

Culture is a complex and multifaceted concept that encompasses a broad spectrum of human behaviors, beliefs, and values. It encompasses everything from our dietary choices and clothing preferences to our religious practices and worldview.

India, a country known for its immense diversity, is home to a rich and vibrant culture shaped by its unique geography and historical influences. The different regions of India exhibit distinct cultural identities, as evidenced by their diverse culinary traditions, traditional attire, lifestyle choices, and vibrant festivals. The geographical and climatic variations across the country have given rise to notable disparities in dietary habits, ways of life, clothing styles, and festive customs among the people residing in these regions. The inhabitants of western India, the northeast, the foothills of Himachal, the plains, and the peninsular regions, all have their own distinct cultural practices.

It is important to recognize that geographical obstacles did not impede the movement of populations between different regions. The people of India were not only connected within the Indian subcontinent but also maintained connections with foreign lands. Despite the presence of the Vindhya mountain range, people from the Indian peninsula continued to migrate across regions, even during the post-Vedic period. This is exemplified in mythological tales such as the saga of the sage Agastya and his encounter with the Vindhya mountains, symbolizing the migration of people from the northern to the southern regions. In ancient times, there was a collective consciousness of the entire Indian subcontinent referred to as "Jambudweep," and the title of "Chakravarti" was reserved for rulers who governed the entirety of Jambudweep.

It is worth noting that the title of 'Chakravartin' held great appeal for rulers, and

even minor rulers aspired to assume this prestigious position. Similarly, the concept of a unified India also captured the attention of ancient scholars and intellectuals. Through Kalidasa's composition 'Meghaduta,' we gain insight into his profound understanding of India's geography. Thus, the geographical and climatic variations could not restrict the movement of merchants, traders, or the ambitions of rulers. As early as the fourth century BC, the Mauryas established an empire that stretched from the Hindu Kush mountains in the northwest to Bengal in the east and Brahmagiri in the south. This fostered continual interaction among the diverse regions of the Indian subcontinent, promoting the exchange of intellectual and cultural ideas. Consequently, the principle of unity in diversity prevailed despite the existence of cultural variations.

Furthermore, alongside geography, history played a crucial role in the development of culture. Various historical factors contributed to the formation and evolution of culture, which can be understood as follows:

- **Emergence of New Social groups :-** The northwestern region of India has witnessed a continuous influx of new elements that have seamlessly integrated into Indian society. Among these migrants, the Vedic Aryans played a significant role. Although they introduced Sanskrit as a new language, they did not possess their own script. Initially, they led a pastoral lifestyle, but through interactions with the North Harappans and other Chalcolithic communities in India, they acquired knowledge of agriculture. While they held their own religious beliefs, it is believed that they adopted the practice of Yajna after coming into contact with the post-Harappan people. Notably, the Aryans outside of India were unfamiliar with Yajna, while the Harappans were well-acquainted with it.

Following this, India saw the arrival of foreign elements such as the Indo-Greeks,

Shakas, and Kushanas, who swiftly assimilated into Indian society. These foreign rulers embraced various Indian religious sects, exemplifying their integration. For instance, the Indo-Greek rulers embraced Buddhism, and an intriguing conversation between the Indo-Greek ruler Menander and the Indian sage Nagasena highlights the historical significance of religion in ancient India. Additionally, the Kushana rulers actively supported the Mahayana Buddhist sect, with Kushan ruler Kanishka being credited with the spread of Buddhism in Central Asia and West Asia. The Hunas, another foreign group, readily adopted the Shaivite sect, as demonstrated by the close association of Huna rulers Toraman and Mihirkul with Shaivism. Thus, foreign elements seamlessly became part of Indian society through various religious paths.

- **Harmony between Aryan and non-Aryan elements :-** When the Vedic Aryans migrated to India, they willingly embraced non-Aryan elements into their culture. Their language, Sanskrit, contains a mixture of non-Aryan words like Munda and Dravidian. They also adopted the practice of Yajna, which likely originated from non-Aryan sources. Furthermore, non-Aryan influences played a role in the development of scripts.

In the domain of religion, a harmonious fusion of Aryan and non-Aryan elements emerged in the early centuries after Christ. Aryan rituals encompassed a wide range of beliefs, transitioning from polytheism to monotheism, as reflected in the Vedas and Upanishads. Subsequently, rival religious sects like Buddhism and Jainism emerged, yet they were founded on Aryan elements.

During the early Christian era, Aryan culture spread to tribal areas through land grants, fostering a peaceful coexistence of Aryan and non-Aryan elements. This harmony extended to the religious sphere as well. The concept of bhakti, meaning devotion, flourished among non-Aryan groups. For example, the worship of Vasudeva Krishna, a non-Aryan deity, thrived in

Mathura. Over time, Vasudeva Krishna became merged with Vishnu, an Aryan god, leading to the development of Vaishnavism. Bhakti became the core of Vaishnavism. Similarly, the non-Vedic deity Shiva merged with the Vedic god Rudra, giving rise to Shaivism. Buddhism also experienced the influence of bhakti during this period, resulting in the emergence of Mahayana as a distinct branch. Alongside bhakti, non-Aryan sects also embraced concepts like incarnation and idol worship, which significantly influenced Aryan traditions. The idea of incarnation facilitated the harmonious integration of Aryan and non-Aryan deities. For instance, ten avatars of Vishnu and twenty-eight avatars of Shiva were envisioned. Brahmin sects adopted idol worship, and the practice of stupas and idol worship became prevalent in Buddhism. The Tirthankaras of Jainism were also venerated. Subsequently, during the Gupta period, temples dedicated to Brahmin deities were constructed, laying the foundation for the future development of the Hindu religion.

- **Harmony between the elements of North and South India: -** As we can see, the Vindhya region failed to create a permanent dividing line between North and South India, allowing people from both regions to freely interact and exchange ideas. It is believed that the concept of bhakti, based on the Puranas, migrated from the north to the south and merged with the idea of love found in the Sangam texts. This fusion gave rise to the emotional phase of Bhakti. Under the Alvar saints, it took the form of Vishnu bhakti, while under the Nayanar saints, it became Shiva bhakti. Later, Brahmin teachers like Ramanujacharya provided it with a philosophical foundation called 'Qualified Non-Dualism' (Vishitatadvaita). Ramanand, who came from the south, further spread this devotion in the north. Over time, regional influences shaped the development of bhakti in different ways. In Maharashtra, it became Maharashtra Dharma, while in North India, it divided into two forms known as Saguna and Nirguna bhakti.

Nirguna bhakti was a synthesis of Nathpanth, Bhakti, Islamic monotheism, and the Sufi sect. Saguna bhakti, on the other hand, focused on Rama and Krishna as the main deities. Thus, the Bhakti movement exemplified unity in diversity, with various regional characteristics while retaining some common elements.

