

Chapter

3

# Jainism and Buddhism

## Sources

Some of the sources that help in the reconstruction of the history of India in the sixth century BCE are discussed here.

## Angas

Several categories into which the Buddhist canonical writings were divided in early times is known as *anga*. This system was based on a combination of form and content. Previously, it used to categorise types of material within the text followed by classification of texts themselves.

While the Mahayana school used a system of twelve categories, the Theravada and Mahasanghika schools used an ancient ninefold division.

The nine *angas* in Pali are the following.

1. *Sutta/Sutra*: These were the sermons or discourses of the Buddha written in prose form.
2. *Geyya/Geya*: The term *geya* means 'mixed prose and verse'. It was usually understood as *sutta* that encompassed verse (*gatha*).
3. *Veyyakarana*: These were prophecies or explanations, under which a popular Pali work, *Abhidhamma Pitaka* has been categorized.
4. *Gatha*: These were the poems.
5. *Udana*: These were the special teachings of Buddha in verse or prose.
6. *Itivuttaka*: These contained tales about the past lives of Buddha's disciples.
7. *Jataka*: These were the stories of the previous lives of Buddha.
8. *Abbhutadhamma/Abdhutadharma*: These comprised the miraculous stories.
9. *Vedalla*: These comprised of the religious instructions.

The twelvefold system added the following *angas*.

10. *Nidana*: The term *nidana* means 'cause'. These were the historical narratives or the introductions.
11. *Avadana*: The term *avadana* means 'nobles deeds'. Hence, these were Buddha's stories about the good deeds or karma in people's previous lives and their effect on their present lives.
12. *Upadesa*: This comprised the discussions on doctrine.

## Tripitakas

*Tripitakas* were written in Pali and are revered by the Theravada school of Buddhism. The term *tripitaka* in Sanskrit means 'three baskets'. Hence, the work is divided into three categories, each has a 'basket of teaching' — *Sutra Pitaka*, *Vinaya Pitaka* and *Abhidharma Pitaka*.

1. *Sutra Pitaka*: It is the oldest and shortest of all the other categories. (It talks about regulations of monastic life.)
2. *Vinaya Pitaka*: The second and the longest of all categories, it comprises doctrines and discourses of Buddha to his disciples centered on ethics.)
3. *Abhidharma Pitaka*: It is (the philosophical as well as psychological analysis of the doctrines of Buddha.)

## Jatakas

The *Jatakas* are popular tales about the previous births and lives of the Buddha, as human and animal form. They are scattered across various sections of the Pali canon and has been preserved by all the sects of Buddhism. These tales are native to India.

In the Theravada Buddhism, the *Jatakas* constitute one of the *angas* included in the *Khuddaka Nikaya* of the *Sutta Pitaka*. A group of 35 tales have also been collected in *Cariya Piyaka* (basket of conduct). Around 550 tales were collected in a Sinhalese commentary in the fifth century BCE called *Jatakathavanna*. This has been attributed to a Buddhist scholar, Buddhagosa.

These tales traditionally begin with a situation that leads to the narration of the story and ends with the Buddha's identification of people in the introductory stories to those of people from the past. The Buddha, in these previous lives stories, may appear as a god, an elephant, a king or an outcast but exhibit the virtues that the stories emphasise.

The *Jataka* tales have parallels in the Sanskrit epic Mahabharata and also in collections like the *Panchatantra* and the *Puranas*. The *Jataka* tales have been illustrated multiple times in paintings and sculptures such as in the Ajanta caves and on the gates of Sanchi Stupa.

## Factors for the Rise of Jainism and Buddhism

These were some of the factors for the rise of Jainism and Buddhism in India.

### Opposition to rituals and rites

The rituals in Hinduism had become too expensive and complex. Common people could not afford to conduct *yajnas*. The Vedic philosophy had lost its purity. The people eventually developed a strong dislike for these rituals. The sacrifices prescribed by the *Vedas* had become a difficult affair and consumed immense amount of time, energy and money.

### Supremacy of the priests

The priests began encouraging ordinary people to perform expensive *yajnas* and sacrifices which were beyond their means. The Brahmin priests failed to understand and grasp the gravity of the situation. Hence, this attitude of the priests was not liked by the common man and the Kshatriya rulers. Buddha and Mahavira were two Kshatriya princes who revolted.

### Casteism

The classification of society and the caste system amongst people had become mandatory. With the passage of time, castes became extremely rigid, like water-tight compartments. There were restrictions on food and drinks and no inter-caste marriages or interactions were possible. A person of the low caste led a miserable life. Buddhism and Jainism offered them an honourable place.

### Slaughter of animals

A large number of animals had to be slaughtered for ceremonial sacrifices and *yajnas*. The common man, therefore, resented such meaningless and indiscriminate killing in the name

of pleasing the gods. Even the farmers, who needed these animals to plough the fields, resented the killing of animals. They **needed a religion which would protect animals from being slaughtered.** Jainism and Buddhism stressed on non-violence which was the perfect answer to their problems.

