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Buddhism- Remarkable History, Origin and Teachings

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Reasons for the rise of Buddhism

- An extraordinary religious revolution took place in India in the 6th century BC. Many religious movements emerged whose aim was to reform the Hindu religion.
- At that time the Vedic religion had become very complex. Due to the predominance of corrupt Brahmins, useless rituals, expensive sacrifices and sacrifices, a feeling of discontent had arisen in the minds of the people.

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- Both these religions were originally the branches of Vedic religion. In which the moral aspect of Hinduism was emphasized by rejecting the pomp, rituals and superstitions.
- Both the rulers of Magadha of that time, Bimbisara and Ajatashatru, were free from the influence of fanatical Brahmins and were very liberal in religious thought.
- In such a political environment, it was possible to raise voice against the rituals, sacrifices and hypocrisy of Brahmins.
- Mahavira, the founder of Jainism, was born in the state of Magadha and Gautam Buddha, the founder of Buddhism, was born in the city republic of Kapilvastu near this state.
- Bimbisara and Ajatashatru gave freedom to Mahavira and Buddha to propagate their views and also protected them. Both the Buddhist texts and the Jain texts claim that Bimbisara and Ajatashatru adopted their religion.



Ancient History of Buddhism image source

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Origin of Buddhism

Buddhism- 6th century BC Gautam Buddha was the main leader of the religious revolution. He provided a simple and pure religion to the people of India in the form of Buddhism. Which spread rapidly in many countries due to its original qualities and kingship and made a deep impact on the culture and history of different countries of the world. Even today this religion is practiced in one-third of the world.

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- ✓ modern Buddhist world mainly includes Tibet, China, Mongolia, Korea, Japan, Indo-China, Thailand, Burma and Sri Lanka. Although Malaysia and Indonesia cannot claim to be Buddhist countries, they have substantial Buddhist population.

About 50% of the population of Nepal is Buddhist and there are many followers of this religion in Bangladesh as well. In present-day India, the birth place of Buddhism, the number of its followers is very small and they are limited to some parts of the country.

Life of Mahatma Gautam Buddha

Birth and Parents:-

Mahatma Buddha, who laid the foundation of Buddhism, was a prince of the Sakya dynasty of Surya-vanshi Kshatriyas. His real name was Siddhartha, but he is known in Buddhist literature by many other names such as Shakyamuni Gautam, Shakyasinha etc. His father Shuddhodan was the ruler of a small kingdom located in the Terai country of the Himalaya Mountains, whose capital was Kapilvastu. His mother Mahamaya or Mayadevi was a Kshatriya princess of the Kollian dynasty.

It is known from contemporary sources that when Mahamaya was visiting her father in pregnancy, she gave birth to Buddha at the place of Lumbini village on the way. Later, Emperor Ashoka erected a pillar at this place, on which the words can be read even today: "Here Shakyamuni Buddha was born."

There has been a lot of difference among historians regarding the date of birth of Buddha, but modern Indian scholars consider the birth of Buddha to be 567 BC.

Childhood:-

Only a week after Gautam's birth, his mother died. So his upbringing was handed over to his aunt Prajapati Gautami, who was also Gautam's stepmother.

According to the residence of the prince, three palaces were built and various types of materials were collected. Proper arrangements were made for Gautam's education and initiation and every possible arrangement was made to keep worldly sorrows out of his sight.

Marriage:-

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- ✓ mind did not turn away from spiritual things. After some time a son was born to him, who was named Rahul (meaning bondage), because Gautama considered him a bondage.

Four signs:-

While traveling he had the chance to see an old man, a sick and a dead body on different occasions. Seeing these scenes, he realised that the world is the home of miseries and calamities and that no creature born in it can escape old age, disease and death. After some time he saw a happy saint, who had renounced the world in order to get freedom from the shackles of life and death and was in search of truth. It is said that these four scenes had such a profound effect on Gautam's mind that he decided to leave home in search of true knowledge.

Great Renunciation (Mahatyag):

Gautam's mind was restless because of the miseries of the world. In order to attain true knowledge, he decided to leave home and take sannyas. One night, leaving his son, wife and the palace, he rode on his horse Kanthak and went in secret in search of truth. His home renunciation was certainly a great sacrifice.

