

## Quadrant II – Transcript and Related Materials

**Programme: Bachelor of Arts (First Year)**

**Subject: History**

**Paper Code: HSD 102**

**Paper Title: History of India (From Earliest Times upto 8<sup>th</sup> Century C.E.)**

**Unit Name:**

**Module Name: Buddhism: Rise, Doctrine and main Sects**

**Name of the Presenter: Ms. Yogita Gauns**

---

### NOTES

Buddhism became the most popular religion not only in India but in the entire Asia. Gautama, alias Siddhartha. The founder of Buddhism, was born about 566 B.C. at *Lumbinivana*. His father *Suddhodana* was a *kshatriya* by caste and the chief of the *Sakya* clan, which had its capital at *Kapilavastu*. His mother *Maya* died seven days after his birth. Therefore, he was brought up by his mother's sister *Mahaprajapati Gautami*. He grew up in luxury and was married at the age of sixteen to *Yasodhara*. Buddha was destined to be a Sage. A few incidents which Buddhists call Four Great Signs occurred and they made a deep impression on him. One evening his Charioteer drove him in the city. He is said to have seen an old man, completely decrepit and ugly and then a sick man who was diseased and was suffering. Thirdly, he saw a corpse; all of which deeply depressed him because they showed that there is nothing but sorrow and suffering in the world and death comes to all of us.

Finally, he saw a religious beggar, an ascetic who devoted himself to religion. This man looked to be quite composed and serene. This sort of life appealed to him and he decided immediately to renounce the world. He left the palace, leaving the baby and his mother sleeping and became an ascetic. This is called "The Great

Renunciation "*Maha Bhinishkvamana*". This took place in 538 B.C. when Buddha was 29 years old.

Buddha found his first teachers at Rajagriha. They are named Alara and Udraka. After six years of striving, he achieved the highest knowledge or '*Bodhi*' at Bodh Gaya. Gautama thus became the Buddha, "The Enlightened one." This happened when Buddha was 35. The site where he received light has now a temple the *Mahabodhi* temple.

After attaining enlightenment, he decided to impart the knowledge to his people. This he did for 45 years. From Gaya he went to Banaras and there he gave his first sermon to his five disciples in the Deer Park Sarnath. They are known as Five Elders. Buddha's first sermon is known as '*Turning wheel of Law*' or "*Dharma Chakra Pravartana*".

Upto the last movement of his life the Buddha kept up his constant travelling and preaching. He attained *Mahaparinirvana* at Kushinagar in 487 BC at the age of 80.

**Growth of Sangha:** This was the beginning of Buddhist sect or Sangha. Buddha travelled in various parts of the country. Many people took to conversion to Buddhism.

Buddha had two kinds of disciples-Monks (*bhikkhus* or *Shranmanas*) and lay worshippers (*Upasakas*). The monks were organised into a Sangha.

The Buddhist Sanghas proved to be the best instruments in the propagation of Buddhism. The Sanghas were also the centres of learning, spiritual exchange for the monks, exchange of ideas and living examples of the practice of Buddhism.

The membership of the Sanghas was open to all persons, male or female, above fifteen years of age and who were free from leprosy, consumption and other infectious diseases. As Buddhism accepted men and women of all strata of society

to become monks and nuns, education was therefore not restricted only to the top few, the acceptance of nuns was a revolutionary step from the point of view of the status of women, considering that brahman orthodoxy was gradually trying to place limitations on their activities. The organization of the monasteries was democratic and clearly based on that of the republican assemblies.

The Sangha was empowered to enforce discipline amongst its members. The life of monks and the nuns was strictly governed by the laws and the ten

Commandments, and there was no room for personal likes or dislikes. The Ten Commandments were

- ✓ To refrain from harming living beings.
- ✓ To refrain from taking what is not given
- ✓ To refrain from evil behavior.
- ✓ To refrain from false speech.
- ✓ To refrain from alcoholic drinks.
- ✓ To refrain from taking foods at forbidden times.
- ✓ To refrain from dancing, singing, music and dramatic performances.
- ✓ To refrain from the use of garlands. Perfumes and jewelry.
- ✓ To refrain from high or broad beds.
- ✓ To refrain from receiving gold and silver.

Regular fortnightly meetings were held and public confessions were heard. One of the great defects of the Sangha system was the absence of a central coordinating authority. Later on this became one of the causes of corruption in Buddhist Sangha in India.

**Teachings of Buddha:** Buddha taught for 45 years through lectures, conversation and parables. His method of teaching was unique.

**Four Noble Truths.**

- (i) The existence of sorrow; (ii) cause of sorrow; (iii) sorrow cessation;
- (iv) existence of a way to attain bliss and end desires.

