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In Search of Peace : Buddha and Mahavir

In the 6th century BC, important reforms were done in social and religious sectors in India. In 6th century some of the reformers worked against social evils that had entered social and religious areas. Along with it they also worked for removal of social inequality and immoralities. Gautam Buddha and Mahavir Swami are the main ones. We will try to understand the life of Gautam Buddha and Mahavir Swami, their pursuit and humanity established by them.

Gautam Buddha :

We obtain a lot of information about Gautam Buddha and Buddhism from Jatak Katha and Buddhist texts 'Tripitaka'. (Sukta Pitak, Vinay Pitak and Abhidham Pitak). About 550 Jatak stories are associated with pre-birth of Buddha.

There was a kingdom called Kapilvastu in the foothills of the Himalayas, while going towards Nepal. The Kshatriyas of Kapilvastu were called Shakyas. It was a Republic. Shuddhodhana was the head of this Republic. Mayadevi was wife of Shuddhodhana. Gautam Buddha was born in house of Shuddhodhana and Mayadevi in 566 BC. His childhood name was Siddhartha. After few days of his birth, his mother Mayadevi died. Therefore, he was nurtured by Gautami Mahaprajapati, who was his foster mother.

From young age, Siddhartha was associated with education and knowledge. Next to Kapilvastu there was a monastery of a saint named Alara Kalam. Alara Kalam was his Guru. Siddhartha went to his ashram. Here he did meditation. Siddhartha's father was worried as he continued to discuss knowledge and samadhi. He was worried if Siddhartha would become a monk. Siddhartha was married at a young age. His wife's name was Yashodhara. He also had a son named Rahul.

Home Sacrifice and Sadhana

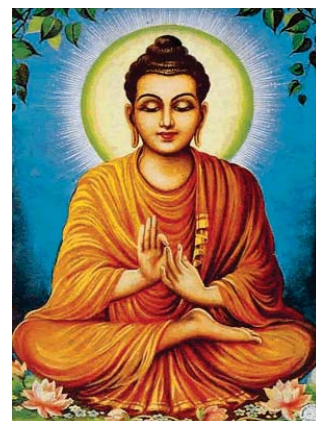
At the age of 30, he decided to renounce his royal family and state and become a (saint) hermit in search of truth. One night he took his charioteer Channa and horse Kanthak, and went to the river bank outside his state. Leaving his royal attire, he gave all his jewellery to Channa and ordered him to take Kanthak along with him and return to the palace. He himself wore the ascetic clothes of the hermit and walked towards the jungle.

After leaving his home, he went to Rajgrih and then to Puruvela. Here he started penance with five Brahmins. He felt that giving up food and water and tormenting the body would not yield knowledge. Conquering the path of self consciousness and the desire is the major duty of human beings. Leaving five Brahmins he decided to do penance alone.

Sitting under the Peepal tree at Bodhigaya he started sadhana for truth and enlightenment. After many days of sadhana, he got knowledge on the day of Vaishakh Purnima. On acquiring knowledge, he became Buddha from Siddhartha. Buddha means conscious or wise. Later on he was called Gautam Buddha.

Preachings :

After attaining enlightenment, Buddha went to Sarnath, where he met his old Brahmin friends. For



5.1 Gautam Buddha



the first time he preached to those five brahmins (monks) at Sarnath. Buddha's these first preachings are called 'Dharmachakrapravartan' Buddha gave very simple sermon to get rid of the miseries of the world. According to him there are four Arya truths : (1) The world is full of miseries (2) The cause of suffering is greed or strong desire (3) Destruction of suffering is renunciation of desire (4) Adoption of octagonal path (Astang Marg) eliminates desire. These four truths explained by Buddha are known as Buddhist principles, also known as 'Samyak Darshan.'

• Know this •

- Samyak sight, samyak resolve, samyak speech, samyak deeds, samyak earning, samyak exercise, samyak memory, samyak samadhi. 'Samyak' is a Sanskrit word. 'Samyak' means 'properly'.

Buddha as a Great Reformer :

Buddha was a great religious and social reformer. He worked life long to eliminate the pollutants in religion and society. He had many disciples. Many kings and states were encouraged by his human religion. He did the following reforms :

(1) Denial of God and Soul : Buddha denied God and Soul and gave importance to Karmaism. According to him if there was God sorrows would not have been there. Instead of indulging in welfare of soul, one should live a virtuous life in the present.

(2) Opposition to Rituals : He opposed rituals performed in Hinduism and the sacrifice of animals in the yagnas. He said that non-violence is the highest value. The greatest duty of all human beings is to treat animals non-violently.

(3) Opposition of Discrimination of High and Low : At this time Hinduism was divided into four varnas - Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra. Buddha opposed this varna system. He said, being born in a high family does not make anyone great. He becomes great by his deeds, by his conscience, by following the path of truth and non-violence. He highly opposed the discrimination of high and low, prevailing in the society.

(4) Importance of Women : Buddha gave equal importance to women as to men. He said that the path of nirvana is not only for men, women can also achieve nirvana through sadhana and duty.