Enlightenment:-

He took samadhi under a peepal tree on the bank of river Niranjana in Gaya city and became engrossed in meditation. It is said that he remained stable in Akhand Samadhi for seven days and seven nights. On the eighth day, on the full moon day of Vaishakh, he attained true knowledge or realization. He found a solution to the difficult problem of life. He learned that man's own desires are the root cause of his misery and that only by suppressing these desires he can get peace.

Preaching:-

Mahatma Buddha reached Sarnath near Banaras with the decision of preaching religion. Coming here, he gave his first speech in place of Mrigavan. His speech is known as 'Dharma-Chakra Parivartan' and contains the essence of Buddhism.

Those who listened to this historical speech were also five Brahmins, who had left Gautam's side and went to Benares during the period of penance. He was very impressed upon hearing the new path shown by Gautam and became his disciple. Soon there were 60 disciples of Buddha in Banaras and he ordered all of them to preach Dharma for the good of human beings in different places.

✓ effort. During this period, he continued to give speeches in the states of Magadha, Kosala, Kapilvastu etc.

Bimbisara's son Ajatashatru and some other people of Rajagriha also became worshipers of Buddha. The propagation of Buddha got special success in the kingdom of Kosala. The greatest devotee of the Buddha in the kingdom of Kosala was a Seth named Anathapindika, who bought Jetavana from Prince Jeta with great wealth and then offered it to the Sangha for a Buddhist monastery. Vishakha, a sethani from Sravasti also became a disciple of Buddha and she used to feed 500 nuns daily.

On his arrival in Kapilavastu, Mahatma Buddha was warmly received by his father Shuddhodana and he became a follower of Buddha along with his queen Mahaprajapati. Buddha's wife Yashodhara and his son Rahul also embraced Buddhism.

Death :-

When Mahatma Buddha was about 80 years old, he came to the city of Pava. There he got a disease called dysentery. Despite this, he continued to engage in his preaching work. As soon as he reached the place of Kushinagar in Gorakhpur, his health deteriorated and he attained Nirvana on the full moon day of Vaishakh month in 487 AD.

He was born on the full moon day of Vaishakh, on this full moon day he attained knowledge and his Nirvana also took place on Vaishakh Purnima. Such an example is not found in the life of any other great person in the history of the world.

Teachings of Lord Buddha or Doctrines of Buddhism

The teachings of Mahatma Buddha were related to simple and practical life. They did not preach esoteric and complicated things about the soul and the Supreme Soul. He even taught them some rules to lead a holy and pure life in simple and clear words in the language of the people. Therefore it would be appropriate to divide his teachings into two parts:

(a) Positive Principles

(b) Negative Principles

(I) Positive Principles

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- ✓ The first principle of the teachings of Mahatma Buddha is the Four Basic Truths. The first truth is that the world is full of sorrows. Birth, disease, separation etc. are sorrows. The second truth is that craving is the cause of these sorrows. It is sad if these desires are not fulfilled. The third truth is that by suppressing desires, suffering can be removed. The fourth and final truth is that cravings can be quelled by the 'Asht Path'.

2. Asht Marga or Eight Fold Noble Path :

Mahatma Buddha exhorted people to adopt eight principles, which are called 'Asht Marga'. These principles are really the essence of his teachings. By adopting these principles one's life can be purified and his desires can be suppressed. These principles are the following:

(1) Truth Belief – Man should have 'Truth Belief'. He should have a firm belief that suppression of desires can remove sorrows and should not deviate from the true path.

(2) True thoughts:- Man's thoughts should be pure. He should leave the thoughts of useless customs, sacrifices, sacrifices etc. and bring pure thoughts in his mind.

(3) Truthful words :- Man's words should be holy. he must speak the truth.

(4) Satya Karma:- Along with true thoughts and true words, one's actions should also be pure. He should stay away from theft, killing of souls, intoxicants and worldly pleasures and should adopt the qualities of charity, kindness, non-violence, love for all human beings etc.

(5) True living:- The living style of a man should be spotless and he should earn his living by pure means.

(6) True effort:- Man's efforts should be true. He should try to do good to others and keep life pure.

(7) Satya Smriti:- Pure thoughts should be absorbed in the mind of man and he should forget bad things and think only about true things.

(8) Satya Meditation:- A person should put his mind in 'true meditation' beyond worldly attachments and illusions.

