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## Indian Buddhism Compositions Revealed to the World

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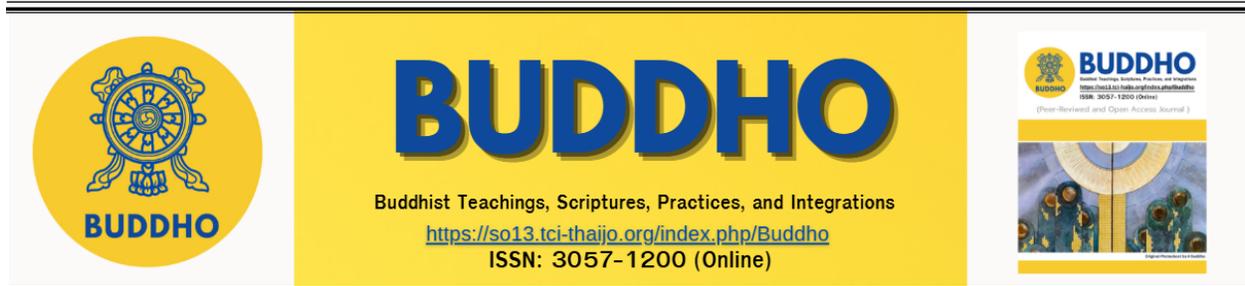
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## Indian Buddhism Compositions Revealed to the World

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### Abstract

Buddhism, originating in the 6th century B.C.E. through the enlightenment of Gautama Buddha, has significantly influenced religious, philosophical, and social traditions across various cultures. This study explores the origins, philosophical foundations, and societal impact of Buddhism, tracing its development from pre-Buddhist Indian culture to the establishment of the Buddhist Sangha. Through an analysis of historical texts and philosophical doctrines, the research highlights Buddhism's divergence from the prevailing Brahmanical traditions, particularly through its rejection of the caste system, the authority of the Vedas, and the concept of an eternal self. Instead, the Buddha introduced the doctrine of Anātman (non-self) and Pratīyasamutpāda (dependent origination), emphasizing impermanence and ethical conduct. The study further examines the growth of the Buddhist monastic community (Sangha) and its role in fostering social unity and ethical governance. The monastic order provided an organized structure for transmitting Buddhist teachings, contributing to moral and intellectual developments within Indian society. Through the missionary efforts of the Buddha's disciples, Buddhism spread across Asia, influencing governance, social welfare, and philosophical discourse. The findings underscore Buddhism's adaptability and its enduring impact on global spiritual traditions. This research contributes to the broader understanding of Buddhism's historical significance and philosophical depth. By analyzing the doctrinal evolution and socio-political implications of Buddhist teachings, it provides valuable insights into how Buddhism has shaped and continues to influence societies worldwide. The study affirms that Buddhism's ethical clarity, emphasis on wisdom, and universal principles remain relevant in contemporary discussions on morality, governance, and social harmony.

**Keywords:** Indian Buddhism; Compositions Revealed to the World

## **Introduction**

The prosperity and widespread acceptance of Buddhism as a spiritual and philosophical system can be attributed to both its profound teachings and the socio-historical contexts that facilitated its expansion (Gethin, 1998). For any religious tradition to gain recognition and acceptance, it must offer meaningful and relevant content that resonates with the general public. Buddhism, with its comprehensive doctrines on human suffering, ethical conduct, and mental cultivation, presents a holistic system that addresses both individual and societal well-being (Harvey, 2013).

The success of Buddhism is not merely the result of its intrinsic philosophical depth but also the product of favorable historical circumstances that allowed its rapid growth. In India, where Buddhism originated, the socio-political landscape provided fertile ground for the emergence and dissemination of the teachings (Hirakawa, 1993). The interaction between Buddhist philosophy and the prevailing religious and intellectual traditions played a crucial role in shaping its development and appeal (Williams, 2009). This study provides an overview of the historical background of Buddhism in India, examining the key compositions and doctrinal developments that contributed to its influence. By exploring the evolution of Buddhist thought and literature, the study aims to reveal how Indian Buddhist compositions shaped the global perception of Buddhism (Skilton, 2004). The research also highlights the dynamic factors—such as cultural exchange, patronage, and adaptation—that contributed to the flourishing of Buddhism beyond its Indian origins (Strong, 2015).