**Middle Path or the Noble Eight Fold Path.** The way to nirvana is the eightfold path. Every Buddhist is asked to follow their path in order to achieve the highest bliss. This path is

- 1) Right Views. Everyone must realize from his own experience that sorrow is the basis of life and that sorrow can end only by controlling desires.
- 2) Right Aspirations. One must resolve to have nothing to do with material pleasures and also resolve not to have malice against any other being.
- 3) Right Speech. One must abstain from telling lies, abuse, harsh words, and gossip.
- 4) Right Action. One is to be very vigilant when acting in life. No one should be injured mentally or physically by our actions.
- 5) Right Living. One is not to follow the professions of a butcher, a slave dealer or a poison dealer.
- 6) Right Effort, One is to control evil thoughts and actions, and in their place try to have good thoughts and to do good by deliberate effort.
- 7) Right Mindfulness. Sometimes one's mind misleads oneself. Through self-examination and self- study, self-mastery is to be acquired.
- 8) Right Concentration. One cannot attain salvation without meditation or concentration. Thus Right concentration" is the end and crown of the "Eightfold Path". A person who leads life according to the noble Eightfold path, gets the highest and purest state of mind.

**Buddhist Philosophy:** Buddha believed in the theory of actions or Karma. He held that one of the chief features of the universal law of *Dharma* is, "As a man acts, so shall he be". We make or mar our future. We get the reward of our past

actions in the present life and for our present actions we get rewarded in the future. Buddha had no faith in a personal God. Lord Buddha remained silent about the existence of God. He neither admitted nor denied the existence of God. However, he believed that a supreme force controls the whole world. To it he gave the name of *Dhama*.

At that time several superstitions and blind faith were prevalent in the society. Buddha's conception of religion was purely ethical. He did not care for worship or rituals. He put all his emphasis on conduct. He was against useless sacrifices and rituals. According to Buddha, the highest goal of man's life is to achieve *Nirvana*. According to him *Nirvana* meant when there is no craving, no selfishness and no hatred or malice for others. It can be achieved by following the eightfold path.

## **BUDDHIST COUNCILS**

The First Buddhist Council was held at Rajagriha in 483 B.C. soon after Buddha's death under the auspices of king Ajatashatru. An attempt was made to compile the religious doctrines (*dhamma*) and the monastic code (*Vinaya*). It was convened by Mahakassapa disciple of Buddha. The teachings of the Buddha were divided into two *pitakas*- the *Vinaya Pitaka* and the *Sutta-Pitaka*. A Second Buddhist Council was held about a century after the death of Buddha under the auspices of king Kalasoka at Vaishali in 383 B.C. This council was the result of a dispute regarding the code of discipline. The monks of Vaishali wanted relaxation of the rules in respect of the ten points. The Vaishali monks stuck to their views therefore no agreement was arrived at. The council ended in a permanent schism of Buddhism into Sthavira and Mahasanghikas.

The Third Buddhist Council was held at Pataliputra under the patronage of Ashoka Maurya in 247 BC was summoned by Moggaliputta Tissa to revise the

scriptures. In this Council the third Pitaka Abhidhamma pitaka came into existence.

The Fourth Buddhist Council was held during the reign of Kanishka in Kashmir in 120 A.D. It was convened under the leadership of elder Vasumitra and the great scholar Asvaghosha. The convening of this council led to the division of Buddhism into two broad sects, namely (1) The Mahayana, and (2) The Hinayana.

**Buddhist Sects:** During the lifetime of the Buddha Buddhism made rapid progress but after about 100 years of his death differences crept into Buddhism and two great schools came into existence-The *Sthaviravada* and *Mahasanghika*. In the time of

Kanishka in the first century A.D, *Mahasanghikas* paved the way for the emergence of a new sect *Mahayanna*. Thus, Buddhism was divided into two sects- *Hinayana* and *Mahayana*.

(1) *Hinayana* - The followers of *Hinayana* Buddhism believed in the original teachings

Mahatma Buddha and did not want any relaxation- This sect was also called the lesser vehicle. *Hinayanisit* regarded the salvation of the individual as the goal. *Hinayanism* prescribed self-culture and good deeds as the only way to salvation.

(2) **Mabayana-** Mahayanist believed in *Bodhisattvas* or beings who were in the process of obtaining but had not yet attained Buddhahood. They laid emphasis on liberating all the living beings than salvation of an individual. They gave prominence to the eternal Buddhas who look like the God of theistic religions. Mahayanist adopted Sanskrit as the language of *Mahayanism*. They regarded Buddha God and believed in his different incarnations, all from the cycles of birth and rebirth.

Mahayanism remained closer to the concept of Hinduism with regard to Nirvana, Brahman, incarnations of God, faith and devotion etc. and thus formed a bridge between the old Buddhism and modern Hinduism. Besides, its doctrine proved intensely human and practical. The monks of *Mahayanism* did not seek their personal salvation instead, they became devoted missionaries to help others to attain *Nirvana*.

## **BUDDHIST SCRIPTURES**

The Buddhist scriptures may be summarized as follows:-

1. The Vinaya Pitaka - Mainly deals with rules and regulations, which Buddha promulgated. Also gives an account of the life and teaching of the Buddha.
2. The Sutta Pitaka - consists chiefly of discourses delivered by Buddha himself on different occasions.
3. The Abhidhamma Pitaka- Contains the profound philosophy of the Buddha's teachings.
4. The Khandakas -Contain regulations on the course or life in the monastic order and have two sections -the Mahavagga and the Cullavagga.
5. Among the non-canonical literature- Milindapanho, Dipavamsa and Mahavamsa are important. The latter two are the great chronicles of Ceylon.