

7th Social Science Lesson 18 Notes in English

18] Jainism, Buddhism And Ajivika Philosophy In Tamil Nadu

Introduction:

During the 6th century B.C. (BCE), according to the Bigga Nitaya (an ancient Buddhist tract), as many as 62 different philosophical and religious schools flourished in India. However, among these numerous sects, only the Ajivikas survived till the late medieval times. But Jainism and Buddhism continued to flourish until the modern times. Buddha and Mahavira, the founders of these two faiths, based their ethical teachings against the sacrificial cult of the Vedic religion. Their teachings were preserved and passed on through monks, who were drawn from various social groups.

Sources and Literature: Jainism:

Mahavira's preaching was orally transmitted by his disciples over the course of about one thousand years. In the early period of Jainism, monks strictly followed the five great vows of Jainism. Even religious scriptures were considered possessions and therefore knowledge of the religion was never documented. Two hundred years after the attainment of nirvana (death) of Mahavira, Jain scholars attempted to codify the canon by convening an assembly at Pataliputra. It was the first Jain council to debate the issue, but it ended as a failure because the council could not arrive at a unanimous decision in defining the canon. A second council held at Vallabhi, in the 5th century A.D., was, however, successful in resolving the differences. This enabled the scholars of the time to explain the principles of Jainism with certainty. Also, over time, many learned monks, older in age and rich in wisdom, had compiled commentaries on various topics pertaining to the Jain religion. Around 500 A.D. (CE) the Jain acharyas (teachers) realised that it was extremely difficult to keep memorising the entire Jain literature compiled by the many scholars of the past and present. In fact, significant knowledge was already lost and the rest was tampered with modifications. Hence, they decided to document the Jain literature as known to them.

A major split occurred in Jainism (1st century B.C.), giving rise to two major sects, namely Digambaras and Svetambaras. Both the Digambaras and the Svetambaras generally acknowledge the Agama Sutras to be their early literature, while they do differ with regard to their content and interpretation.

Jain Literature:

Jain literature is generally classified into two major categories.

1. Agama Sutras:

Agama Sutras consists of many sacred books of the Jain religion. They have been written in the Ardha-magadhi Prakrit language. Containing the direct preaching of Mahavira, consisting of 12

texts, they were originally compiled by immediate disciples of Mahavira. The 12th Agama Sutra is said to have been lost.

2. Non-Agama Literature:

Non-Agama literature includes commentary and explanation of Agama Sutras, and independent works, compiled by ascetics and scholars. They are written in many languages such as Prakrit, Sanskrit, old Marathi, Rajasthani, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Tamil, German and English. Recognition was given to 84 books, and among them, there are 41 sutras, 12 commentaries and one Maha Bhasya or great commentary. The 41 sutras include 11 Angas (scriptures followed by Svetambaras), 12 Upangas (instructions manuals), five Chedas (rules of conduct for the monks), five Mulas (basic doctrine of Jainism) and eight miscellaneous works, such as Kalpasutra of Bhadrabahu. It is believed that the Panchatantra has a great amount of Jain influence.

In addition to these, we have some Jain texts composed in Indian vernacular languages such as Hindi, Tamil and Kannada. Jivaka Chintamani, a Tamil epic poem, is a good example, composed in the tradition of Sangam literature by a Jain saint named Tiruthakkathevar. It narrates the life of a pious king who rose to prominence by his own merit only to become an ascetic in the end. Another scholarly work in Tamil, Naladiyar, is also attributed to a Jain monk. Thirukkural was composed by Tiruvalluvar, believed to be a Jain scholar.

Jains in Tamil Nadu:

There is a clear evidence of the movements of the Jains from Karnataka to the Kongu region (Salem, Erode and Coimbatore areas), to the Kaveri Delta (Tiruchirapalli) southwards into Pudukkottai region (Sittannavasal) and finally into the Pandya kingdom (Madurai, Ramanathapuram and Tirunelveli districts). Tamils broadly come under Digambara sect. It is believed that the Kalabhras were the patrons of Jainism.

The Sittannavasal Cave Temple:

Sittannavasal cave in Pudukkottai district is located on a prominent rock that stands 70 m above the ground. It has a natural cavern, known as Eladipattam, at one end, and a rock-cut cave temple at the other. Behind the fenced cavern, there are 17 rock beds marked on the floor. The stone berths aligned in rows are believed to have served as a Jain shelter. The largest of these ascetic beds contains a Tamil-Brahmi inscription that dates to the 2nd century B.C. There are more inscriptions in Tamil from the 8th century A.D., bearing the names of monks. It is believed that they should have spent their lives in isolation here.



