

Discuss the social and economic factors for the rise of Buddhism. How far was it influenced by Upanishadic thought?

6<sup>th</sup> Century B.C a lot of heterodox sects emerged including Buddhism.  
concluding) due to social and economic factors.

### Social factors:

- Kshatriyas resented the Brahminical dominance in the society. Irrespective of King status to Kshatriyas, Brahmins maintained their dominance in social factors backed by Dharmashastras which gave them primacy in the Chaturvarna system.

- 6<sup>th</sup> Century B.C was called the phase of urbanisation. This was brought about due to surplus in agriculture and trade carried on solely by Vaishyas. This urbanisation uplifted the Vaishyas who thought they were being ignored / looked down by Brahmins.

- This phase saw the formation of state (Mahajanapadas). Due to this access for resources, was restricted only the elite sections (Dvijas). This caused tensions in Brahmanism.

- Concentration of wealth brought about lavish lifestyles and people were vexed with this and wanted to go back to the ascetic life.

(2)

• Usage of Sanskrit in Brahmanism resulted in Complex Dharmashastras which common man could not comprehend. Buddhism with its usage of Pali attracted masses.

• Condition of women were abysmal as ~~they~~ a majority of them were not allowed to access education (Vedas). Same applied to Shudras. Buddhism promoted women and Shudras to join their Sanghas.

• Buddhist Sanghas also engaged in philanthropic works which attracted masses

• Traders etc wanted to rise in varna hierarchies by economic reasons. making donations

• Vedic rituals had become complex and was the sole monopoly of Brahmins who helped to conduct them. They extorted money which was a drain of wealth for the Rajastha.

• ~~The~~ Society being majoritatively agricultural depended on cattle. Animal sacrifices of Brahmanism only added to their woes. Ahimsa of Buddha economic attracted them.

• Buddhism also promoted trading (since they wanted to attract donations) by upholding traders, weavers etc as 'Uccha Kula'. Buddhist Sanghas were opened along trade routes. (Uttarapatha and Dakshinapatha)

(3)

### Influence of Upanishads on Buddhism;

Historians like Oldenberg suggest that Buddhist thoughts are influenced by Upanishad.

### Similarities between Buddhism and Upanishads;

- Theory of Karma, rebirth and liberation.

Karma: Buddha accepts the Karma Concept of Upanishads. He says "Good deeds in this life will not necessarily lead to salvation as the Karma of previous lives cannot be brushed off".

Concept Rebirth (Samsara): In Patichha Samueppada Buddha explains how ignorance (Avidya) is the cause for Dukkha (Sorrow). Unless this <sup>of desire</sup> ignorance is overcome, this cycle of birth and death continues.

Liberation / Nirvana theory of Upanishad is accepted by the Buddha.

- Buddhism disputed Brahmanistic rituals and focused more on ethical behaviours, Yoga and meditation like in Upanishads.

The "middle path" of Buddha promotes ethical behaviours.

- Accepts idea of Atomism.
- Both promote Ahimsa.

### Differences

- Soul / Atman - Buddhism rejects the permanent Soul / Atman of Upanishads.  
→ Buddha says the characteristics of nature

(4)

are anicca (transiency), dukka (sorrow) and anatta (soullessness). He says that nature is constantly transforming / changing and there is nothing there is permanent / non-changing as the Atman.

- God - Upanishads accept existence of a Supreme being. Buddhism can be considered to be an agnostic i.e. he neither rejects or accepts existence of God.

- Caste system and Vedas.

- Though Upanishads condemned Vedic rituals, they never condemned the Caste system and they were considered themselves to be part of Veda.

- But Buddhism outrightly rejected Caste system and never considered Vedas to be infallible.

Thus though Buddhism borrowed some aspects of Upanishadic thoughts, it developed its own unique path in certain other aspects mentioned above.