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The Economic Impact of Buddhism in the Ganga Valley Region from 500 BC. to 700 AD.

ORIGINAL ARTICLE



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Abstract

Many evils entered the ancient Indian Vedic religion from the Rig Vedic period to the Mahajanapada period, which had a negative impact on society, politics, religion and especially the economy. For example: Due to the increasing importance of Yagya in a large scale, economic pressure had increase on the common man, taxes and other methods were given religious basis to extract money from the common man and animal sacrifice was encouraged, which put a negative pressure on the agricultural economy. In such a situation, the common people needed a religion that was simple to follow, easy to follow and affordable and cheaper than other religions. The rise of Buddhism provided this option to the common people. Buddhism developed and spread throughout the Ganga valley. Its principles, ideas and religious activities created an economic

environment in the Ganga valley which encouraged economic activities. Such as: - opposition to animal sacrifice and yajna, lending money on interest and supporting business activities and the suitability of the urban environment. This article describes the economic impact of Buddhist activities on the Ganga Valley. Buddhism had a positive impact on the economic policies of kings in different periods and on the economic environment of the Ganga Valley region such as agriculture, markets, trade, commerce, crafts and industry.

Key Words

River Ganga Valley, Economics, Buddhism, Vedic, Mahajanpada, Mouryan.

The Origin of Lord Buddha

According to Pali canon, the Buddha is represented as a man, but an extraordinary one, whose body bore the 32 signs of a mahapurusha. He is the Tathagata, one who has come thus (tatha) and gone (gata) thus, and has liberated himself from the cycle of rebirth. The Buddha was born as Siddhartha, son of Suddhodana, chief of the Sakya clan, who ruled from Kapilavastu. His mother Maya gave birth to him in a grove at Lumbini. Suddhodana bringing Siddhartha up in a highly artificial atmosphere, surrounded by luxury and pleasant things because didn't wanted Siddhartha to turn is back on the world and took great pains. Siddhartha married young women named Yashodhara and they had a son named Rahul.

When he was at 29-year-old, Siddhartha saw four things that completely shattered his composure- an old man, an ill man, a corpse, and a renouncing. Siddhartha left his home and family and wandered around for

six years, seeking the truth. He observed that he must nourish his body and try to attain peace of mind. A young woman named Sujata offered him a bowl of milk-rice. Nourished with food, he once again sat under the papal tree in Niranjana River in Gaya, resolving not to get up before he had realized enlightenment. He rises to progressively higher and higher states of knowledge through meditation. Siddhartha ultimately attained enlightenment and famous as new name the Buddha - the enlightened one.

The Buddha gave his first sermon on deliverance from suffering to his five prior associates in Banaras. This event famous for dhamma chakka-parivattana. His five disciples soon themselves realized the truth and became arhats. The Buddha wandered about teaching his doctrine for over four decades. He established an order of monks and nuns known as the sangha. He died at the age of 80 at Kusinagar.

The Buddha's Teachings

The core of his teaching is express in **The Four Noble Truths**: There is suffering (dukkha), it has a cause (samudaya), it can be removed (nirodha), and the way to achieve this is following the Eight-fold path. This path consists of number of interconnected activities related to knowledge, conduct and meditative practices. It consists of right view, intention, speech, action, livelihood, effort, mindfulness, and concentration. Meditation is very important in Buddhism and is the key to achieving mental calm and insight. The path taught by the Buddha was known as the middle path - one between extreme indulgence and extreme asceticism. The Buddha taught that everything is suffering. The reason for suffering includes human propensities such as desire, attachment, greed, pride, aversion, and ignorance. Desire is central to the cause and removal of suffering. All this connected with another aspect of existence emphasized in the Buddha's teaching- impermanence (aniccha). Impermanency has many phases. as regards a personal and social life, there is neither living or non-living being nor authority and power in the universe that can avert became old, ill and death.

Another important aspect of the Buddha's teaching was patichcha-samuppada- the law of dependent origination. This was both an explanation of all phenomena as well as an explanation of dukkha. The fundamentals of this law were represented as a wheel be composed of 12 nidanas, each of these follows to previous and leading to the next: ignorance (avijja), formations (sankhara), consciousness (vinnana), mind and body (nama-rupa), the six senses (salayatana), sense contact (phassa), feeling (vedana), craving (tanha), attachment (upadana), becoming (bhava), birth (jati), and old age and death (jara-marana). The ultimate goal of the Buddha's teaching was the attainment of nibbana. The Buddha's teaching accepts the idea of transmigration (samsara) but reject the idea of atman. The connection between different lives is established by karma. The Buddhist priority on non-violence concerned a criticism of Brahmanical animal sacrifices. Monks and nuns were not to kill animals.