Apart from the 'Eight Marga', the eight principles are also called 'Middle Marg', because this path is considered to be the path between severe penance and enjoyment. Neither Mahatma Buddha was in favor of leaving the world and doing penance in the forests. nor did he ask to lead a life of indulgence. He asked

- ✓ Non-violence is the main principle of the teachings of Mahatma Buddha. He believed that all living beings – humans and animals and birds – should be loved and should not be killed. Those who kill animals should not be appreciated and those who kill strong or weak animals should be opposed. Mahatma ji has also condemned the eating of animal flesh. His principle was that all living beings should be treated with love and kindness.

4. Theory of Karma :-

Like the Hindu religion of the later Vedic period, Mahatma Buddha also expressed his faith in the doctrine of Karma. He believed that man is the creator of his own destiny. He definitely gets the fruits of his actions. Mahatma Buddha accepted this prevailing theory and gave the message of doing good deeds. "His belief in the theory of karma has special importance from the point of view of sociology, because in it more importance has been given to individual karma than birth-caste."

5. Universal Brotherhood :-

Mahatma Buddha also propagated the principle of brotherhood. He exhorted everyone to live as brothers. Mahatma Buddha himself set a high example in front of all the people of high and low castes by treating them with love and kindness.

6. Morality :-

Mahatma Buddha also laid special emphasis on morality. His teaching was that human beings should have pure character. If seen carefully, 'Asht Marg' is also a collection of principles of morality, according to which man was taught pure thoughts, pure words, pure actions, pure living, pure efforts, pure memory, pure meditation etc.

7. Self-Enlightenment :-

Mahatma Buddha always preached to his followers you must be light to yourself, which meant that they should find their spiritual path through experience. He firmly believed that man's own experience was his greatest guide and that he should accept only the criterion of experience.

8. Nirvana:-

The attainment of 'Nirvana' was the ultimate goal, which Mahatma Buddha put before the people. He told the people that 'Nirvana' can be attained only by following these principles. By 'Nirvana' he means the

✓ 1. No Belief in the Worship of God and Deities: –

Apart from the above main principles, Mahatma Buddha also expressed disbelief in many famous prevailing principles. They did not believe in the existence of God nor believe in the worship of gods and goddesses. But he believed that there is such a power by which the world runs. He calls it 'Dharma'.

2. Disbelief in penance :-

Mahatma Buddha did not believe in penance. He himself did penance in the forests of Urvala for six years but he found it in vain. He used to exhort his disciples that there is no need to renounce the world or the householder. Even while living in the world, 'Nirvana' can be attained by following the 'Eight Path'.

3. Mistrust in the caste system:-

The Hindu society of the post-Vedic period was divided into four castes – Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras. Mahatma Buddha expressed disbelief in this distinction of castes. He said that a man who leads a pious life and follows the 'Eight Path', whether he is a Brahmin or a Shudra, attains Nirvana.

4. Disbelief in Vedas :-

According to the prevalent Brahmin religion before Mahatma Buddha, the Vedas were considered to be sacred religious texts and reciting the mantras of the Vedas was a good religious activity. But Mahatma Buddha did not believe in the purity of the Vedas.

5. Disbelief in Yagya and chanting:-

At that time in Hinduism, various types of yagyas were performed to please the gods and mantras were chanted in their praise. Mahatma Buddha did not believe in these practices at all.

6. No Faith in Sanctity of Sanskrit :-

Mahatma Buddha did not believe in the purity of Sanskrit language. At that time the idea was prevalent that only by reading Vedas and other religious books in Sanskrit one can get results, but Mahatma Buddha did not accept this idea. He gave his teachings in the simple language of the people, Prakrit, which was well understood by the people.

The Buddhist Sangha

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- ✓ gradually developed into a broad and powerful institution and through them Buddhism spread in different countries. A brief description of the outline, organization and working of the Buddhist Sangha is as follows:

(i) Membership and Union Entry :-

The disciples of Mahatma Buddha were mainly of two types – worshipers and monks. The disciples who followed the norms of household life were called worshipers, while the followers of Buddha who took sannyasa after leaving home were called bhikshus. The Buddhist Sangha was the organization of these monks. At first, Mahatma Buddha did not allow women to enter the Sangh, but later on the request of his chief disciple Anand, he opened the doors of the Sangh to women as well. The woman who was a member of the Sangha was called a bhikshuni.

