

A Consideration on the History of Buddhism in Bihar



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Abstract

Buddhism is a philosophy and religion that originated with the teachings of the Buddha (Awakened One in Sanskrit), a teacher who lived in northern India between the middle of the sixth and middle of the fourth century BCE (before the Common Era). Buddhism has played a significant part in the spiritual, cultural, and social life of Asia since it first moved from India to Central and Southeast Asia, China, Korea, and Japan. It also began to spread to the West in the 20th century.

Keywords: Buddhism, birthplace, philosophy, religion, karma.

Introduction

One of the main faiths in the world is Buddhism. It began with Siddhartha Gautama in South Asia about the fifth century B.C.E., and throughout the following millennia, it expanded across Asia and the rest of the globe. Buddhists believe that while rebirth and suffering are a constant part of human existence, this cycle may be broken permanently by attaining enlightenment (nirvana). The first person to achieve this degree of enlightenment was Siddhartha Gautama, who is currently referred to as the Buddha. Buddhists don't believe in any kind of god or God, but they do believe in supernatural beings that may aid or obstruct a person's journey towards enlightenment.

About the Four Noble Truths, the Buddha lectured. The first fact, "Suffering (dukkha)," asserts that everyone experiences some kind of suffering in life. The "Origin of Suffering (Samudya)" is the second fact. According to this, all pain is caused by desire (tanh). The third truth, "Cessation of suffering (nirodha)," asserts that enlightenment is achievable and that suffering may be put an end. The Middle Way, or the stages to enlightenment, is discussed in the fourth truth, "Path to the end of suffering (magga)".



Figure 1: Image of Buddhists

Buddhists believe in a wheel of rebirth, where souls are born again into different bodies depending on how they conducted themselves in their previous lives. This is connected to "karma," which refers to how a person's good or bad actions in the past or in their past lives can impact them in the future.

History of Buddhism

Buddhism suggests a devotion to "the Buddha," which is another name for the "Awakened One" or the "Enlightened One." Buddhist tradition has long maintained that there have been or will be further previous Buddhas who have or will reside on Earth in the future. However, "the Buddha" is often used to refer to the historical figures known to Theravada Buddhists as Gautama and Mahayana Buddhists as Sakyamuni. Around 490 B.C.E., Siddhartha was born into a royal family that reigned over the Sakyan homeland at Kapilvastu in modern-day Nepal. Siddhartha did not have a regular life. According to legend, Queen Mahamaya travelled

from Kapilvastu to Devadaha on a full moon day in 623 BC in order to give birth to her kid at her parents' house. She gave birth to a boy while standing in a tree grove that is now known as Lumbini, midway between the two towns. Over 300 years after the incident, King Ashoka built a stone pillar to commemorate the location, which is today a well-known Buddhist pilgrimage destination.

At the age of 29, Siddhartha and Channa, his charioteer, departed the palace to travel the outer world. The "Four Passing Sights"—a dying man whose body was being transported for cremation; a sick man sobbing in misery; an elderly man who had become frail with age; and a travelling sannyasin—which he had never seen before—deeply moved him. For the first time, Siddhartha was devastated to see ageing, illness, and death. He was motivated by the sannyasin to leave the palace, his wife, and the infant boy in order to better comprehend life, its hardships, and how to end suffering in the world. His rigorous austerity was the beginning of his quest for enlightenment. After six years of struggle, Siddhartha came to the conclusion that neither opulence nor famine could give him a more profound insight of life and chose to travel the Middle Path instead. He sat in meditation beneath a Bodhi tree in the hamlet of Bodh Gaya and attained enlightenment. He recognised that he had destroyed all wants and ignorance inside himself after seeing his previous lives, deaths, and rebirths. He was now a Buddha known as the "Awakened One." Buddha's first sermon was delivered to a group of ascetics with whom he had previously trained after his enlightenment. These ascetics ended up becoming Buddha's earliest followers. For the following 45 years, Buddha proceeded to disseminate his teachings across India, gathering a number of disciples along the way, until his death at the age of 80 in a little village named Kusinara.

He lived at a period when the early Hinduism known as "Brahmanism" was prevalent. Some of the fundamental concepts of Brahmanism were present in his teachings, including karma and reincarnation, moksha, the presence of gods, yogic practises, and the need of spiritual insight. He did not agree with some of their key tenets, hence his views on them were different from those of Brahmanism. He disregarded the legitimacy of the Vedas, the offering of sacrifices to deities, and the caste system. Everyone was welcome to practise Buddhism. Buddha himself established the Sangha, a social organisation of monks and nuns. Many of the followers went on to become monks and nuns, while others stayed lay followers who helped the monks and nuns financially in exchange for their teachings and counsel to the laypeople. The many sects of Buddhism still centre their teachings on this reciprocal interaction.

Objectives of the study

- To know the History of Buddhism.
- To determine the history of Buddhism in Bihar.

Buddhism in Bihar

The Sanskrit word Vihara, which means "abode" and is a significant Buddhist institution, is where the name Bihar originates. Because Bodh Gaya is the holiest site in Buddhism and a significant site of pilgrimage connected with the Mahabodhi Temple Complex in Bihar's Gaya district, the region of Bihar is significant to Buddhism. Siddhartha Gautama is believed to have attained enlightenment in Bodh Gaya under the Bodhi Tree. In Bihar, the Buddha delivered several lectures in cities like Vaishali and Rajgir. In the areas of Magadha, Bihar, students continued to practise Buddhism even after his Mahaparinirvana. The followers of Gautama Buddha founded several monasteries and colleges, including Nalanda University and Vikramshila University. The Magadha ruler Ashoka the Great converted to Buddhism, established Buddhism as the official religion, and disseminated its philosophy across India and beyond.

The Spread of Buddhism

The three main global religions—Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam—all aggressively expand their teachings and practises outside of their original regions. Buddhism first gained popularity when the Buddha himself sent enlightened followers to propagate his teachings. As a result, Buddhism began to expand both within and outside of India, becoming the primary form of Indian religion exported along with literate culture. The great Mauryan emperor King Ashoka, who expanded his kingdom via conquest, gave Buddhism a significant boost in the third century. He felt guilty during one of the wars in Orissa on the east coast and embraced Buddhism. After then, Buddhism thrived under Ashoka's rule as he governed in accordance with Buddhist teachings and despatched missionaries to the courts of kings in South-east Asia and the West. Great Buddhist institutions like Nalanda, which thrived between the 7th and the 12th century, were founded in India. Both the south and the north-west saw the establishment of significant Buddhist centres, which later served as a key entryway to central Asia and the far east. However, when Muslim Turks invaded India in the 10th century, Buddhism came under assault. Libraries were burnt down, and many items of art were destroyed. Stability and religious tolerance weren't restored until the Moguls came to power in the 16th century. However, Buddhism had already vanished from its own country at this point.

Conclusion

Between the 6th and 4th century BCE, Buddhism, a significant international religion and philosophy, was formed in northeastern India. Buddhism, which is based on the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama, often known as the Buddha, views nirvana—the achievement of eternal bliss—as the key to liberation from suffering and the cycle of reincarnation. It places a strong emphasis on meditation and following specific moral rules. The Buddha created the Buddhist monastic order during his lifetime and passed on his teachings orally via his students (sangha). While he rejected many of the beliefs and all of the gods of the Hinduism of his day, he did absorb some of its concepts, most notably the concept of karma. Emperor Ashoka encouraged Buddhism in India around the third century BCE, but it dwindled in the centuries that followed and was all but dead by the 13th century.

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