Buddhism and Contemporary Economy

Buddhism related to the immediate economy in various ways, such as maritime trade was considered condemnable in Vedic religious texts, while Buddhist literature shows a favourable attitude towards maritime trade. The non-violence principle of Buddhism advocated the end of war. This brought great benefits to the traders and the security of their property. Many instructions were given to the traders regarding the price of goods and the efficiency of buying and selling, which proved helpful in their prosperity. In Buddhism, food ethics and attitudes towards courtesans were compatible with the activities of civic life, which helped in the process of urbanization. Buddhism propounded the ideal of the Chakravarty Dhamma King who expanded the empire, which led to progress in trade. Buddhism provided ideological and religious support to the society developing on new production techniques. Due to the non-violent and peaceful policy of Buddhism, the business class adopted this religion and patronized it. The principles of Buddhism were compatible with the new economic system and urban life developing on the surplus of produce. Due to the new agricultural system, circulation of coins and progress in trade, both the rulers and the business classes were becoming richer.

Mahajanpad Period

Due to the development of Buddhism, a new agricultural economy developed in the Ganga valley region. The use of oxen was necessary in an agricultural economy based on the iron plow, so Buddhism played a role in stopping animal slaughter to run the new economy. Due to this, agricultural economy developed in the Ganga Ghat region during the Mahajanapada period. Lord Buddha preached non-violence which ended the war between Mahajanapada chieftains and kings in the Ganga valley region and as a result trade and commerce developed. In the Brahmin religion, doing business by taking money on interest was considered condemnable, but in Buddhism it was allowed. This encouraged exchange of money, resulting in increased commerce in the Ganga valley region. Mahatma Buddha roamed around and gave his sermons in different states of Mahajanapada. Due to this, mutual contact between Mahajanapadas increased and helped in integration of the economy.

Mauryan Period

During the rise of Magadha and the early Maurya period, wars and foreign invasions had a negative impact on the economy and trade commerce of the Ganga valley region, but the religious policy implemented by Ashoka after the Kalinga war during his reign established peace in the entire empire. As a result, due to the influence of Dhamma policy, the Ganga valley economy expanded. After the Kalinga victory, the religious policy of non-violence was implemented in this region because Kalinga was an important place for trade with South India and sea port. Therefore, due to the implementation of Dhamma policy, the trade of the Ganga valley region with South India and South East Asia increased. Ashoka sent Dhamma officials to different regions of the empire and different countries to implement the Dhamma policy and implemented his orders through edicts. Since these orders were issued from the capital Pataliputra, it resulted in remote areas being connected to the Ganga valley and trade routes had developed.

Post Mauryan Period

In the post-Maurya period, close relations were established with Western and Central Asia by the Indo-Greek, Kushan and Shaka conquerors of North-Western India. Due to this, Buddhism became popular in West Asia and South East Asia. Dhamma pilgrims from different parts came to India to study the teachings of Buddhism and took the information about the richness of the Ganga Valley to their region. As a result, a trade route from South East Asia to West Asia via the Ganga Valley region developed, which was called the Silk Road. It was therefore said that Buddhism performs a significant role in the development of the Silk Road. Buddhism also received large amounts of support in the post-Maurya period. Due to which Buddhist centres became prosperous. Buddhism was supported by various business classes, thus Buddhism provided religious support to the business class. Created a positive environment related to economy and trade.

Gupta Period

Buddhism did not get much support throughout the Gupta era but it did not disappear completely in the Ganga valley. During this period, Nalanda University was established, which developed as an important educational institution. Influenced by this, many pilgrims and traders came to the Ganga valley region. The Chinese Buddhist traveller Fa-Hien mentioned merchant activities around the Buddhist stupa.

Post Gupta Period

In the post-Gupta period, Harshvardhan and the rulers of Pala dynasty supported Buddhism, due to which Buddhism and various places related to it prospered during this period. During this period, various religious places, monasteries, stupas and universities related to Buddha were established in different areas of Bengal, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, due to which the Ganga valley area became the centre of education, business and commercial activities. During this period, maritime trade contacts of the Ganga valley region with South East Asia increased. Ganga valley is the centre of these activities. Chinese traveller Hien Tsang travelled in India during the period of Harshvardhan. Buddhism and its related economic activities have been mentioned.

Conclusion

In conclusion we can say that various contribution of Buddhism in the Ganga valley region such as: - in the economy (agriculture and industry), in interstate and international trade and commerce, in the development of the Silk Road, in the integration of the economy of Ganga valley. The principles of Buddhism impact on the economic policies of different kings. The expansion of the economy of the Ganges valley was related to Buddhism. The non-violence policy of Buddhism created a suitable environment for the growth of agriculture and industry. Buddha's philosophy promoted international trade and commerce in the Ganges valley region. The regional economy of the Ganga valley expanded due to foreign travelers came to Buddhism religious place in Ganga valley for the purpose of religious journeys and seeking education related to Buddhism. Many religious pilgrims from abroad came to the Ganga valley region to get information about Buddhism, due to which the trade route through the Ganga valley to the remote areas developed and the connectivity of the Ganga valley to the remote areas kept increasing.

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