Rules for entering the union:-

(1) He should obtain the permission of his parents in this regard. (2) His age should not be less than 15 years. (3) He should not have leprosy, tuberculosis and any other contagious disease (4) All people were allowed to enter the union without distinction of caste, but slaves and criminals were generally not given place in it.

When a person fulfilled these conditions, he was required to shave his hair and wear yellow clothes and appear before the chairman of the local sangha and say the words, "I take refuge in the Buddha, I take refuge in the Dharma, I take refuge in the Sangha." I take refuge." At the same time he had to declare that he had full faith in the ten commandments prescribed by the Buddha. At the end of this program, the person was considered fit for the life of a monk.

After this he would train under the supervision of an experienced monk for ten consecutive years and then actually became a member of the Buddhist Bhikshu Sangh. Each monk was expected to follow the rules of the sangha and lead a virtuous life.

(ii) Ten orders :-

The members of the Sangh had to lead a very simple and pious life. Mahatma Buddha prescribed the following ten orders for him:

(1) Not wishing anyone's property.

✓ (4) Do not lie.

(5) Do not cohabit with women.

(6) Do not take part in dancing and singing.

(7) Do not use flowers, garlands, ornaments and fragrant things.

(8) Do not eat food at any other time than the fixed time.

(9) Do not sleep on a soft bed.

(10) Do not keep money and gold and silver with you.

All the members of the Sangh were to live their lives according to these orders.

(iii) Democratic Principles :-

Mahatma Buddha adopted democratic principles in the organization of the Sangh. He took these principles from the Lichchavi and Shakya republics. According to the democratic rules of today, at that time all the people were considered equal for the membership of the union and no attention was paid to the discrimination of high and low. The meetings of the Sangh were held according to democratic rules. In these meetings, the members were given place according to the rule of seniority. The quorum in these meetings was fixed, which was usually ten. If there was even a shortfall in the fixed quorum, the decision taken in such a situation was often not accepted. The functioning of the Sangh was also of modern democratic style. Each sangha had a chairman, who was usually the oldest person in the sangha. He used to maintain discipline in the assembly and under his supervision all the work of the assembly was carried on. Small wooden stamps were given to the members to express their vote clearly. This work was done under the supervision of an election officer.

Each union also had some officers who were elected unanimously by the members of the union. These officers used to arrange food etc. for the monks and also got the Viharas built for their stay.

(iv) Buddhist Vihara :-

Buddha built viharas for the residence of monks and nuns. In which the viharas of Jetavan, Amarvan and Mriqavan were especially famous. Each such vihara had rooms for the monks to live in, eateries,

- ✓ students came from far and wide to receive education and could not remain without being impressed by the scholarship and high character of Buddhist monks." From the ruins of which have been found in India, it is known that these will certainly be great and glorious centers of education of their time. Apart from this, these monasteries are unique evidence of the charity of Buddhists and devotees.

(v) Contribution of Sangh in the development of Buddhism :-

The Sangha made a significant contribution to the development of Buddhism. Monks and nuns used to roam from place to place for the propagation of Buddhism throughout the year except for the three months of the rainy season. He also kept following the ten orders given by Mahatma Buddha and lived a very simple and pious life. As a result, Buddhism spread to far and wide countries in India and outside India.

(vi) Splits in the Union :-

Gradually the discipline of the Sangha began to loosen and the character of the monks began to decline. The monks of Vaishali tried to change the strict life rules of monks given in the 'Vinay Pitaka'. But these changes were rejected in the second Buddhist council. This did not lead to unity in Buddhism. In the first century AD, it was clearly divided into two parts – 'Hinayana and Mahayana'. This hindered the development of Buddhism. Buddhism began to decline in India.

(a) Buddhist Mahasabhas:-

Even after the death of the founder of Buddhism, the organization remained in the Buddhist religion for a long time and they called Mahasabhas from time to time in the interest of the progress of the religion. In these Mahasabhas, the principles of Buddhism and their need, the rules of the Buddhist Sangha and its flaws etc. State aid made a special contribution in making these meetings successful. A brief description of these meetings is as follows:

(i) First Mahasabha in Rajgriha :-

Mahatma Buddha had not fixed his successor. He ordered his principal disciples to follow the rules made by him. These teachings will guide them. But soon after his death there was such a debate among his disciples that due to him Mahakashyapa, the oldest disciple of Buddhism, in 487 BC for the purpose of making an authentic collection of Buddha's teachings. A Mahasabha was convened in Rajgriha. He himself was its chairman. 500 monks gathered in this Mahasabha, in which Anand and Upali were also

- ✓ three texts named 'Vinay Pitaka', 'Sutta Pitaka' and 'Abhidhamma Pitaka' with his valuable help, which are called 'Tripitaka'.