Sittanavasal cave

The Sittanavasal cave temple, named Arivar Koil, lies on the west off the hillock. The facade of the temple is simple, with four rock-cut columns. Constructed in the early Pandya period, in the 7th century A.D. , it has a hall in the front called the Ardha-mandapam and a smaller cell at the rear, which is the garbha graha (sanctum sanctorum).



The murals in the temple resemble the frescoes of the famous Ajanta caves. The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) took over the caves only in 1958. Thereafter it took two decades to cover the cave and regulate the entry of visitors. There are the bas-relief figures of Tirthankaras on the left wall of the hall and acharyas on the right before one enters the inner chamber, the sanctum sanctorum.

Jains in Kanchipuram (Tiruparuttikunram):

Jainism flourished during the Pallava reign. In his writings, Chinese traveller Hiuen Tsang has mentioned about the presence of a large number of Buddhists and Jains during his visit to the Pallava country in 7th century A.D. Most of the Pallava rulers were Jains. Mahendravarman was a Jain initially. The two Jain temples in Kanchipuram are Trilokyanatha Jinaswamy Temple at Tiruparuttikunram, on the banks of the river Palar, and the Chandra Prabha temple dedicated to the Tirtankara named Chandraprabha. The architecture of these temples is in Pallava style, but it has deteriorated in due course of time. During the Vijayanagar rule (1387), Irugappa, a disciple of Jaina-muni Pushpasena and a minister of Vijayanagar King Harihara II (1377-1404), expanded the Trilokyanatha Temple by adding the Sangeetha mandapa. The grand murals were added only at this time.



Jain Temple, Tiruparuttikunram

Mural paintings in the temples show scenes from the lives of Tirtankaras. Unfortunately the paintings of the Trilokyanatha temple at Tiruparuttikunram have been ruined by overpainting done during renovation. There is rich inscriptional evidence inside the second shrine, the Trikuda Basti, containing information on the development of the temple, and the contributions of various donors over the centuries.



Paintings on the walls of the Trilokyanatha Temple

In the Kanchipuram district, apart from Tiruparuttikunram, Jain vestiges have been found over the years in many villages across the state.

Kazhugumalai Jain Rock-Cut Temple:

The 8th century Kazhugumalai temple in Kovilpatti taluk in Thoothukudi district marks the revival of Jainism in Tamil Nadu. This cave temple was built by King Parantaka Nedunjadaiyan of the Pandyan kingdom. Polished rock-cut cave beds, popularly known as Panchavar Padukkai at Kazhugumalai cavern host the figures of not only the Tirtankaras but also the figures of yakshas and yakshis (Male and Female attendants respectively).



Sculptures in Kazhugumalai Cave Temple

Jain Temples in other parts of Tamil Nadu:**Vellore:**

Fourteen Jain monk beds, dating back to the 5th century A.D., have been excavated inside three caverns on top of a hill in Vellore district. The beds are found at the Bhairavamalai in Latheri, Katpadi taluk, Vellore district. Of the three caverns, two of them house beds. One houses four rock beds while the other houses one bed. Unlike many rock beds found elsewhere, these ones have no head-rests.

Tirumalai:

Tirumalai is a Jain temple in a cave complex located near Arni town in Tiruvannamalai district in Tamil Nadu. The complex, dated to the 12th century A.D., includes three Jain caves, two

Jain temples and a 16-metre-high sculpture of Neminatha, the 22nd Tirthankara. This image of Neminatha is considered to be the tallest Jain image in Tamil Nadu.

Madurai:

There are 26 caves, 200 stone beds, 60 inscriptions and over 100 sculptures in and around Madurai. The Kizha Kuyil Kudi is a striking example. This hillock is 12 kilometres west of Madurai, on the Madurai–Theni Highway. The sculptures are assigned to the period of Parantaka Veera Narayana Pandyan who ruled from A.D. 860 to 900. There are eight sculptures. The images of Rishab Nath or Adinath, Mahavira, Parshvanath and Bahubali are found here.



Rock – cut Jain Temple, Kizha Kuyil Kudi

Contribution to Education:

Jaina monasteries and temples also served as seats of learning. Education was imparted in these institutions to the people irrespective of caste and creed. The Jainas propagated their doctrines and proved to be a potential media of mass education. The Bhairavamalai we have mentioned earlier is situated near a small village called Kukkarapalli. 'Palli' is an educational centre of Jains and villages bearing the suffix of Palli are common in many places in Tamil Nadu.