Apart from religion, there were also exchanges of art and literature between North and South India. Initially, cave architecture was promoted by Ashoka, and it later evolved into Chaityas and Viharas. These structures were primarily developed in the regions of Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh. Furthermore, the rock-cut temples that emerged were influenced by the earlier cave architecture and were developed by the Pallavas.

As different architectural styles emerged, such as the Nagara style (between Kashmir and the Vindhya region), Dravida style (between the Krishna river and Kanyakumari), and Vesara style (between the Vindhya region and the Krishna river), they complemented and influenced each other. Temples in both the North and South regions showcased the construction of 'Mandap.' Additionally, the Jagmohan found in North Indian temples bore resemblance to the temples in South India. The Vesara style, in particular, combined features of both the Nagara and Dravidian styles. This exchange and influence can also be seen in other forms of art, sculpture, and painting. While India had a rich tradition of sculpture, with the earliest forms found in Harappan sculptures, another stream of sculpture emerged from the northwest, known as Gandhara art. Gandhara art was influenced by Greco-Roman art as well as Central Asian and Indian elements. It emphasized the depiction and ornamentation of idols. Furthermore, Gandhara art influenced Mathura art and Amaravati art, and vice versa.

Similarly, the paintings of Ajanta influenced the paintings of Ellora and the Chola dynasty. Ancient India had an openness to the outside

world, particularly in the fields of art and ideas. Indian numerology, for example, reached the West through Arab scholars, while Indians gained astronomical knowledge from the Greeks. Indian sculpture and painting spread from Central Asia to South Asia, and in return, ancient Greece and Rome contributed to Indian sculpture through the medium of Gandhara art. Notably, various regional versions of the Indian Ramayana developed in Southeast Asia, and the largest Buddhist temple, Borobudur, was built in Indonesia.

### **Achievements of Ancient Indian Culture –**

**1. Unity in Diversity –** Hinduism, for the first time, showcases the expression of unity in diversity within the realm of religion. It is not a single religion but rather a composite of various religious sects, including Brahminism, Buddhism, Jainism, and others. Hinduism encompasses different dimensions such as monotheism and polytheism, knowledge and devotion, Yoga and idol worship, elements of non-violence, animal sacrifice, worship of shapeless gods, and tantrism. Pilgrimage plays a crucial role in promoting unity among these diverse sects. The term 'Hindu' originated from Arabian sources and gained recognition as a distinct religion during the British colonial era.

In the early centuries of Christianity, India also encountered religious traditions from the 'Abrahamic' tradition, including Judaism and Christianity. Some Jews, who were persecuted by the Roman Empire, migrated to India. St. Thomas, a renowned Christian saint, arrived in India and his tomb was built in Madras. Christianity also found its followers in Kerala. Furthermore, with the advent of Islam in Iran, a group of Zoroastrians sought refuge in India and settled in Gujarat. They became known as Parsis and excelled in business. Even before the establishment of Muslim rule, Arab traders had settled on the Malabar Coast. Throughout ancient times, there is no record of Indian rulers persecuting followers of different faiths. People were granted the freedom to practice their

religion, highlighting the expression of unity in diversity. This spirit of unity prevails across various fields such as art, language, and literature.

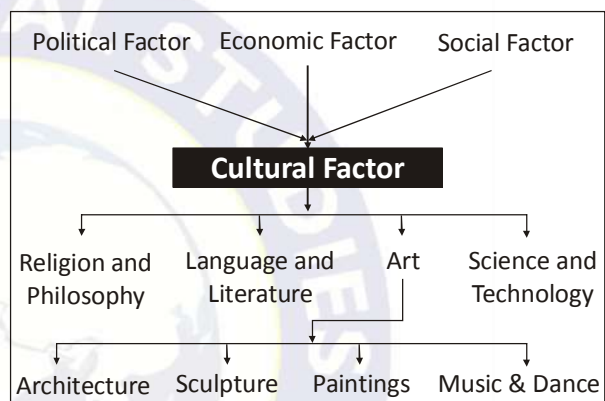
Sanskrit, considered the oldest language, laid the foundation for the development of Pali, Prakrit, and Apabhramsha languages. Subsequently, during the early medieval period, regional languages emerged, including Bengali, Oriya, Punjabi, Marathi, Gujarati, Hindi, and others. In the Dravidian language group, Tamil stood as the oldest language, followed by the emergence of Kannada, Telugu, and Malayalam. Besides these primary languages, numerous sub-languages and dialects gained popularity.

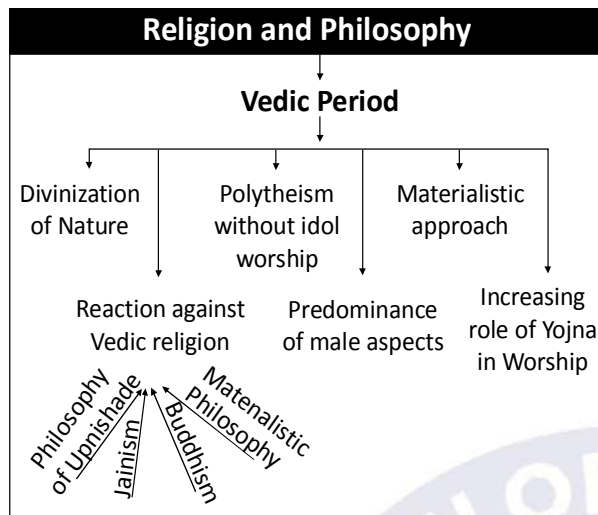
Overall, the religious, linguistic, and cultural landscape of ancient India vividly reflects the concept of unity in diversity.

**2. Religious Harmony:** - In other regions of the world, it is often observed that if a religious sect receives patronage from a dynasty, other religious sects tend to face discrimination or persecution. However, in India, the rulers of

various dynasties extended their patronage to multiple religious sects. For instance, Emperor Ashoka patronized not only Buddhists but also Brahmins and Ajivikas.

**3. Freedom to express Religious views:-** This fact has been articulated by Amartya Sen in his renowned book, "The Argumentative Indian." According to him, in ancient times, people belonging to various religious sects engaged in spirited debates and discussions with one another, fostering a culture of intellectual exchange and mutual understanding. This practice not only enriched Indian culture but also infused it with additional vitality and energy.





### Vedic Religion

During the transition from the Rigvedic to the Later Vedic Age, a tribal society evolved into a Varna-based social structure, accompanied by the emergence of a more defined religious system. The Vedic religion exhibited distinct characteristics during this period:

- 1. Divinization of Nature:** The Vedic people observed and studied natural elements like the Sun, Earth, Fire, and the Moon. They tried their best to understand them, but if they couldn't, they considered them as divine.
- 2. Polytheism without idol worship:** An intriguing aspect of Rig Vedic religion was its polytheistic nature, where multiple gods were worshipped. However, unlike in ancient Greece, the practice of idol worship was not widespread during this era.
- 3. Predominance of Male Aspects:** During the Rigvedic period, the selection of deities was influenced by economic and social needs. The supreme gods at that time were Indra, Agni, and Varuna. Indra held the roles of both the god of war (Purandar) and the god of rain (Purbhida). Agni, the second major deity, represented fire, which served purposes like cooking and clearing forests. Additionally, Agni played a crucial role as a mediator between gods and humans. Varuna, known as the 'Ritsya Gopa,' was

considered the guardian of natural laws. The concept of 'Rita' held great spiritual significance for the Rigvedic Aryans. To appease Varuna, it required not only prayer and sacrifice but also adherence to high moral standards.