### Difficult language

The Vedic religion had become extremely complex and degenerated into superstitions, dogmas and rituals. The Vedic mantras chanted by the priests and religious treatises, which were in Sanskrit, were beyond the intellect of an average person. Sanskrit was the language of the elite and not the masses. Therefore, people wanted an alternative. Mahavira and Buddha, on the contrary, explained to the people in simple Pali or Prakrit, the language of the common man during that time.

### Patronage by the kings

Bimbisara who ruled Magadh and later Ajatashatru, who were liberal rulers, patronised both Jainism and Buddhism. They rejected certain social evils which were prevalent during their rule.

### Jainism

Jainism originated in India and is thought to have heavily influenced the existing two main religions during that time—Hinduism and Buddhism. The religion emphasises the progress of one's soul towards a divine consciousness through self-reformation, wisdom, self-control and pacifism towards all living creatures. Some Jains believe that Jainism started flourishing millions of years ago but it is impossible to verify the exact origins. Jains believe that there had been 24 teachers known as *tirthankaras*. The first *tirthankara* was Rishabha, the twenty-third was Parsavanath and the twenty-fourth was Mahavira.

### Review

1. Why do you think people of lower castes were attracted towards Jainism and Buddhism?
2. How was royal patronage an important factor in the growing popularity of Jainism and Buddhism?
3. What led to the rise of discontent among people against the Brahmanical religious system in sixth century BCE?



Handship

## Doctrines of Jainism

The various doctrines of Jainism are:

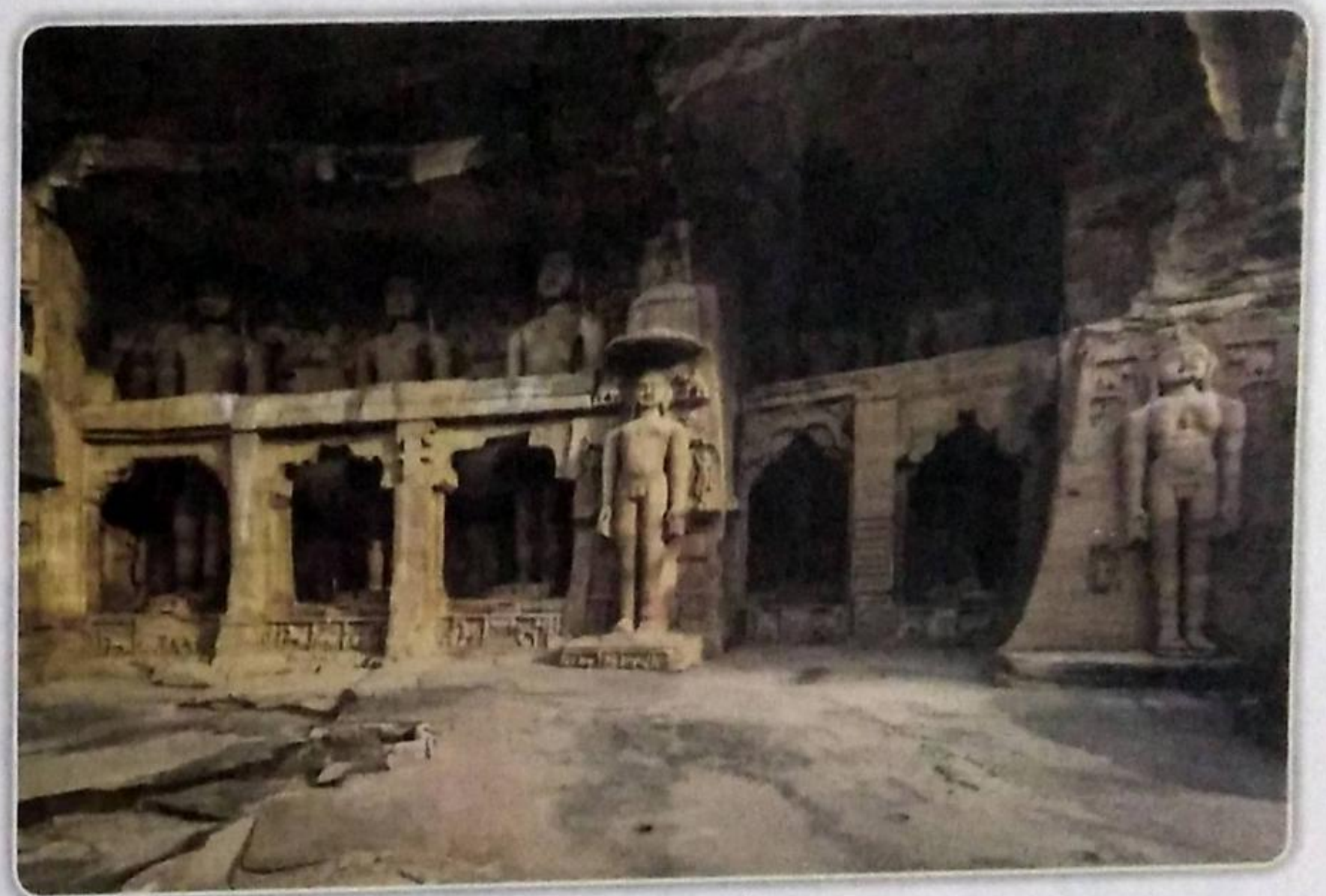
1. **Tri-ratnas (three jewels):** Mahavira laid great stress on a pure and austere mode of living. He prescribed a threefold path for leading a pure life. These were:

- i. right belief,
- ii. right knowledge and
- iii. right conduct.