The important ground for promoting Buddhist prosperity to achieve success that is acceptability of the general public. The content which is a characteristic of that religion, if this is the criterion of the success of the religion must admit that Buddhism is a complete religion with content or such qualifications completely finishes another thing, times and situations are important factors that helps new religious movements such as Buddhism to flourish quickly or not? The study is an overview of the background of Buddhism from the history found in India.

## **Buddhism: Origins, Philosophical Foundations, and Social Influence**

Buddhism is a religion founded in the 6th century B.C.E. by Gautama Buddha and later spread across the world through the efforts of his disciples. Initially emerging in the Indian subcontinent, Buddhism gradually expanded throughout Asia, influencing religious and philosophical traditions in various cultures (Gethin, 1998). The teachings of the Buddha, collectively known as the Dhamma (Sanskrit: Dharma), serve as spiritual guidance for followers seeking liberation from suffering.

The story of Gautama Buddha's life is preserved in various historical and literary sources. One of the earliest and most significant biographical works is the *Buddhacarita*, composed by the Indian poet Ashvaghosa between the 1st and 2nd centuries C.E. This text provides a poetic account of the Buddha's acts and enlightenment (Olson, 2005). Born as Siddhartha Gautama, he attained enlightenment under the Bodhi tree in Bodh Gaya and subsequently delivered his first sermon at Sarnath, marking the beginning of his spiritual mission (Harvey, 2013).

During this period, Hindu ascetics, particularly those influenced by the Upanishadic tradition, also sought spiritual liberation by renouncing worldly life. The Upanishads, composed between the 8th and 4th centuries B.C.E., emphasized concepts such as Brahman (the ultimate reality) and Atman (the self), which were central to Vedic thought (Olivelle, 1996). However, Buddha's teachings diverged significantly from this theological framework. Instead of embracing the Upanishadic belief in a permanent self, he introduced the doctrine of Anātman (non-self), rejecting the idea of an eternal soul and emphasizing the impermanence of all phenomena (Williams, 2000).

In the Indian intellectual landscape, Buddhism was regarded as a philosophical religion that challenged Brahmanical orthodoxy. While the Upanishadic sages sought liberation through metaphysical speculation and rituals, Buddha's path was rooted in ethical conduct, wisdom, and meditative practice (Gombrich, 1988). Many scholars view him as a radical reformer who emphasized personal experience over dogmatic tradition, advocating a path of moral discipline that could lead to Nirvana—the cessation of suffering (Lopez, 2001). Although the Buddha did not engage in political activism in the modern sense, his teachings had profound social and economic implications. His establishment of the Sangha, a monastic order of Bhikkhus (monks) and Bhikkhunis (nuns), provided an organized structure that influenced governance and social welfare (Keown, 2013). While Buddha's focus remained on individual enlightenment, his teachings indirectly addressed social inequalities by advocating principles of compassion, non-violence, and ethical responsibility. His rejection of the caste system and his acceptance of people from diverse backgrounds into the monastic community further reinforced his progressive stance on social issues (Strong, 2007). The doctrine of Pratīyasamutpāda (dependent origination), another central tenet of Buddhism, marked a significant departure from Brahmanical theology. Unlike the Upanishadic notion of an eternal cosmic self, Buddha proposed that all phenomena arise due to interdependent causes and conditions, negating the existence of a permanent, unchanging self (Collins, 1998). Despite his rejection of Upanishadic metaphysics, his teachings on renunciation, moral discipline, and the transient nature of worldly existence mirrored some aspects of earlier Indian traditions (Bronkhorst, 2009).