In the later Vedic period, there was a shift in the hierarchy of deities. Prajapati, Vishnu, and Rudra emerged as the three supreme deities. The Vedic Aryans had transitioned to a more settled way of life during this period, leading to the development of infrastructure.

While the Rigvedic and later Vedic periods mentioned some goddesses like Usha, Nisha, Aranyani, and Ratri, their status remained subordinate to the deities.

**4. Worldly or Materialistic Approach:** The Vedic Aryans had a materialistic approach to their worship, focusing on seeking tangible benefits rather than spiritual salvation. They conducted yajnas, which were sacrificial rituals performed with the aim of achieving material prosperity. This included desires for good health, an abundance of food, and the continuation of their lineage through sons.

**5. Increasing role of Yajna in worship:** Both prayer and yajna were prevalent during the Rigvedic period, but the significance of yajna grew significantly in the later Vedic period. Animal sacrifices and the recitation of mantras became central elements of yajnas, making them pivotal rituals in Vedic ceremonies.

### Religions of Buddhist Period

The Buddha Age witnessed rapid socio-economic changes that had an impact on religious beliefs and practices. These changes were driven by the development of agriculture and urban economies, which posed challenges to the existing Vedic religion. The Vedic Yajna, with its large-scale animal sacrifices, conflicted with the need to protect livestock, which was crucial for the agrarian economy. Additionally,

new religious sects emerged that supported trade and commerce.

Socially, there was a clash between the ambitions of the Kshatriya Varna (warrior class) and the Brahmins (priestly class). Interestingly, many religious reformers during this period came from the Kshatriya Varna, highlighting the growing tension between the two groups.

Key characteristics of the religious cults during this time can be outlined as follows:

**1. Plurality of Religious sects:** Buddhist texts mention the existence of 62 religious sects, while Jain texts go even further, mentioning 363 sects. This indicates a diverse religious landscape during that era.

**2. Increasing emphasis on Renunciation:** The period saw a growing encouragement of renunciation, whereby individuals voluntarily gave up worldly possessions and attachments. This cultural trend came to be known as 'Shraman tradition.'

**3. Emphasis on concepts such as Karma, Rebirth, and Salvation:** Most religious sects of the time stressed the importance of these concepts, underscoring the significance of one's actions, the cycle of birth and death, and the pursuit of spiritual liberation.

■ **Important Religious Sects:**

• **Upanishads** -The Upanishads portray the evolution of ideas within the Vedic religion itself. They rejected the practice of Yajna, which involved animal sacrifice, and instead placed great emphasis on the pursuit of knowledge as the pathway to liberation. This knowledge revolves around the profound understanding of the unity between Brahman (the ultimate reality) and Atman (the individual self). Recognizing the oneness of Brahma and Jiva, knowledge becomes essential for achieving salvation. The Upanishads represent the culmination of the Vedic religion, as they reveal that the Vedas prioritized prayer, the Brahmanas focused on sacrifice, the Aranyakas emphasized asceticism, and the Upanishads centered on the pursuit of

knowledge.

• **Buddhist Philosophy** - The following concepts were held by the Buddhists regarding the nature of this world. Firstly, they believed that this world is full of suffering (dukkha), and they sought to understand the cause, cessation, and path leading to the cessation of suffering. These are the Four Noble Truths according to Buddhism. Secondly, they believed that this world is impermanent, meaning that it undergoes constant change in every moment. Thirdly, they believed that this world is devoid of a self (anatman), denying the existence of a permanent soul, yet supporting the concept of rebirth. Hence, the question arises: If there is no self, what transmigrates from one birth to another? The Buddhist tradition attempted to explore this question through the concept of dependent origination (pratītyasamutpāda). In other words, if birth is the cause of suffering, then the cycle of cause and effect, known as karma, perpetuates from one birth to another. Buddhist philosophy tried to elucidate this through the concept of causality, i.e., the cause and effect relationship. Just as one extinguished lamp can light another, the first lamp is the cause and the second is the effect.

• **Jaina Philosophy**- According to Jainism, the belief is that the world is eternal. In Jain philosophy, it is understood that God does not play a role in creating, preserving, or destroying the universe. Instead, the universe operates based on eternal laws. It is divided into endless cycles, with each cycle consisting of periods of progress (Utsarpini) and decline (Avasarpini). During the progress phase, it is believed that 12 Chakravartin kings and 24 Tirthankaras appear. These figures are counted among the 63 Shalaka Purushas.

Jain philosophy explains that the functioning of the universe involves the interaction between two key elements: 'Jiva' (soul) and 'Ajiva' (non-living entities). Jiva represents the soul, while Ajiva encompasses elements such as motion (Dharma), rest (Adharma), space (Akash), time

(Kal), and matter or karmic particles (Pudgala). The ultimate goal of Jainism is to attain 'Kaivalya,' which means liberation from karmic matter. Jainism aims to prevent the inflow of Ajiva into the Jiva and to eliminate the acquired Ajiva from the Jiva. The processes involved in achieving these goals are referred to as 'Samvara' (prevention) and 'Nirjara' (elimination).

In Jainism, Kaivalya is regarded as the highest form of knowledge. The doctrine of Jainism includes the recognition of five Anuvrat and Mahavrat. Another important philosophical concept in Jainism is 'Syadvad or Anekantavada,' which asserts that truth is both singular and multifaceted. It acknowledges the coexistence of multiple perspectives and the dynamic nature of truth.

- **Materialistic Philosophy** – Among the contemporary thinkers during the time of Buddha and Mahavira, there were several materialistic philosophers, including Ajit Keshkamblin, Pakudh Kachchapan, Purana Kassapa, Makkhali Goshala, and Sanjay Belitthiputta. Later, the Charvakas also joined this philosophical tradition. What distinguished these thinkers was their disbelief in concepts such as karma, rebirth, and salvation.

Ajit Keshkamblin argued that there are no consequences, positive or negative, for one's actions (karmas). According to him, all human endeavors are ultimately futile because the physical body eventually disintegrates into mere matter. He saw no connection between acts of compassion or acts of charity and a person's destiny. Chavarka, who also belonged to this philosophical school, believed that direct perception is the sole means of acquiring knowledge. On the other hand, Makkhali Goshala, the founder of the Ajivika sect, adhered to determinism, suggesting that our future is predestined.

The significance of materialistic philosophy lies in its emphasis on secularism. Had this

philosophy endured, it might have fostered the development of scientific ideas. However, these notions were suppressed by Brahmanical influences, and idealism gained prominence over materialism. Additionally, by rejecting the concepts of karma and reincarnation, which aligned more closely with immediate societal needs, materialistic philosophy failed to exert the anticipated influence on society.

