

BUDDHISM AND JAINISM: PHILOSOPHICAL DIVERGENCE AND POLITICAL INFLUENCE IN ANCIENT INDIA

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Abstract:

The philosophy and politics of ancient India's major religions, Buddhism and Jainism, in relation to the Greek and Roman traditions, are evaluated here. Each religion is similar in promoting peace and high moral values, but they differ in their ideas about the soul, karma, liberation, and the way to release from suffering. The study explains how political patronage from rulers such as Chandragupta Maurya and Emperor Ashoka, including the support of institutions, helped the religions to develop and spread in India and beyond. Analyzing ancient writings along with archaeological remains and records allowed the study to explain how these spiritual movements recast religion and touched on government, social positions, and culture in ancient India.

Keywords: *Buddhism, Jainism, Ancient India, Philosophical Divergence, Political Influence, Mauryan Empire*

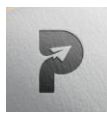
Introduction:

During the 6th century BCE, there was a major change in India, and people became full of restlessness, changed their social systems, and started challenging existing religious and social beliefs. Among the traditions of the Vedas, full of ritual sacrifices, powerful priests, and strong caste lines, a group of people emerged to encourage a new way of thinking and formed two key heterodox religions: Buddhism, led by Siddhartha Gautama (the Buddha), and Jainism, guided by Vardhamana Mahavira. The two religions both became ways of thinking, providing separate paths to being free from worldly suffering and developing doctrines about reality, oneself, karma, ethics, and ways to become detached from worldly pain.

Traders, artisans, women, and many others were drawn to the inclusive logic of the two religions, helping shape the political culture during ancient India's era. Great leaders in political life also supported these faiths, which further spread and helped form their institutions. Chandragupta Maurya, who began the Mauryan Empire, gave up his throne and became a Jain ascetic, starting Jain influence at court. After Kalinga was conquered so brutally, Emperor Ashoka adopted Buddhism and used his state's wealth to spread the Buddhist faith within India and throughout Asia, making it one of the initial and most easily noticeable examples of state-led spread of religion in history.

They illustrate the strong tie between religion and politics in ancient India, since moral beliefs influenced actions, policy-making, legal rules, schools, and international affairs. The reach of Buddhism and Jainism was felt in art, architecture, literary works, and in what makes up cultural identity. This research paper looks at the ways that Buddhism and Jainism are similar and different, organized around the interaction of their philosophies and the role of political systems in shaping South Asia's history and traditions.

Objective of the Research:



- 1) To examine the historical emergence of Buddhism and Jainism within the socio-religious context of 6th century BCE India and to understand the factors contributing to their development as reformist movements.
- 2) To analyze the core philosophical doctrines of both religions, with particular emphasis on their concepts of the self (ātman vs. anātman), karma, liberation (moksha/nirvana), non-violence, and ascetic practices.
- 3) To explore the political influence of Buddhism and Jainism, particularly their association with prominent rulers such as Chandragupta Maurya and Emperor Ashoka, and how such patronage contributed to their institutionalization and geographic spread.
- 4) To investigate the role of monastic communities and religious institutions in promoting education, social reforms, and intercultural exchanges during ancient times.
- 5) To assess the long-term impact of both religions on Indian society, culture, governance, and philosophy, and to understand their contribution to the evolution of religious pluralism in the subcontinent.

Literature Review:

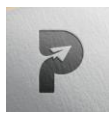
Much interest among researchers exists in how Buddhism and Jainism influenced early Indian cultures. Paul Dundas's *The Jains* (2002) is one of the initial works that looks closely at Jain doctrines and compares them to Buddhist beliefs about no-self. In *What the Buddha Thought* (2009), Richard Gombrich looks back at early Buddhism and shows that its ethics and political approach were of special significance to King Ashoka and others in ancient India. In 1998, Padmanabh S. Jaini provided a side-by-side look at common ideas and different routes to salvation. According to Romila Thapar (2002), the birth of these traditions reflected, to some extent a break from Vedic tradition and received help from reformatory rulers. Upinder Singh (2008) additionally shows that Buddhism and Jainism shaped the government of the Mauryas and that these religions expanded using trade and missionaries. In *Greater Magadha* (2007), Bronkhorst suggests that both religious traditions began in a culture other than Vedic, emphasizing renunciation as a main way of living. In his 2010 work, K.T.S. Sarao explains Buddhism's fall by looking at how support from rulers and internal conflicts affected its position. John Cort points out the political use of Jain art and iconography, and Jason Neelis shows how Buddhism's growth was supported by trade networks (2010 and 2011). While Audrey Truschke studies a later period, she shows how these early traditions still affected the cultural and political mixing of that time. All of these studies point out the ways both Buddhism and Jainism influenced Indian culture and politics in ancient times.