To fully understand the historical and philosophical development of Buddhism, a comprehensive study of the Tripitaka (Pali Canon) is essential. The texts provide insight into the social, political, and economic conditions during Buddha's time, as well as the evolution of Buddhist thought in response to different cultural and intellectual influences (Lamotte, 1988). Ultimately, Buddhism's enduring appeal lies in its adaptability, ethical clarity, and emphasis on wisdom, making it a transformative force in both ancient and modern societies.

### **Indian Culture Prior to Buddhism**

The history of Indian culture before the emergence of Buddhism reflects a civilization deeply engaged in material advancements, spiritual explorations, and the pursuit of truth. The remains of the Mohenjodaro and Harappa civilizations, which flourished around 2500 B.C.E., provide evidence of a society primarily focused on trade, architecture, and artistic expression (Thapar, 2002). The artifacts, including tools, toys, and intricate city planning, suggest that the

people of this era relished material satisfaction rather than engaging in metaphysical speculations. However, the discovery of seals depicting proto-Shiva-like figures indicates that religious thought, particularly related to asceticism and meditation, had already begun to take shape (Singh, 2009).

By the 6th and 5th centuries B.C.E., Indian society had become a hub for religious and philosophical discourse, mirroring similar intellectual awakenings in other parts of the world. In China, figures such as Lao-Tzu and Confucius were laying the foundations for Taoism and Confucianism, while Zoroaster's teachings in Persia and the philosophies of Plato in Greece were shaping their respective civilizations (Radhakrishnan & Moore, 1957). In India, this period was marked by a transition from ritualistic Vedic traditions to more introspective and philosophical inquiries, as seen in the Upanishads and the teachings of Jainism (Bronkhorst, 2007). The religious environment of pre-Buddhist India was characterized by a multiplicity of ideas and debates among various intellectuals. The Upanishadic thinkers questioned the nature of existence and the self, emphasizing concepts such as Brahman (the ultimate reality) and Atman (the soul). Meanwhile, Jainism, founded by Mahavira (599-527 B.C.E.), promoted asceticism and non-violence (Dundas, 2002). These discussions set the stage for the emergence of Buddhism, which offered a radical critique of existing religious practices. Buddha's teachings challenged several aspects of Brahmanical tradition. He rejected the authority of the Vedas, the rigid caste system, and sacrificial rituals that involved animal killing (Gombrich, 1988). Instead, he emphasized personal experience and ethical conduct over scriptural knowledge and priestly mediation. His doctrine of Pratītyasamutpāda (dependent origination) introduced a dynamic perspective on existence, opposing the Brahmanical notion of an eternal, unchanging self (Williams, 2000). This resonated with many intellectuals of the time, including prominent disciples such as Sāriputta, Moggallana, and Mahākassapa, who helped in spreading the new faith (Strong, 2007).

The Buddha's emphasis on self-reliance and moral responsibility found appeal among those dissatisfied with the dominant religious institutions. His famous teaching, Attāhi attāno nātho ("One is one's own refuge"), emphasized that enlightenment was a personal endeavor, independent of divine intervention (Harvey, 2013). This teaching significantly influenced Indian intellectual and religious landscapes, leading to the establishment of monastic communities and the gradual decline of Brahmanical dominance in certain regions. The spread of Buddhism was facilitated by the charisma and wisdom of its early disciples. Figures like Sāriputta, known for his analytical prowess, and Moggallana, famous for his supernatural abilities, played key roles in propagating the Buddha's teachings (Keown, 2013). Additionally, lay followers such as King Bimbisara, Anāthapiṇḍika, and Visakha provided material support for the Buddhist monastic community, leading to the establishment of monastic centers that served as hubs of learning and spiritual practice (Gethin, 1998). Buddhism's rise in India was not merely a religious phenomenon but also a social and intellectual movement that reshaped the cultural landscape. Its critique of Brahmanical orthodoxy, emphasis on ethical living, and commitment to rational inquiry attracted scholars, rulers, and commoners alike. The ruins of ancient monastic complexes and the continued influence of Buddhist philosophy in Indian thought testify to the enduring impact of the Buddha's teachings on the subcontinent (Lopez, 2001).