(ii) Second Mahasabha at Vaishali :-

After 100 years of the first assembly, differences arose again among some monks regarding the rules. The monks living in Vaishali and Pataliputra adopted ten such rules which the monks of Kaushambi and Avanti did not agree with. These were the main ones in the rules. (i) To collect salt for use on need. (ii) To accept gold and silver. (iii) Eating food after noon etc. When the differences between the monks of the eastern and western regions increased, in 387 BC to resolve them, The second Mahasabha was convened in Vaishali. In this General Assembly there was a debate on ten rules which were the subject of difference of opinion. In the end the monks who broke the rules were thrown out of the Sangha. These monks established their new sect called 'Mahasanghika'. The rest of the Buddhists were called Theravadis.

(iii) Third Mahasabha at Pataliputra :-

During the reign of Ashoka, many sects of Buddhism were formed and differences arose among them regarding the rules of 'Vinay-Pitaka'. Another Buddhist Mahasabha was convened for the purpose of removing the evils of Buddhist Sangha and religion. This assembly was held in 251 BC during the time of Emperor Ashoka. in Pataliputra and was attended by 1,000 monks. The program of the meeting continued for 9 months and all the problems related to religion were seriously considered. In the end, in consultation with Mogliputta Tissa, the head of this assembly, Ashoka expelled all the monks who did not follow the principles of Theravada and the rules of Vinayapitaka from the Buddhist Sangha.

As a result of this Buddhist assembly, the evils that had come in Buddhism were removed and a book named 'Kathavathu' was composed.

(iv) Fourth Mahasabha at Kashmir :-

Although Emperor Ashoka had taken steps to resolve the differences of Buddhist sects, he did not get complete success. These differences again assumed a worrying form during the reign of Kanishka. On this Emperor Kanishka, who was a supporter of Buddhism, convened the fourth Mahasabha. Its chairman was Vasumitra and its deputy chairman was Asvaghosha. Authentic commentaries were written on Tripitaka with the help of Vasumitra, which were named as 'Mahavibhasha'. There are one lakh verses on each part in this authentic commentary. As a result of this a new Buddhist branch called Mahayana came into existence and the old Buddhism came to be known as Hinayana.

✓ (i) Sutta-Pitaka :-

The holy religious texts of Buddhism are 'Tripitaka'. These three texts were written in Pali, the language prevalent at that time. The first of these is the Sutta Pitaka which is divided into five parts. In this book the principles of Mahatma Buddha are given in his own words. Somewhere some sentences of his famous devout disciples have also been given. Its study gives valuable knowledge of the teachings of Mahatma Buddha.

(ii) Vinay-Pitaka :-

The rules regarding the conduct of monks and nuns are given in the 'Vinay Pitaka'. Buddhists believe that the rules given in 'Vinay Pitaka' were decided by Mahatma Buddha. According to these rules the monks were ordered to lead a very simple, pious and taint-free life.

(iii) Abhidhamma-Pitaka :-

There are seven parts of 'Abhidham-Pitaka'. In these, the stages of life in different eras and other philosophical things have been considered.

(a) Spread of Buddhism

(i) At the time of Mahatma Buddha:- Buddhism spread rapidly in many regions of North India during the lifetime of Mahatma Buddha. In Banaras, Rajagriha and other cities of Magadha, Kapilvastu, Kosala, Vaishali, etc., a large number of people adopted this religion. The teachings of this religion were simple and it was not difficult to adopt them in practical life. According to this religion, there was no need to perform any yajna nor did penance. Apart from merchants, farmers, craftsmen and people from many other occupations became the followers of this religion, many kings and Brahmins and Kshatriyas of high family also adopted this religion. Mahatma Buddha propagated his teachings in the language of the people.

(ii) Two hundred years after Buddha:- After the death of Mahatma Buddha, the monks of the Buddhist Sangha continued to propagate Buddhism with great enthusiasm. As a result, within two centuries, this religion spread all over North India as well as South India.