The threefold path is known as the *tri-ratna* (three jewels). By following it, a man could attain *siddha-sila* which means liberation from *karma* and transmigration.

2. **Nine tattvas:** The nine *tattvas* or principles are the single most important subject of the Jain philosophy. These are:

- i. *Jiva*: soul or living beings (consciousness),
- ii. *Ajiva*: non-living things,
- iii. *Asrava*: good deeds,
- iv. *Bandh*: bondage of *karma*,
- v. *Punya*: virtue, result of good deeds,
- vi. *Papa*: sin,
- vii. *Samvara*: hindrances in the way of *karma*,
- viii. *Nirjara*: exhaustion of the accumulated *karmas* and
- ix. *Moksha*: salvation.



▲ The Tirthankaras

3. **Five vows:** Since the supreme goal of life is the attainment of salvation, one needs to avoid all kinds of evil deeds or *karmas*. Mahavira prescribed some ethical code both for a householder and a monk. These were the five great vows by which one must lead one's life to attain salvation. They are:

- i. non-violence (*ahimsa*) towards all living beings (human, animal or plant life);

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- ✓ ii. not getting too attached (*aparigraha*) to material possessions, people or places;
- ✓ iii. not telling lies (*satya*);
- ✓ iv. not stealing (*asteya*) or taking things that are not willingly handed over by somebody and
- ✓ v. sexual restraint (*brahmacharya*) practised as celibacy by monks and nuns and monogamy by normal society.

### Teachings of Mahavira

Some of the followings of Mahavira are discussed here.

- **Ahimsa (non-violence):** Mahavira put great emphasis on *ahimsa*. In Jainism, *ahimsa* is the standard by which all the actions are judged. **A householder has to observe small vows (*anuvrata*).** For him, the practice of *ahimsa* requires that he **cannot kill any animal.** An ascetic person has to **observe great vows (*mahavrata*).** For him, *ahimsa* requires **utmost care to prevent him from knowingly or unknowingly causing harm to any living substance.** Living matter (*jiva*) not only includes human beings but insects, animals and plants. **The killing of living matter increases one's *karma* and delays one's liberation from the cycle of rebirths.**
- **Denial of the existence of god:** Mahavira did not believe in the existence of god. He said that man's liberation from suffering did not depend on any god. **Man is the architect of his own destiny.** One can escape the evils by following an austere, pure and virtuous life.
- **Denial of the Vedas:** Mahavira rejected the authority of the Vedas and meaningless rites and ceremonies. According to him, all Vedic gods and goddesses were imaginary and they were to misguide the society. He **criticised the Vedic rituals and supremacy of the Brahmins.**
- **Extreme asceticism:** Mahavira asked his followers to practice extreme asceticism. This could be done by practising penances, fasting and torturing the body. In order to follow a more austere life he asked his followers to **even discard clothes.**
- **Karma and moksh:** The chief aim of Mahavira's teaching is the attainment of *moksh* or the liberation of the soul from earthly bondage and the cycle of births and rebirths. It is due to *karma* that the soul is in a state of bondage. This bondage is created by passion and desire accumulated over several births. One should be responsible for every action (*karma*) that he or she does. Good deeds alone can liberate a person from the cycle of birth and death. **The ultimate goal of self-reformation and the application of the Jain *tri-ratna* is to break free from this cycle of birth and death.** In Jainism, a soul that frees itself (*moksh*) from the *samsara*, cycle of life and death, is called *siddha* (liberated soul).
- **Universal brotherhood:** Lord Mahavira laid stress on the equality of all human beings, universal brotherhood and no caste distinctions. He said that all living beings had the right to live and thus, everybody should be shown compassion. From its beginning, Jainism welcomed women into the ascetic community.

### Review

1. What did Mahavira preach about the existence of god?
2. What are the nine *tattvas* of Jainism?
3. What was the difference between *anuvrata* and *mahavrata*?

### Factors that led to popularity of Jainism

- **Language:** Mahavira preached in Prakrit, a language of the common people, rather than in Sanskrit, the language of the priests. The simple teachings of Mahavira attracted many followers.
- **Support from kings:** As discussed, emperors such as Chandragupta Maurya changed their religion to Jainism. Many other royal dynasties gave patronage to this religion.
- **Non-violence:** It was a simple religion with no animal sacrifices and caste distinctions.
- **Missionary zeal:** The Jain preachers with a missionary zeal preached the religion after the death of Mahavira.



## ANSWER THE FOLLOWING:

1. Mention any two causes for the rise of Jainism and Buddhism.
2. Mention the Five Vows to be taken by the Jains.
3. Mention the tri-ratnas in Jainism.
4. Discuss all the sources that help in the reconstruction of the history in the 6th C BCE.
5. Explain the teachings of Mahavirra.