## **Growth of the Buddhist Sangha in India**

A major consequence of the rise of Buddhism was the promotion of peace and unity within society. During the time of Gautama Buddha, political groups and trade guilds were known as "Saṅgha," a term that was later applied to Buddhist monastic orders (Gombrich, 1988). As a result, a group of Buddhist monks became collectively referred to as the "Saṅgha." The term "gaṇa," meaning group, was sometimes used to refer to religious orders, with Mahayana traditions referring to their religious orders as "Bodhisattva gaṇa" (Harvey, 2013).

The first Buddhist ascetic orders were established sometime after Gautama Buddha attained enlightenment. Following his realization, the Buddha decided to preach to five ascetics who he believed had sufficient intelligence to understand the noble truths. His first sermon, delivered at Deer Park in Benares—now known as Sarnath—marked the "Turning of the Wheel of Teaching" (Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta) (Warder, 2000). In this sermon, the Buddha instructed his followers to avoid the two extremes of asceticism and luxurious living, instead advocating for the Middle Way (Majjhimā Paṭipadā) and expounding the Four Noble Truths: (1) the truth of suffering, (2) the cause of suffering, (3) the cessation of suffering, and (4) the path leading to the cessation of suffering (Bhikkhu Bodhi, 2000). Ājñātakauṇḍinya, the eldest of the five monks, attained enlightenment through these teachings, and later, the other four monks followed suit, thus forming the first Buddhist Sangha (Gethin, 1998). The Sangha continued to grow with the conversion of Yaśas, the son of a wealthy elder of Benares, and his fifty-four friends, who later attained the state of Arahat (Harvey, 2013). With a mission to spread his teachings, the Buddha instructed his disciples to preach the Dharma to all beings, saying: "Go out and preach, monks, out of compassion for sentient beings and for the welfare of the world. No two of you should go to the same place. Preach the Dharma with reason and eloquence so that it will be beneficial at the beginning, middle, and end" (Vinaya Pitaka, I:20).

The spread of Buddhism gained momentum as the Buddha traveled across Magadha, converting significant figures such as Uruvelā-Kassapa and his brothers. Their disciples also embraced Buddhism, attaining enlightenment upon hearing the Buddha's teachings. Two prominent disciples, Mahā Moggallāna and Śāriputta, were formerly followers of the skeptic Sañjayin but converted upon hearing the teachings from Assaji, one of the first five monks ordained by the Buddha (Gombrich, 1988). Upon joining the Sangha, Śāriputta and Mahā Moggallāna became leading disciples instrumental in the dissemination of Buddhism. The influence of Buddhism extended beyond monastic circles to lay supporters such as Viśākhā of Sāvattihī, King Pasenadi of Kosala, and the wealthy Sudatta, also known as Anāthapiṇḍika, who was renowned for his charitable contributions to orphans and monks (Harvey, 2013). Anāthapiṇḍika first encountered the Buddha at Śitavana and subsequently became his disciple, providing residences for Buddhist monks in Sāvattihī, which later became the renowned Jetavana Monastery (Warder, 2000).