- **Why is the period of 6<sup>th</sup> century BC considered as the period of intellectual revolution?**

The 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE marked an era of profound intellectual exploration known as the "Age of Enquiry." During this time, people delved into existential questions surrounding life, death, the afterlife, and the essence of the soul. This intellectual movement had been gradually evolving since the Aranyaka period but reached a pinnacle of revolutionary thinking with the emergence of diverse sects and ideas.

1. The 6th century BCE marked a significant shift in ideology, sparking deep contemplation and vibrant intellectual discourse. It became a time of active exploration and debate regarding the fundamental meaning of life.
2. This era witnessed the emergence of diverse religious sects. Buddhist texts mention the existence of 62 sects, while Jain texts refer to 363 sects that thrived during this period.
3. Thinkers of this epoch presented a wide array of philosophies, with some embracing the concept of karma and rebirth while others rejecting it. The Upanishads delved into the concept of a Supreme Soul, whereas the Buddhist sect questioned the very existence of the soul.
4. Additionally, this period holds global significance as an intellectual revolution, coinciding with influential thinkers like Pythagoras in Greece, Zoroaster in Iran, and Confucius and Lao Tzu in China.

- **Did the Buddhist sect encompass both religious and social reform movements?**

The Buddhist sect encompassed both religious and social reform movements, making it a transformative force in both aspects. This can be understood through several key points:

1. It rejected Yajna and Vedic rituals, distancing itself from ongoing religious controversies by challenging beliefs in the existence of the soul and divine entities.
2. Buddha proclaimed that the Varna system, which upheld Brahminical superiority and the caste system, was a human creation rather than a divine decree.
3. Buddhism broke new ground by welcoming women into the Buddhist Sangha, offering them equal opportunities for spiritual growth. The sect's regard for women is evident in literary works like the 'Therigatha,' a collection of poetry by female nuns.
4. Buddhism also provided an inclusive path to Nirvana for Shudras, undermining the rigid social hierarchy and allowing them to participate in the Sanghas.
5. The emphasis on non-violence in Buddhism fostered a supportive environment for the agricultural economy, earning the allegiance of householders.
6. Buddhism recognized the roles of moneylenders and traders, acknowledging their contributions to society and garnering their support.
7. In essence, the Buddhist sect's teachings and practices not only aimed to bring about religious transformation but also had a profound impact on social norms and structures, advocating for equality, inclusivity, and peaceful coexistence.

- **What were the limitations of the social reforms initiated by Mahatma Buddha??**

**Limitations -**

1. Despite Mahatma Buddha's criticism of the Brahmanical caste system, he was unable

to eradicate its influence completely. Some remnants of caste bias persisted within the Buddhist sect, resulting in a significant number of upper-caste individuals remaining part of the Buddhist Sangha.

2. The Buddhist sect faced challenges in fully liberating itself from the grip of Brahmanical patriarchy. While Buddha eventually allowed women to join the Buddhist Sangha in response to mounting pressure, disparities between genders persisted. Separate monasteries were established for nuns, but they were placed under the strict supervision of the monks.

- **What factors contributed to the global expansion of Buddhism, leading it to become a widely followed world religion?**

Mahatma Buddha's establishment of Buddhism as a world religion, like Christianity and Islam, can be attributed to the following factors:

1. Buddhism addressed immediate economic concerns, such as moneylending and ethical commerce, while promoting animal welfare.
2. The rejection of the Varna and caste systems tackled pressing social issues, advocating for a more egalitarian society.
3. Buddhism explored universal and timeless questions surrounding suffering, disease, aging, and death.
4. The active engagement of the Buddhist Sangha and dedicated monks facilitated the dissemination of Buddhism across borders.
5. Support from influential kings like Ashoka and Kanishka bolstered Buddhism's popularity and expansion.

These reasons contributed to the global spread of Buddhism as a significant world religion.

- **What is the relevance of Buddhism at present?**

Buddhism remains relevant in the present-day for the following reasons:

- 1. Non-violence :** Buddhism offers a path to address the prevailing violence in the world, promoting peace and harmony.
- 2. Ethical principles :** Buddhism's noble eightfold path, advocating balance and moderation, tackles contemporary issues such as extremism and its impact on areas like production, consumption, and the environment.
- 3. Social impact :** The enduring relevance of Buddhism is exemplified by significant events like the mass conversion of 6 million Mahars to Buddhism led by Bhimrao Ambedkar in 1956. Buddhism's appeal to Dalit communities lies in its radical rejection of the caste system, addressing a crucial need in present-day India.

**Model Questions :**

1. What factors contributed to the widespread popularity of Buddhism?
2. Do you believe Mahatma Buddha initiated a social revolution? Present your perspective, providing arguments to support your opinion.
3. What were the key factors that enabled Buddhism to evolve into a global religion? Additionally, explore the contemporary relevance of Buddhism in today's world.

• **Was Ashoka a devoted Buddhist?**

Ashoka personally embraced Buddhism, as evident from his Bhabru inscription where he expressed his faith in the Triratna (Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha) of the Buddhist sect. However, his concept of Dhamma extended beyond Buddhism, encompassing broader social and moral ideals necessary for leading a righteous life. The Dhamma policy emphasized the following principles:

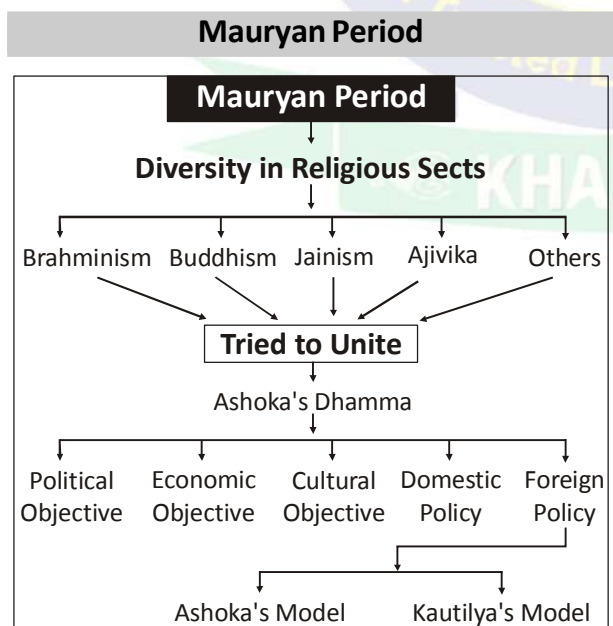
1. Reverence for parents and teachers.
2. Compassion towards servants, slaves, and animals.
3. Promotion of frugality and modesty in spending.
4. Eradication of anger and cruelty.