The educational institutions had libraries attached to them. Several books were written by the preachers of Jainism, highlighting the important aspects of Jainism. The permission for women to enter into the order provided an impetus to the spread of education among women.

2. Buddhism:

Buddha's original name, Siddhartha Sakyamuni Gautama, if translated into English, would mean Gautama who belongs to the Sakya tribe and who has reached the goal of perfection. Gautama Buddha was a contemporary of Mahavira. His father ruled the tribe of Sakya in a region near the present-day Nepal. Gautama found that he had nothing to learn from the teachers of the old religions. The religions proclaimed that the only way to salvation was through living the life of an ascetic. But despite practicing asceticism, Gautama could not arrive anywhere near the truth. And one night, as he sat under a bodhi-tree struggling with his doubt and his loneliness, a great peace descended on him. He was no longer Gautama, the sceptic, but became Buddha, the Enlightened. At last, he had succeeded in understanding the great mystery of human suffering, its causes and

its cure. Asserting that both the king (passion for pleasures) and the hermit (self-mortifications) were wrong, he discovered the middle path. The middle path is based on 'an eight-fold path' of Right understanding, Right thought, Right speech, Right action, Right livelihood, Right effort, Right mindfulness, Right concentration.

Buddha taught not the glory of God but the power of love. He held the view that all men are born to an 'equality of rights'. He undertook long journeys and carried his message far and wide. Buddha preached his teachings in Prakrit. His four noble truths are as follows:

1. Life includes pain, getting old, disease, and ultimately death.
2. Suffering is caused by craving and aversion.
3. Suffering can be overcome and happiness attained.
4. True happiness and contentment are possible, if one pursues the eight-fold path.

Buddhist Literature:

Buddha's teachings for a long time were transmitted through the memory of teachers and disciples. They were reduced to writing by 80 B.C. and were written in the Pali language. The Pali canon Tripitaka has three divisions, also known as the Threefold Basket. They include Vinaya Pitaka, Sutta Pitaka and Abhidhamma Pitaka.

Vinaya Pitaka contains the rules of the order of Buddhist monks, which must be observed for achieving purity of conduct.

Sutta Pitaka lays down the principles of religion by citing discourses as evidence.

Abhidhamma Pitaka is the latest of the Tripitaka. It deals with ethics, philosophy and metaphysics.

Other prominent canonical literary works in Buddhism include:

Jatakas – various stories of the lives of the Buddha found in Buddhist literature.

Buddhavamsa – A legend in verse, containing a narration of the life and activities of the 24 Buddhas who are believed to have preceded Gautama. Apart from the above canonical literature, there is a long series of noncanonical literature in Pali. They include:

- Milindapanha – which means 'questions of Milinda'. It contains a dialogue between Milinda, the Graeco-Bactrian king, and the monk Nagasena over some problems that faced Buddhism. It was originally written in Sanskrit.
- The two famous Ceylonese chronicles are Mahavamsa and Dipavamsa. The former deals with the royal dynasties of the Indian subcontinent including Sri Lanka, while the latter deals with the arrival of the Buddha's teachings and preachers in Sri Lanka.
- Buddhagosha's Visuddhimagga is a later work. He is the first Buddhist commentator.

- Sanskrit literature became prominent in Buddhism with the rise of Mahayana Buddhism. However, some of the Sanskrit works were produced by the Hinayana school as well. Buddhacharita, written by Asvaghosa, is an epic style Sanskrit work. It tells the life history of Gautama Buddha.

Buddhism in Tamizhakam:

Buddhism is believed to have spread to the Tamil country by the Ceylonese missionaries. The evidence in support of this is some monuments of the Pandya country, which are assigned to the 3rd century B.C. (BCE). The monuments are in caverns known as Pancha Pandava Malai. Buddhism seems to have flourished and co-existed peacefully with Jainism, Ajivikam and also with various sects of Hinduism. Since the time of Bhakti Movement, Buddhism came to be challenged by its exponents and began to lose royal patronage. The Thevaram hymns of Saiva saints and the Nalayira Divyaprabandam of Vaishnava Azhwars provided evidence to the challenges Buddhism faced in Tamil country. When Hieun Tsang, the Chinese traveller, visited south India in the 7th century, Buddhism was almost on the decline.