Research Methodology:

This study uses a qualitative and historical-analytical research methodology to examine the philosophical distinctions and political impact of Buddhism and Jainism in ancient India. It uses primary sources like religious texts, inscriptions, and archaeological findings, as well as secondary sources like scholarly books and conference proceedings. Data was collected through document analysis, textual analysis, and content analysis. The study aims to contrast key tenets of both religions, evaluate the socio-political circumstances, and track religious-political relations. However, the study is limited to ancient India, may be subject to interpretation, and interpretations of philosophical texts are based on translations.

Buddhism and Jainism: Philosophical Divergence and Political Influence in Ancient India

Both Buddhism and Jainism began as important religious and philosophical movements



in ancient India in the 6th century BCE. They were started as responses to the main Vedic Brahmanical faith. Buddhism, which began with Siddhartha Gautama (known as the Buddha), rejects a lasting soul and believes the self to be nothing more than an illusion based on various moving mental and physical activities. According to Buddhism, you can become free or attain Nirvana by following the Middle Way and erasing desire, ignorance, and pain. Those looking for freedom from any life cycle look to the Buddha's teachings on the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path.

Unlike Buddhism, Jainism, taught by Mahavira, sees the soul (Jiva) as eternal, gathered in karmic particles by the things one says and does, keeping it captured in cycles of rebirth. In Jainism, Moksha or liberation, is possible when the evil effects of karma are removed by following very strict ethical and religious rules. Ahimsa or strict non-violence guides Jain beliefs, even being followed with the same strictness toward bugs and other small creatures.

As a result of royal support and their moral precepts, these two religions had a major impact on old Indian society. Emperor Ashoka of the Mauryan dynasty was one of many rulers who gave Buddhism strong support after it influenced him during the dangerous Kalinga War. Thanks to his support, Buddhist institutions expanded and Buddhist teaching got stronger politically, helping to shape the subcontinent's culture.

Both Gujarat and Rajasthan were places where Jainism depended on royal support from local rulers. After ruling his kingdom, Chandragupta Maurya adopted the life of a Jain monk. Because of Ahimsa in Jainism, rulers adopted non-violent and tolerant laws, favored fairness at any level, and helped remove the strong caste system.

Soon after being noticed, both religions faded in importance as Hindu religious movements increased and Islamic rulers came to India. At the same time, their ideas have strongly influenced Indian culture, law, art, and beliefs.

Historical Background

By the 6th century BCE, Buddhism and Jainism came into being at the same time as major changes in society, politics, and economics in India. Trade flourished, cities increased, kingdoms formed, republics began, and some people grew unhappy with the traditional religion. In the leading Vedic system, called Brahmanism, plenty of sacrifices were part of religious rituals, complex rules for castes were in place, and priests handled spiritual matters. Meanwhile, the Śramaṇa movement began to grow, based on giving up certain things, meditation, living a good life, and pursuing personal enlightenment by closely following self-discipline.

Vardhamana Mahavira (born about 599 BCE) became both a Jain saint and omniscient (Kevala Jñāna) after leaving his family life and living strictly for twelve years. Later called the Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama founded Buddhism around the fifth century BCE. Raised as a prince in Nepal among the Shakyas, he gave up his royal life when he understood human suffering and became enlightened after sitting under the Bodhi tree at Bodh Gaya. His methods consisted of the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path, showing that the middle ground was best between rejecting all pleasures and rejecting all without.

Religious traditions in both religions began in the region of the fertile eastern Gangetic plain, where city growth was on the rise. People who made their living by trading and crafting liked the egalitarian and reasonable ideas taught in Jainism and Buddhism. During this time, Buddhist sanghas and Jain gacchas or sanghas arose as religious, educational, and social-



reform centers that also carried out economic activities.

Buddhism and Jainism rose in India as a result of tumultuous social times, strong religious beliefs, and the bringing together of India's kingdoms. They came onto the scene to challenge the important place of rituals in life and instead offered ways that were helpful and accessible to all.

Philosophical Divergences Between Jainism and Buddhism

There is a basic difference in philosophy between Jainism and Buddhism about the idea of the soul and breaking free from suffering. The religion of Jainism emphasizes that living beings have an eternal soul in each individual. It is believed by Jains that this soul is bound to life and death because it gathers karmic particles. By finishing the mandatory austerities and becoming a morally upright person, a person can get free from karmic impurities. By contrast, Buddhism defies the idea of having a soul that endures and lasts permanently. It teaches, however, that the concept of a "self" consists of fleeting physical and psychological parts. When desire, attachment, and ignorance are removed, liberation, nirvana, occurs, and one is freed from having to be reborn again and again. If you stick to the Eightfold Path, which encourages learning, respect, and mental improvement, you can gain this kind of liberation.

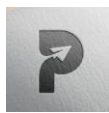
Karma is understood differently by the two religions. For Jainism, karma exists and can bond to the soul because of anything you do or don't do throughout your life, both intended and unintended. As long as these deeds remain, the soul is slowed in its spiritual growth and will not progress fully until those deeds are left behind through tough spiritual training and purification. From a Buddhist point of view, karma is mainly understood as intentional action caused by a person's will. It stresses the importance of your moral frame of mind instead of the stuff you do. Buddhist teachers believe that the wrong actions a person takes can affect his or her future and help decide where they are reborn.