■ **Ashoka's Dhamma policy was driven by several objectives:**

- 1. Political Objectives:** Ashoka utilized his Dhamma for political purposes, employing it as a means to foster unity and integrity within his vast empire.
- 2. Economic Objectives:** On the economic front, Ashoka sought to safeguard the agricultural economy by discouraging the killing of animals. Recognizing that protecting livestock aligned with the needs of the agricultural sector, he emphasized the concept of non-violence, thereby promoting agricultural prosperity.
- 3. Cultural Objectives:** In terms of cultural aspects, Ashoka aimed to establish a uniform code of conduct by fostering ideological harmony among various religious sects.

■ **The impact of Ashoka's Dhamma policy on domestic governance -**

1. **Reduced use of penal power:** Ashoka's Dhamma policy led to a decrease in the reliance on punitive measures in state governance.
2. **Emphasis on public welfare:** Ashoka significantly expanded the state's role by prioritizing the well-being of the public.



■ **Dhamma of Ashoka**

3. Improved administration and governance: Ashoka emphasized the importance of efficient administration and governance. Historical records suggest that his officers enjoyed unrestricted access to him, fostering a culture of diligence and accountability.
4. Acknowledgment of public indebtedness: Ashoka recognized his indebtedness to the public and expressed his commitment to fulfilling this obligation. To ensure effective implementation, he appointed a new class of officers called Dhamma Mahamatta.

The success of Ashoka's domestic policy is reflected in the adoption of the Ashoka Chakra, a national symbol, by the independent government of India.

■ **Impact of Ashoka's Dhamma policy on foreign policy -**

1. Ashoka introduced an alternative foreign policy approach, pioneering efforts to find alternatives to war.
2. In his 13<sup>th</sup> inscription, Ashoka proclaimed his adoption of the Dhamma Vijay policy, emphasizing reconciliation over military victory.
3. Ashoka sent delegations to neighboring countries to propagate the Dhamma doctrine, appointing Dhamma envoys in place of traditional ambassadors. Even today, cultural diplomacy remains fundamental to India's relations with Southeast Asia.
4. Unlike previous Mauryan rulers who focused primarily on western countries, Ashoka pursued both a "Look West Policy" and a "Look East Policy." He sent religious missions to Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia, forging connections in those regions.
5. While material progress has flourished over the past 2400 years, Ashoka and his Dhamma remain unparalleled in moral stature.

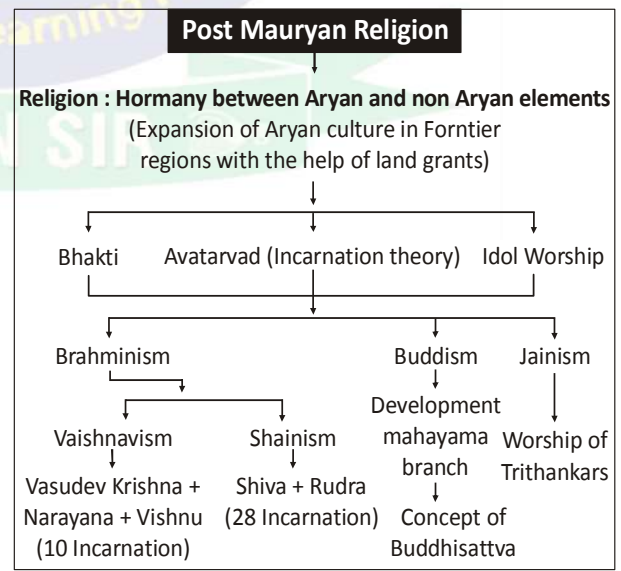
■ **What are the characteristics of Kautilya's foreign policy?**

Kautilya's foreign policy is characterized by a pragmatic and realistic approach, in contrast to Ashoka's idealism. He prioritizes opportunism and adopts the "Raj Mandal system" to classify neighboring states as friends and enemies, shaping policies accordingly. According to Kautilya, one's immediate neighbor can be a potential enemy, while the enemy of one's enemy can be a potential ally. This system further distinguishes between categories such as friend of friend, friend of enemy, and enemy of enemy.

Shiv Shankar Menon, an esteemed scholar of International Relations, highlights that Kautilya's concept of the "Balance of Power" predates the Treaty of Westphalia by 2000 years.

In the context of Indian foreign policy, the legacies of both Ashoka and Kautilya are observed, each carrying its own significance. Kautilya's approach is relevant for a state aspiring to become an empire, focusing on strategic expansion and consolidation. On the other hand, Ashoka's foreign policy is more suitable for a large empire emphasizing internal organization and stability rather than aggressive expansion.

**Post-Mauryan Period**



During the Post-Mauryan Age, there was a harmony of Aryan and non-Aryan elements in

the field of religion. As a result, new forms of religion emerged, including:

1. Development of Bhaktism.
2. Emergence of the concept of incarnation.
3. Idol making and idol worship.

These factors have left their imprints in almost all religions.

#### ■ **Brahmin Sect**

- **Vaishnavism** - The harmonious integration of Aryan and non-Aryan influences led to the emergence of the Vaishnavite cult. Among the non-Aryan deities, Vasudeva Krishna, associated with the 'Panch Vrishni Nayak' of Mathura, held great significance. These deities included Vasudeva (Krishna), Sankarshana (Balarama), Shamba, Pradyumna, and Anirudha. Descriptions of Vasudeva Krishna can be found in the 'Mora inscription' discovered in Mathura.

Another non-Aryan deity, Narayana, became closely linked with Vasudeva Krishna. Narayana's worship was established in the Himalayan region and had connections to animal husbandry. It is believed that the concepts of cow herding, Gopian (cowherd), and the importance of milk and butter possibly originated from the worship of Narayana. Eventually, Vishnu came to be regarded as the supreme deity among these non-Aryan gods, leading to the development of the Vaishnavite cult.

- **Shaivism** - The presence of Shiva, a non-Aryan deity, can be traced back to the period of the Harappan civilization. The description of the Vedic god Rudra first appears in the Rigveda. Over time, a synthesis occurred between these two deities, leading to the development of Shaivism.

Additionally, the concept of incarnation became intertwined with the concept of bhakti (devotion). Both Shaivism and Vaishnavism were influenced by the principles of bhakti. Vishnu's ten incarnations and Shiva's twenty-eight incarnations were visualized and revered.

#### ■ **Buddhism**

A new branch of Buddhism called Mahayana

emerged, bringing about significant changes in the nature of the religion and drawing it closer to the Brahmin sect. The Mahayana sect differed from the earlier Hinayana sect in several ways: Unlike the Hinayana sect, which emphasized the historical existence of Buddha, Mahayana regarded Buddha as a deity rather than solely a preacher or mentor. This shift gave rise to the concept of Bodhisattva, which referred to individuals deserving of attaining nirvana but choosing to delay it. Bodhisattva embodied the idea of selfless service, as they dedicated themselves to the enlightenment and liberation of all beings in the world. Consequently, the Mahayana tradition adopted a more optimistic outlook, in contrast to Hinayana, by offering the opportunity for Nirvana to all people.