Nirvana :

Buddha attained enlightenment in the shadow of the Bodhi tree on Vaishakh Purnima. By acquiring knowledge, Buddha continued reforming society and religion in India. He led many people towards righteous path. Giving preachings of truth and non-violence, he opposed eating of non-vegetarian food and high and low discrimination. He died at the age of 80 years in Kushinara and attained Nirvana. But his ideas and religion is still alive in the world.

Mahavir Swami

Jainism also has an important place in Indian society like Buddhism. There are total 24 Tirthankars in Jainism. Agams are the main source of knowing about Jainism. According to these texts the first Tirthankara of Jainism was Rishabhdev or Adinath. 23rd Tirthankara was parshwanath. Parshwanath was the son of king Ashwasen of Kashi. He left home at the age of thirty and became a hermit and preached



Jainism. He opposed vedic religion and rituals and caste system. He gave the preaching of truth, non-violence, Astey and non-possessiveness. After him Mahavir Swami was the 24th and last Tirthankar. We will learn about him.

Mahavir Swami : Early Life :

Mahavir Swami was born in Gnatrik Kshtriya dynasty of Kundgram republic of Vajji Union. His childhood name was Vardhman. His father, Siddhartha, was the king of the republic. Mahavir Swami's mother's name was Trishladevi. His elder brother's name was Nandivardhan. Like Gautam Buddha, Mahavir Swami was also a prince, thus he acquired knowledge of many arts. He was married to princess Yashoda. His daughter's name was Priyadarshini.



5.2 Mahavir Swami

Leaving home and Sadhana :

He left home at the age of 30 years, in search of knowledge. He lived life as a 'Bhikshuk' (beggar) and did a harsh penance for twelve years. On the bank of river Rijupalika he attained the highest knowledge, i.e. 'Kevalgyan'. As he conquered his mind and senses, he was called 'Jin'. Such great mighty Vardhaman came to be known as 'Mahavir'.

Preachings :

Like Buddha Mahavir Swami too believed that the world is full of fear and sorrows. He rejected God's existence. His teachings are known as doctrine of 'Triratna'. He preached the following five vows :

(1) Non-Violence : Mahavir Swami believed that violence is one of the biggest evil of human society. There should not be violence of any kind. Even the smallest creature has the right to live. Even mental violence should not be done. Protecting animals is the real duty of human beings.

(2) Truth : We should never speak lies. We should not speak without thinking or understanding. We should abstain anger to follow the truth. The truth should always be followed in every situation.

(3) Astey : Theft is the biggest evil. We should not take anybody's things without his/her permission. Entering anybody's house without permission, is also like stealing. By saying so, he tried to keep the society of that time away from stealing.

(4) Non-Possessiveness (Aparigrah) : Man should not store goods, possessions, ornaments or clothings beyond their requirement. Keeping the things as per requirement, reduces collection instinct in a person and things like grains reach upto the poor people. This was his important message.

(5) Brahmcharya : He specifically told Jain monks and nuns to observe celibacy.

Know this

- The 'Triratna' (Ratnatrayi) doctrine means samyak vision, samyak knowledge and samyak behaviour.

Mahavir Swami : As a Great Reformist :

Mahavir Swami opposed rituals and sacrifices. He rejected presence of God. He condemned animal sacrifice in the yagnas. He said that, the women should be given equal rights. Like Buddha, he too preached in people's language i.e. Prakrit and Ardhamagadhi. With his simple and easy teachings, he changed people's lives.

Nirvana : He died in Pawapuri at the age of 72.



In this way, about 2500 years ago people got new ideas. Religious rituals and defilement were removed. People became his followers in a large number. Both preachers obliged people to adopt the path of peace and virtue. Thus they promoted the virtue in the society.

Exercises

1. Choose the correct alternative and write correct answer :

- (1) Where did Gautam Buddha first preach ?
(A) Bodhigaya (B) Sarnath (C) Kushinara (D) Kapilvastu
- (2) Where did Gautam Buddha attain Nirvana ?
(A) Lumbini (B) Kapilvastu (C) Kushinara (D) Sarnath
- (3) What was the name of Mahavir Swami's mother ?
(A) Trishladevi (B) Mayadevi (C) Yashoda (D) Yashodhara
- (4) Where was Mahavir Swami born ?
(A) Kapilvastu (B) Kundgram (C) Sarnath (D) Pawapuri
- (5) In which language did Mahavir Swami preach the people ?
(A) Pali (B) Prakrit and Ardhamagdhī
(C) Prakrit and Pali (D) Pali and Ardhamagdhī

2. Answer the following questions in short :

- (1) What was the main preaching of Gautam Buddha ?
- (2) What was the main teaching of Mahavir Swami ?
- (3) What were five 'Mahavrats' of Jainism ?

3. Tell whether the following statements are True or False :

- (A) Both Buddhism and Jainism urged people to take path of peace and non-violence.
- (B) Buddha gave his first sermon in Bodhigaya.
- (C) Buddha had attained enlightenment in Sarnath.

4. Give the correct answer :

- (1) What were the similarities in preachings of Gautam Buddha and Mahavir Swami ?
- (2) Which evils were seen in Gautam Buddha's time ?

Discuss

How are the teachings of Gautam Buddha and Mahavir Swami useful to us ?

Let's Do

- Find out didactic issues of different religions and note what are the similarities in them.
- Watch 'Angulimal' movie and note life events of Buddha.