Years after his enlightenment, the Buddha returned to Kapilavastu, where he ordained his son Rāhula as the first Śrāmaṇera, or novice monk. Many young men, including his cousins Devadatta and Ānanda, his half-brother Nanda, and a barber named Upāli, also joined the monastic order. Upāli later became an expert in Vinaya (monastic discipline), playing a crucial

role in the early Buddhist Sangha (Gethin, 1998). Over the forty-five years following his enlightenment, the Buddha journeyed extensively across Magadha and Kauśāla, spreading his teachings. His travels took him through major cities, including Rājagaha, Nālandā, Pāṭaliputra, Vaiśālī, Kuśinagara, Kapilavastu, Śrāvastī, and Benares, fostering the establishment of numerous monasteries (Bhikkhu Bodhi, 2000). Throughout his lifetime, the Sangha expanded to include both monks (Bhikkhu), nuns (Bhikkhunī), and lay followers (Upāsaka and Upāsikā), demonstrating its inclusive nature and enduring influence. Buddhism's monastic order played a pivotal role in shaping a more unified and peaceful society. The Sangha provided a structured means of preserving and transmitting the Buddha's teachings, ensuring their continuity through oral recitation and monastic discipline. The teachings of the Buddha continue to serve as a guiding force for ethical living, promoting peace and harmony within human societies.

## **Conclusion**

Buddhism, as one of the most influential philosophical and religious traditions, has its origins in the teachings of Gautama Buddha and has left a profound impact on societies, cultures, and intellectual traditions worldwide. Emerging from the Indian subcontinent in the 6th century B.C.E., Buddhism provided a transformative alternative to the prevailing Brahmanical orthodoxy, emphasizing ethical conduct, wisdom, and meditative practice over ritualistic traditions. Its fundamental doctrines, including the Four Noble Truths and the principle of Anātman (non-self), distinguished it from other philosophical schools of the time and laid the foundation for a new spiritual and moral framework. Before the advent of Buddhism, Indian culture was deeply influenced by Vedic traditions and the Upanishadic quest for ultimate reality. The period was marked by an intellectual and spiritual awakening that saw the rise of diverse religious movements, including Jainism and various ascetic traditions. Buddhism emerged within this dynamic context, offering a rational and experience-based path to enlightenment, free from the rigid caste structures and sacrificial practices of the Brahmanical system. This shift resonated with many intellectuals and laypeople, leading to the rapid growth of the Buddhist community. A key factor in the success and longevity of Buddhism was the establishment of the Sangha, a monastic order that ensured the preservation and propagation of the Buddha's teachings. The Sangha played a crucial role in institutionalizing Buddhist practices and fostering a sense of unity and discipline among followers. With the patronage of influential leaders and the dedication of key disciples, Buddhism expanded beyond its Indian origins, spreading throughout Asia and influencing various cultural and philosophical traditions. The adaptability of Buddhist teachings has allowed them to remain relevant across different historical periods and cultural contexts. Its emphasis on ethical responsibility, compassion, and self-awareness continues to inspire individuals and societies worldwide. The foundational principles of Buddhism not only offer a path to personal enlightenment but also contribute to social cohesion and moral development. Through its integration into diverse cultural landscapes, Buddhism has demonstrated its enduring significance as both a spiritual and intellectual tradition.

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**Recommendations**

The historical and philosophical development of Buddhism highlights its role as a transformative force in human civilization. From its inception in ancient India to its global influence today, Buddhism has shaped ethical thought, social structures, and philosophical discourse. Its teachings continue to provide guidance for those seeking wisdom, inner peace, and a deeper understanding of existence. The impact of Buddhism, both historically and in contemporary societies, underscores its relevance as a system of thought that transcends cultural and temporal boundaries.

**Body of Knowledge**

Buddhism, as one of the most influential philosophical and religious traditions, has its origins in the teachings of Gautama Buddha and has left a profound impact on societies, cultures, and intellectual traditions worldwide. Emerging from the Indian subcontinent in the 6th century B.C.E., Buddhism provided a transformative alternative to the prevailing Brahmanical orthodoxy, emphasizing ethical conduct, wisdom, and meditative practice over ritualistic traditions. Its fundamental doctrines, including the Four Noble Truths and the principle of Anātman (non-self), distinguished it from other philosophical schools of the time and laid the foundation for a new spiritual and moral framework.

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