With the development of devotion towards Bodhisattva, the practice of idol worship became prominent. While the Hinayana Buddhist cult mainly focused on worshipping symbols associated with Gautama Buddha, the Mahayana tradition started creating idols of Bodhisattvas.

#### ■ **Jainism**

The Jain religion was divided into two branches: Shvetambara and Digambara. The Shvetambara branch embraced the practice of idol worship. However, Jainism maintained its distinctive character as it remained largely faithful to the teachings of Mahavira.

During this period, the tradition of creating idols emerged, encompassing not only the idols of Tirthankaras (spiritual leaders) but also of Bodhisattvas and Brahmin deities.

**Question: "In the early centuries of Christ, changes in the field of religion became an important landmark in Indian history." Examine the statement.**

**Answer:** During the early centuries of the Christian era, significant transformations occurred in the realm of religion, leaving a profound impact on Indian history. The amalgamation of Aryan and non-Aryan elements gave rise to a new religious framework, later

identified as Hinduism.

Through the allocation of land grants, Brahmins, Buddhists, and Jains were settled in peripheral regions where they came into contact with tribal communities. This interaction fostered an exchange between Aryan and non-Aryan beliefs and practices. While the Brahmin religion emphasized Yajna (sacrificial rituals), the influence of tribal elements led to an increased emphasis on Bhakti (devotion). Consequently, Bhakti influenced various religious sects, with Vaishnavism and Shaivism evolving from the Brahmin sect and Mahayana emerging from Buddhism. The tribal influence also facilitated the development of idol worship, resulting in the creation of idols depicting Buddha, Bodhisattva, Jain Tirthankara, Vishnu, Shiva, and others.

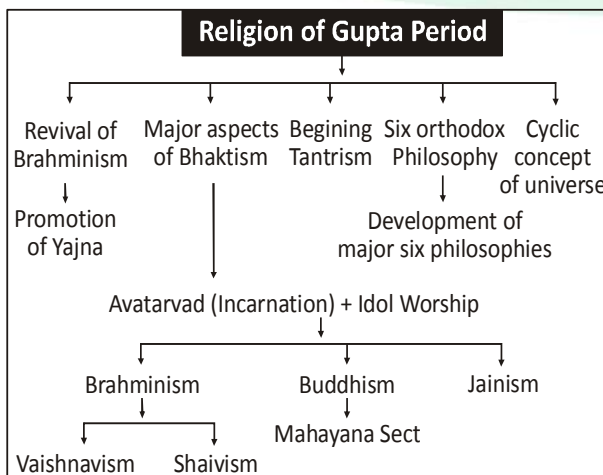
Furthermore, during this period, certain non-Aryan deities were assimilated into the Aryan sect. This integration gave rise to a distinct religious form known as Hinduism in subsequent periods. These deities included Shiva, Kumar Karthikeya, Mother Goddess, Ganesh, animals, trees, and more.

Thus, the social integration that took place in the early centuries of the Christian era brought about significant changes in the realm of religion, ultimately becoming a pivotal landmark in Indian history.

### Religion of Gupta Period

#### Following aspects of Gupta Period

Religion :



### ■ Brahmanical Revivalism

The Gupta period marked a significant resurgence of religious and cultural activities in India. Among the notable events, Ashwamedha Yajna was performed by Gupta rulers like Samudragupta and Kumaragupta. However, it is worth mentioning that yajnas were not exclusive to the rulers. Common households also enthusiastically engaged in various yajnas, including Haviryajna, Somayajna, and Panch Mahayajna. This widespread participation reflected the vibrant religious practices and cultural traditions during the Gupta era.

### ■ Bhakti as the dominant trend

The concept of Bhakti emerged as a result of the harmonization between Brahmin and non-Brahmin elements. Along with Bhakti, the notions of incarnation and idol worship became intertwined. The concept of incarnation aimed to reconcile diverse and opposing elements. Bhakti had a profound influence on almost all contemporary religious traditions. Within the Brahmin religion, Vaishnava Bhakti and Shiva Bhakti flourished, leading to the establishment of idols in temples and the practice of idol worship.

During the Gupta period, the idea of the Tridev, comprising Brahma, Vishnu, and Mahesh (Shiva), gained prominence. The Gupta rulers themselves supported the Vaishnava cult. Moreover, the worship of deities in human form gained popularity during this period. Examples include the worship of mother goddesses, animals, and snakes.

### ■ Beginning of Tantrism

During this period, we can observe the subtle emergence of Tantrism. Tantrism can be described as the influence of Tantric practices on certain sects, possibly due to the integration of Aryan and tribal elements. Notably, a significant aspect of Gupta religion was the growing significance of female elements. It was believed that the involvement of women was essential to inspire and energize the actions of men. For instance, Lakshmi became associated with

Vishnu, and Parvati became associated with Shiva.

In the Harappan civilization, the mother goddess was not connected to male deities. However, in the Gupta period, mother goddesses were linked with male gods. This shift led to the encouragement of Tantrism as well.

#### ■ **Development of Six Orthodox Philosophies:**

During the ancient period, there were various ideas, ideologies, and schools of thought. By the time of the Gupta period, these diverse perspectives were consolidated into six major orthodox schools of philosophy. These schools were known as Sankhya, Yoga, Vaisheshika, Nyaya, Mimamsa, and Uttar Mimamsa.

- **Samkhya** - Sankhya is the most ancient school of philosophy. Its founder is Kapila. The foundational scripture of this philosophy is Maharishi Kapila's "Sankhya Sutras". According to the ancient Sankhya philosophy, it is not necessary to acknowledge the existence of a divine entity for the creation of the universe, as the universe originates from nature and not from God. However, as the philosophy evolved, the concept of Purusha, which refers to the individual soul, became associated with nature. Jain philosophy shares close affinity with Sankhya philosophy.
- **Yoga** - Another significant philosophical system is the Yoga philosophy. Among the various philosophies in India, Yoga is widely recognized around the world. This philosophy places great emphasis on self-regulation and self-discipline. According to Yoga philosophy, the creator of the universe is not a divine being, but rather an elevated and energetic self known as the Atman, which remains in existence without being absorbed into any material substance. Patanjali, the proponent of Yoga, authored the Yoga Sutras.
- **Nyaya** This philosophical system was rooted

in rationality, emphasizing the significance of reason and empirical evidence in the quest for knowledge. The Nyaya philosophy, established by Akshapada Gautama in the 2nd century BCE, was particularly renowned for its logical approach. Gautama's influential work, the Nyaya Sutras, guided Indian scholars towards a greater appreciation for logical thinking and persuasive argumentation.