Their ideas diverge more clearly because of their approach to salvation. Jainism emphasizes personal effort and a powerful form of asceticism in its five main vows: non-violence, truthfulness, not stealing, celibacy, and not possessing anything. They commit the monk to a hard way of life meant to stop accumulating negative karma and work towards a pure soul. Buddhism, instead, asks people to steer clear of both extreme self-indulgence and overly harsh ways of life. The Eightfold Path shows how to combine ethics, discipline, and wisdom, so people using it may learn and discover Nirvana.

According to these religions, there is no creator deity in God or the universe. For the Jains, there is no beginning and no end to the universe; every law operates on its own, without the need for gods. The existence of souls, matter, time, space, and motion is our proof that no supreme creator oversees them. Also, Buddhism doesn't accept that there is a creator god, instead teaching Pratītyasamutpāda, which shows how every event in nature is related to the next. Because of this loop, suffering begins and ends without divine control.

Political Influence in Ancient India

Buddhism and Jainism played a big role in politics during the Mauryan Empire in ancient times. At some point in his life, the founder of the Mauryan dynasty, Emperor Chandragupta Maurya, quit being a ruler and became a follower of Jainism, living under Jain monks. Because of this, Jainism gained greater political recognition and grew in the south of India. At first, his son Chandragupta's grandson followed Brahmanism, but seeing the Kalinga War changed his mind, and he adopted Buddhism. Because of his patronage, Buddhism was



made a part of India and set off on a missionary journey that took it beyond the subcontinent to Sri Lanka, Central Asia, and Southeast Asia.

Both faiths seriously influenced social improvement in ancient India by standing up against the strict grip of Brahmanism and the caste system. Although only men from the highest brackets were originally admitted, they later taught other groups, such as lower caste individuals and women. In those monasteries, people could worship, learn, receive health care, and find help for their community. Buddhist monasteries and Jain temples gathered thinkers and newcomers, who helped the intellectual and cultural growth of Native Americans.

Just as in Hinduism, the religious art and architecture of the area exhibit the deep mark left by Buddhism and Jainism. The religion is widely admired for its giant stupas, rock-carved cave temples, and fine temple architecture and statues. They reveal both piety and the link between political support and artistic initiatives.

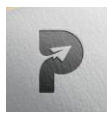
Decline and Legacy

Around the 10th century CE, the number of followers of both Buddhism and Jainism was declining in India, as a result of the restoration of Brahmanism and the problems brought by invasions from Muslims. The old Hindu traditions were revived, giving more power to the Vedic rituals and caste, and Buddhism and Jainism became less important. Because of the times of uncertainty and economic changes during the invasions, support for these religions at an institutional level began to fade. The number of Buddhists in India decreased, but the religion grew by leaps and bounds in East and Southeast Asia. By adopting Buddhist thought and practices, China, Japan, Tibet, Sri Lanka, and countries in the area known as the Southeast today have contributed to their global growth and rich heritage.

Even though Jainism is mainly practiced in one region, it has maintained its identity in India all these years. Because Jainism always encouraged ahimsa (non-violence), it has been a guiding force in how Indian society today chooses to live ethically and often eat vegetarian diets. Over the years, members of Jain communities have played a big part in business and trade, focusing on honesty, avoiding harm to others, and caring for society. Furthermore, Jain teachings about compassion and peace influenced later Indian leaders, including Mahatma Gandhi, who found useful ideas for peaceful resistance in what Jains believe. Consequently, although both religions have fallen from importance in Indian politics, their beliefs and traditions still enlighten the Indian culture and the world as a whole.

Conclusion:

India gave rise to Buddhism and Jainism, which were independent trends that each went against the established beliefs of the Brahmanical system. They both oppose ritual sacrifices and value ethical living and peace, yet their ideas are not the same. According to Jainism, the soul is eternal, and people should strive to live a very strict religious life, while Buddhism teaches that there is no eternal soul and encourages a more balanced path. The many opinions concerning existence, karma, and freedom from suffering influenced each faith to create different rituals and impact their followers and the communities around them. Support from leading rulers such as Chandragupta Maurya and Ashoka helped both religions to rise in political power. Because of their teachings, reforms were made to society that brought down the walls of caste and welcomed everyone, even women, to spiritual life. Because of monasteries and places of learning, they contributed more to society by encouraging art, architecture, and learning. Despite their decline during the medieval period because of



Brahmanical Hinduism and invaders, neither Buddhism nor Jainism lost all they had previously brought to the area. Because Buddhism was brought to East and Southeast Asia, it managed to survive and grow into a major world religion. The philosophical thoughts and moral guidelines of Jainism have inspired today's leaders and activists, showing India's age-old spiritual wisdom.

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