

5th Sept.

Q) Discuss the social and Economic factors for the rise of Buddhism. How far was it influenced by Upanisadic thought?

Ans) Buddhism as a religion emerged from the teachings of Mahatma Buddha who lived during the 6th century BC India.

The period of 6th cent. BC was one of the ~~the~~ transformatory phases, where several changes were happening in the country. It resulted in rise of numerous heterogeneous sects in country, out of which Buddhism emerged as a dominant religion.

SOCIAL FACTORS FOR ITS RISE:

- The society had become stagnant and started to degenerate under the Brahmanical religion of the time. It was the dominant religion of period and was besetted with several evils, which were not accepted by the society, such as:
 - It was dominated by Brahmana Priests, who maintained their superior status by monopolising knowledge and preventing any changes in society.
 - Included numerous complex and lengthy rituals and ceremonies, which needed to be performed in a strict manner, which otherwise could lead to bad results.

- Emphasis on status quo in society by Varna order, was preventing any social mobility and flexibility. The stagnant caste system emerged during the period, which needed legitimacy.

- All these factors, also made religion and worship, an expensive matter and away from the reach of common people.

ECONOMIC FACTORS :

- The sacrifices of Brahmanical religion resulted in killings of drought animals which were used for agriculture.
- New social classes such as Gahapatis (rich peasants) and Sethhis (Merchants) were emerging, who wanted high social status, as per their wealth and position.
- The rising trade and commerce in period demanded common eating houses which was derided under Brahmanical religions. It also needed the practice of Usury, which was condemned.

Thus, the Brahmanical religion was not in accordance with the ~~times~~ needs of times and changes were needed which resulted in rise of Buddhism.

INFLUENCE OF UPANISHADIC THOUGHT:

- Upanishads constituted one of the first Kshatriya challenge to the Brahmanical knowledge. It was carried forward in Buddhism, which also placed Kshatriyas above Brahmanas.

- Upanishads were the earliest reaction or against sacrifices and rituals or ceremonies of Brahmanism, Buddhism also emerged as a challenge to Brahmanism.
- Upanishads provided for 'Jnana Marg' (Knowledge path) for the salvation of an individual. Buddhism also favours Jnana Marg for Nirvana. Its concept of salvation was also influenced by Upanishads.
- Upanishads favoured non-violent methods of worship and Buddha also placed Buddhism above the deliberate killings and violence, with respect to animals.

However, Buddhism also had several unique and noble elements associated with it, such as: It did not believe in the infallibility of Vedas; gave the concept of Soul-lessness with examples of candles; provided a defined and clear passage for attainment of Nirvana by focusing on 4 Noble truths and 8 fold paths.

Thus, several factors of not only 6th cent. B.C. but the earlier Upanishadic thought as well, contributed to the rise of Buddhism, which has made it the world religion of the time.