- **Vaisheshika** – The Vaisheshika School is a philosophical tradition that embraces a realistic and objective view of the universe. It firmly believes in the physical nature of the universe. The Vaisheshika philosophy was formulated by Kanada, who is widely recognized as the founder of this school. According to this philosophy, the universe is composed of five fundamental elements: fire, air, water, earth, and ether (sky). These elements combine to form everything that exists in the universe, including atoms, space, time, mind, and soul.  
The Vaisheshika School introduced the atomic hypothesis, which posits that all material objects are comprised of atoms. They propose that atoms and molecules combine to give rise to matter, serving as the fundamental building blocks of everything that can be perceived or observed in the physical world. This hypothesis is put forth to explain the various phenomena that occur within our universe.
- **Mimamsa** – Mimamsa, meaning "exposition of the Vedas," aims to interpret and revive the importance of the Vedas. Its primary text is Jaimini's "Purva Mimamsa Sutras." Mimamsa philosophy is closely associated with the practical aspects of Vedic religion. It extensively examines sacred rituals and the rewards derived from their performance. An eminent scholar and philosopher associated with this school of thought was Savara Swamin.

- **Uttara Mimansa or Vedanta** –Vedanta philosophy, derived from the Upanishads, forms the basis of this philosophy. The primary text of this philosophy is Badarayana’s “Brahma Sutras,” compiled in the second century BCE. The essence of this philosophy can be found in the early Upanishads. According to Vedanta, Brahman is the ultimate reality, and everything else is considered illusory (maya). There is no distinction between the individual soul and Brahman. Therefore, those who realize their true selves also attain knowledge of Brahman and attain salvation. Both Brahman and the soul are eternal and indestructible. Shankaracharya later wrote commentaries on the Upanishads, Brahma Sutras, and Bhagavad Gita, which came to be known as Shankar’s Vedanta

■ **Cyclic concept of the Universe**

During this period, the Brahmanical concept developed a cyclic understanding of creation. According to this concept, a Mahayuga is composed of four Yugas, and a Manvantara consists of 71 Mahayugas. A total of 14 Manvantaras were envisioned. After each Manvantara, there occurs a Pralaya, which signifies the destruction of the universe. Following each Pralaya, a new Manu emerges, who is considered the first human in the subsequent cycle of creation. It is believed that we are currently in the seventh Manvantara.

The influence of Tantrism grew significantly in the realm of religion in North India. Tantrism emphasized the practice of Vamachara and PanchaMakaras. Its influence extended to nearly all significant religious sects-

■ **Brahminism**

- **Vaishnavism:** Within Vaishnavism, the Sahajayana branch emerged as a result of the influence of Tantrism.
- **Shaivism:** Extremist sects such as Kapalika and Kalamukha developed within Shaivism. The followers of these sects consume their food from human skulls, paint their bodies with ashes from cremations, and engage in Panchamakara rituals.
- **Worship of Mother Goddess:** Tantrism had a profound impact on the worship of the mother goddess, granting her a prominent position in Tantric rituals.

■ **Buddhism**

Due to the influence of Tantrism, the Vajrayana sect emerged within Buddhism. Vajrayana places great emphasis on the transformative potential of Tantric practices for achieving spiritual liberation. Within the historical development of Vajrayana, feminine deities became integral to the sect’s beliefs and rituals. Among them, one notable deity was ‘Pragya Paramita,’ who was closely associated with Avalokiteshvara (Bodhisattva), while another revered deity was Tara, who held significance in connection with the Buddha.

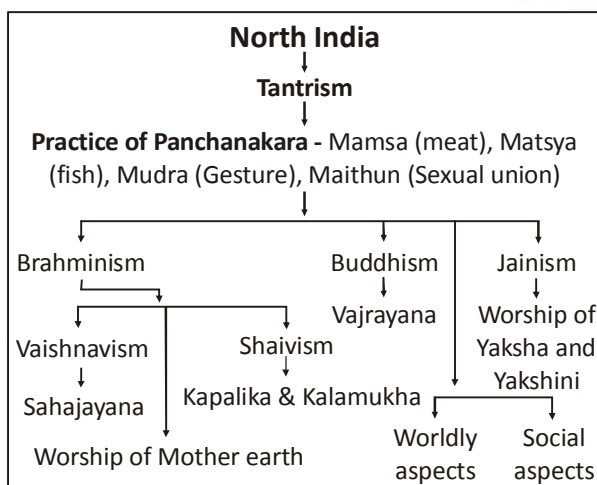
■ **Jainism**

The Jain tradition experienced minimal influence from Tantrism, although the devotion to Yaksha and Yakshini began to emerge within Jainism. Alongside the worship of Tirthankaras, the Jain religious system also incorporated the worship of Yaksha-Yakshinis.

■ **Emphasis on Worldly Aspects**

Tantrism places a significant emphasis on worldly aspects in stead of supernatural practices. Within this tradition, worldly matters

**Post-Gupta Religion**



hold great importance, as mantras are believed to possess the power to mitigate the effects of snake and scorpion bites.

### ■ Sociological Aspect

The Tantric religion exhibited greater egalitarianism compared to Brahmanical cults. It did not discriminate based on gender or caste, thus providing accessibility to women and individuals from lower castes. This inclusive approach contributed to the growing popularity of Tantric religion within these communities. Furthermore, women were also able to hold the esteemed position of guru in Tantric practice.

### South India

The Bhakti movement in South India emerged from the influence of both the Puranas and the Sangam literature. This movement expressed devotion and love through emotional expressions of Bhakti.

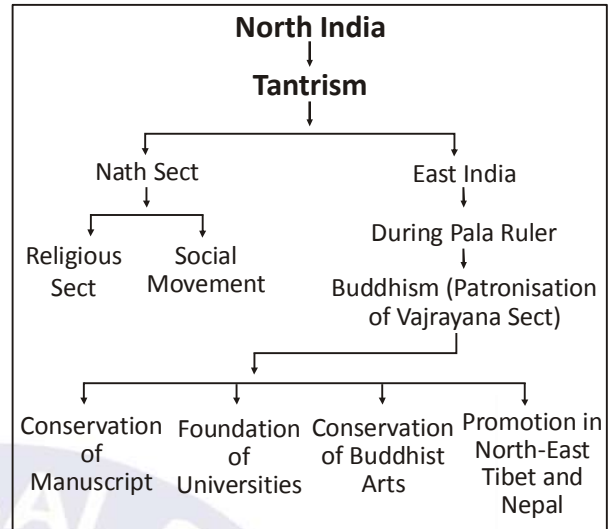
Two groups of saints, the Alvars and the Nayanars, played vital roles in inspiring the Bhakti movement. The Alvars were Vaishnavites, devoted to Vishnu, while the Nayanars were Shaivites, dedicated to Shiva. Among the Alvar saints were notable figures such as Kulasekara, a Pandya ruler, and Andal, a revered female saint. The Nayanar saints included influential individuals like Appar, Namsambandar, and Sundaramurthy.

The Alvar saints' hymns were compiled into the sacred text called Prabandham, which holds significant reverence in the southern region like Vedas. In the 12th century, the biographies of the Nayanar sages were compiled into the text known as Periyapuramam.

The Alvar and Nayanar saints hailed from diverse backgrounds, representing different castes. However, they shared a common belief in rejecting the caste system and promoting religious and social equality.

