fruit is in the form of Jnana, that too after undergoing a rigorous exercise of penance."*<sup>8</sup>

Similarly, they also write about Buddhism as an alternative spiritual path having not complex traditions and free from hierarchical discrimination. They mention appropriately, *"The Buddhism emerged as another powerful alternative to the Vedic way life and standards. The Buddhism was having no tradition, no follow-up and no theory. It was proposed afresh by Gautama Siddhartha who lived during 566 B.C. to 486 B.C."*<sup>9</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The emergence of Buddhist and Jain philosophy was in response to Brahmanism with background of the new economic and social situations where the old religion failed to cope and change itself with new necessities and aspiration of the age.

The opposition of Brahmanism started from its early days, but Jain and Buddhist philosophy had

worked towards giving creative direction. These two philosophies worked to give new and ever-oriented directions to the stream of intellectualism that era, which almost lost its identity among rituals and misgivings.

The spiritual leaders Mahavira Swamy and Gautama Buddha of Jainism and Buddhism respectively were born six centuries before Christ era, in Kshatriya class. Both of them had strongly opposed rituals and orthodoxism in their philosophy. Both were against animal sacrifices offered in the yajna. Both had taken the side of peace and non-violence, and earned a lot of fame and popularity. Both Jain and Buddhist philosophies have an important place in the Indian mindset from more than 2500 years. Hence these two religions or spiritual path showed by the Buddha and Mahavira were able to fulfill the necessities of the time.

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- 3.Ibid, p.65
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- 5.Chaturvedi: 'The Concept of Dharma' in 'Dharma and Ethics: The Indian Ideal of Human Perfection, p. 73
- 6.Vannucci: 'Ancient Gods and Heroes of East and West', p. 347
- 7.Chaudhury: 'History of Ancient India', p. 66
- 8.Kasibhatta and Murty: 'The Aryans and After', p. 90
- 9.Ibid, p. 91