(iii) Buddhism during the reign of Maurya Emperor Ashoka (273-232 BC):- There was a great spread of Buddhism during the reign of Maurya Emperor Ashoka (273-232 BC). This great Maurya emperor himself

✓ which the icons of Mahatma Buddha were kept in the room and over which there was a stone and wooden umbrella. Of these, the Sanchi and Bharhut stupas found in Madhya Pradesh are famous. The doors of these stupas have beautiful carvings and are considered to be fine specimens of art. Many pillars were also erected during the reign of Ashoka. Statues of elephants, bulls, horses and lions were made on the heads of these pillars, which are related to the stages of the life of Mahatma Buddha. Ashoka organized the third Mahasabha of Buddhists at Pataliputra in which the differences of Buddhist monks were resolved and a book called 'Kathavathu' was composed. Ashoka sent preachers not only to different parts of India but also to other countries to propagate Buddhism. As a result, Buddhism spread to Lanka, Burma and many other countries of Asia.

(iv) During the Reign of Kanishka: (120-162 AD) – After adopting Buddhism in the second century AD, the Kushan emperor Kanishka worked enthusiastically for its propagation. He convened the fourth assembly of Buddhist monks at a place called Kundalavan in Kashmir. The Buddhist scholars gathered in this conference debated on the Tripitaka texts and then wrote commentaries on them, which were given the form of a book called 'Mahavibhasha'. This book is considered to be the 'Encyclopaedia of Buddhism'.

Under the patronage of the Kushan emperor, Buddhist scholars like Ashvaghosha, Nagarjuna, Vasumitra etc. composed many important texts related to Buddhism. Kanishka also got Viharas and stupas built in cities like Mathura, Peshawar, Kashmir, Taxila etc. Like Ashoka, Kanishka also sent monks abroad to propagate Buddhism. As a result of his efforts, Buddhism spread to countries like China, Japan, Tibet etc. and Buddhism became the main religion of these countries.

(v) During the Gupta period and Harsha:- Although the emperors of the Gupta dynasty patronized Hinduism, Buddhism remained established as one of the main religions of the empire during the Gupta period. Beautiful sculptures of Mahatma Buddha were made during this period, of which the statues of Buddha sitting in Sarnath and standing in Mathura are particularly noteworthy. The Buddhist monasteries were assisted by the Gupta emperors. There were also Buddhist scholars named Asanga and Vasubandhu during this period, who increased Buddhist literature through their creations. During the reign of Chandragupta Vikramaditya, the famous Chinese traveler Fahien came to India for the purpose of visiting the holy places of Buddhism.

Another Chinese visitor came to India in the first half of the seventh century, Hunsang, who was a great scholar of Buddhism. Under his influence Harsha Vardhana, the famous ruler of Kannauj at that time, became a follower of the Mahayana branch of Buddhism.

(vi) Decline of Buddhism :- After Harsha, the decline of Buddhism started in India during the period of

✓ Origin of Mahayana:-

With the passage of time, a new sect was born in Buddhism, which is called 'Mahayana'. The Mahasanghikas are considered the forerunners of the Mahayanis. Buddhists of these liberal ideas made some changes in the ancient principles of Buddhism according to the needs of the times. The orthodox Buddhists of the old ideas rejected these changes and continued to follow the ancient principles of religion. These Buddhists formed a separate sect called 'Hinayana'. The meaning of 'Mahayana' is 'maha-chakra' and 'minor wheel' of 'Hinayana'. As is evident from these names, the followers of Mahayana considered their sect to be great and the sect of their opponents as small. According to Monier Williams, Mahayana originated in the Indus valley and Hinayana in the Ganges valley. The prominent 25 leaders of this sect were born in southern India, where they received education and then went to northern India to propagate their ideas. The most famous of these was the monk Nagarjuna. It was under the influence of Nagarjuna that Mahayana definitely flourished in northern India during the reign of Kanishka.

The most important principle of Mahayana was to believe in the greatness of Bodhisattvas. Buddhist texts say that Mahatma Buddha had done acts of kindness as a Bodhisattva in many previous births before his last birth. Bodhisattvas used to refer to those venerable Buddhist leaders who had attained fame by self-sacrifice but had not yet attained 'nirvana'. It was believed that a bodhisattva could attain nirvana if he so desired. But he is born again and again out of compassion towards the sad ones and helps them in attaining Nirvana. Mahayana is also called 'Bodhi-Sattvayana' because of Mahayana's unwavering belief in Bodhisattvas.

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