## Early Medieval Religion

### ■ North India



The Nathpanth, a school of Tantrism, emerged in North India during the early medieval period. It was founded by Matsyendranath and later led by Gornath. The Nathpanthis placed great importance on ethical behavior and actively opposed caste divisions. They were both religious and social reformers, advocating for equality among all individuals. The Nathpanthis welcomed people from all classes, including lower castes and untouchables, promoting inclusivity and acceptance.

### ■ Eastern India

During this period, Buddhism experienced a significant decline in North India. Several factors contributed to this decline:

1. Buddhism became closely associated with the Brahmin sect after the emergence of the Mahayana sect.
2. The invasion of the Hunas resulted in the loss of many Buddhist monks' lives.
3. The revival of Hinduism led by Shankaracharya also played a role in the decline of Buddhism in India. Hiuen Tsang observed Buddhist Viharas in North India deteriorating during his time.

It is important to highlight that Buddhism not only declined in North India but also continued to flourish in Bengal, primarily due to the

patronage and support of the Pala rulers. The Pala rulers played an active role in promoting Buddhism and ensuring its growth by implementing various measures.

1. The Pala rulers had a deep understanding of the prevailing Vajrayana form of Buddhism and actively supported it, drawing parallels to the patronage of Ashoka in the past.
2. They generously patronized renowned Buddhist scholars such as Atisha Dipankara and sponsored the production and preservation of Buddhist manuscripts.
3. The Pala rulers extended their patronage to esteemed institutions like Nalanda University and established prominent centers of Buddhist education, namely Vikramshila, Odantapuri, and Sompura.
4. In their efforts to promote Buddhism, they played a crucial role in propagating the teachings of Buddhism in regions like the North-East, Nepal, and Tibet.

The Pala rulers played a pivotal role in safeguarding the existence of Buddhism in India.

**Question-The Pala period is the most significant phase in the history of Buddhism in India. Enumerate. [UPSC 2020]**

**Answer-** The Pala dynasty is renowned as the Golden Age in the history of Bengal due to its profound support for the advancement of Buddhism. During their reign, the Palas erected numerous monasteries and universities such as Odantapuri, Vikramshila, and Nalanda, which emerged as prominent centers for Buddhist education and secular learning.

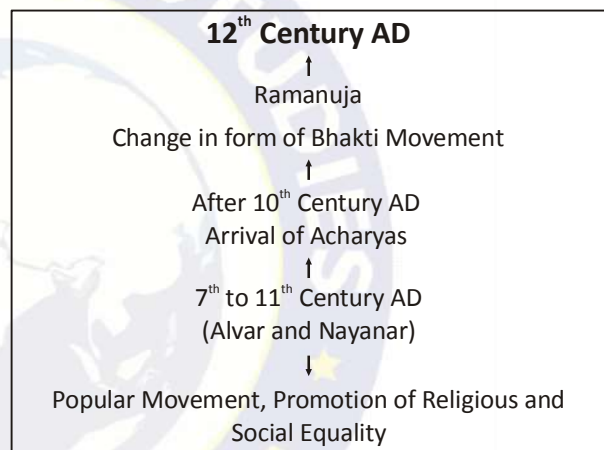
King Devapala, donated the income from five villages to ensure the sustenance of Nalanda University. Additionally, several other educational centers like Jagaddala, Somapura, and Iraikot were established during this era. Balaputradeva, the ruler of Suvarnavdipa, even constructed a monastery within the premises of Nalanda.

The period witnessed the creation of numerous manuscripts on various Buddhist subjects and intricate palm leaf carvings depicting Vajrayana deities, including the revered Astasahasrika Prajnaparamita text.

The patronage extended by the Pala rulers and the emergence of Vajrayana Buddhism marked a significant turning point for Buddhism. Its influence transcended the boundaries of Bengal, reaching regions as distant as Tibet, Mongolia, and Central Asia. Hence, the Pala dynasty played a momentous role in the growth and dissemination of Buddhism in India.

## ■ South India

### ● Bhakti Movement:



The Bhakti movement in South India was initiated by the Alvar and Nayanar saints. However, as the movement progressed, Brahmin Acharyas took up its cause and introduced certain modifications to its form.

**The arrival of Acharya Ramanuja led to a change in the form of the Bhakti movement–**

1. Acharya Ramanuja, a Hindu philosopher and theologian, played a crucial role in reconciling the Vedic tradition with the Prabandham tradition. His efforts aimed to establish harmony between the liberal religious practices of the Bhakti saints and the principles of Brahmanism.
2. Ramanuja advocated for the equality of all individuals within the realm of religion. However, he also maintained the belief in

the social division of Varna. As a result, Ramanuja's teachings encouraged social conservatism.

3. Ramanuja's philosophy, known as Vishishtadvaita (Qualified non-dualism), emphasized the significance of devotion to a personal God. This philosophy provided a solid philosophical framework for the Bhakti movement.

#### **Ramanuja made some modifications to Adi Shankaracharya's non-dualism philosophy -**

1. Shankaracharya and Ramanuja held contrasting views regarding the relationship between Brahman and Jiva. Shankaracharya believed in the concept of non-duality, asserting that Brahman and Jiva are essentially the same. On the other hand, Ramanuja believed in their distinct yet interconnected nature, where Brahman represents the quantity and Jiva represents its quality.
2. Shankaracharya emphasized that knowledge alone was sufficient for attaining liberation (moksha), whereas Ramanuja believed that both knowledge and God's grace were essential prerequisites.
3. Shankaracharya highlighted the significance of renunciation and meditation as means to realize the ultimate reality and achieve moksha. In contrast, Ramanuja emphasized the path of devotion (bhakti) as the means to unite with the divine.

#### **Historical role of Shankaracharya or why Shankaracharya is called Hindu religion reformer?**

Adi Shankaracharya, a 9<sup>th</sup> century Hindu philosopher and reformer, was born on the coast of Kerala. He wrote commentaries on major Hindu scriptures and his teachings have had a profound influence on Hinduism, earning him the title of Hindu reformer. Shankaracharya implemented several measures for the revival of Hinduism:

1. He revitalized the philosophical foundation of Hinduism by emphasizing the concept of Non-dualism.
2. Shankaracharya recognized the significance of idol worship as a valid form of religious practice for the common people. He conceptualized the Hindu trinity, comprising Brahma as the creator, Vishnu as the preserver, and Shiva as the destroyer.
3. To foster religious unity among Hindus, Adi Shankaracharya established four Mathas (monastic centers) in different corners of India. These mathas were located in Badrinath (north), Sringeri (south), Puri (east), and Dwarka (west).
4. Shankaracharya established an organization of Brahmin ascetics to propagate the Hindu religion, taking inspiration from the Buddhist Sangha. He encouraged these ascetics to compose scriptures based on the teachings of Buddhist and Jain thinkers.

Overall, Shankaracharya's efforts played a crucial role in strengthening Hinduism, both philosophically and organizationally.