But contrary to popular perception, the Buddhism did not disappear completely. The presence of Virasozhiyam (a 11th century Later Chola period grammar text, composed by a Buddhist) and the discovery of 13th century Buddhist bronzes in Nagapattinam testify to the presence of Buddhism in later periods. The sculptures of Buddha in Thiyaganur village in Salem district strengthen this conclusion.



Buddha image, Thiyaganur

Though Buddhism faced challenges from Saiva and Vaishnava sects from the Pallava period onwards. One of the exceptions was Nagapattinam, which was supported by Chola kings, not for religious but for political reasons. Chudamani Vihara of Nagapattinam was constructed by the Srivijaya king with the patronage of Rajaraja Chola. This vihara has been since destroyed. The Tamil epic, Manimekalai, written by Kulavanigan Sithalai Sattanar, is considered a typical representation of Tamil Buddhism. Sattanar indigenised Buddhism into Tamil Buddhism by communicating a large set of Buddhist terms in Tamil, as translations from Sanskrit and Pali.

There is a record about a Buddhist monk named Vajrabodhi, who was skilled in tantric rituals, but this monk left the Pallava court for China. Mahendravarman's Mattavilāsa Prahāsana describes Buddhism as a religion in decay.

In the field of education, Buddhist Sanghas and Viharas served as centres of education. Students from various parts of the world came here to receive education. Nalanda, Taxila and Vikramshila gained reputation as great educational centres. They were originally Buddhist Viharas. Students from Tibet and China were influenced by Buddhism and they took effective steps to spread Buddhism.

Viharas:



Buddhist Vihara of Nalanda in ruins

Excavations of Buddhist Vihara and a temple at Kaveripoompattinam and hundreds of stone and bronze sculptures by ASI from over 125 sites have proved the spread of the religion in the state. A 1.03 metre Buddha statue in 'padmasana' pose in remote Tirunattiyattankudi village in Tiruvarur district was unearthed when digging a tank in a field.



Buddha in 'padmasana' pose

3. Ajivika Philosophy:

The Ajivikas believed in the doctrine of karma, transmigration of the soul and determinism. The head of Ajivika sect was Gosala Mankhaliputta. The Ajivikas practiced asceticism of a severe type. The Ajivika religious order and school of philosophy is known from the Vedic hymns, the Brahmanas, the Aryankas and other ancient Sanskrit compilations and treatises of the pre-Jaina

and pre-Buddhist age. Gosala's ideas live on in other religions, though no Ajivika literature has survived.

Gosala was closely associated with Mahavira for six years and then they parted company. The Mauryan emperor Asoka and his grandson Dasaratha patronised the Ajivikas. After the collapse of the Mauryan Empire, the sect declined in northern India, but had by then spread into southern India where it continued to exist for many centuries.



Representational Image of Ajivika ascetics

Throughout history, Ajivikas had to face persecution everywhere. Village communities under Pallavas, Cholas and Hoysalas imposed special taxes on them. Despite such obstacles, Ajivikas continued to have influence along the Palar river in the modern states of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu (Vellore, Kanchipuram and Tiruvallur districts) till about the 14th century. In the end, they seemed to have been absorbed into Vaishnavism.

Summary:

- ❖ Sources and literature for study of Jainism are highlighted.
- ❖ Presence of Jains in the Tamil country is examined.
- ❖ Jain monuments and art in Tamizhakam, in particular Sittanavasal and Kazhugumalai are illustrated.
- ❖ The Jain contribution to education through 'Palli' is explained.
- ❖ Buddhist teachings are analysed.
- ❖ Buddhism in the Tamil country is explored.
- ❖ Buddhist legacy in Tamizhakam is discussed.
- ❖ The essence of Ajivika philosophy and its presence in Tamil Nadu is detailed.

Glossary:

1.	Heterodox	Not conforming to orthodox beliefs, especially religious ones, unorthodox	பழமை வழக்கத்திலுள்ள மதக்கொள்கைக்கு மாறான	சாராத,
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2.	Canon	A rule, an accepted principle	ஒரு விதி, பொது ஒழுங்கு
3.	Unanimous	All sharing the same view	ஒரு மனதாக
4.	Ascetic	Monk, hermit	துறவி, சந்நியாசி
5.	Deteriorate	To grow worse	சீர்கெடு, மோசமடை
6.	Vestiges	Things left behind, remains, traces	தடங்கள், அடையாளங்கள், சுவடுகள்
7.	Cavern	A large deep underground cave	அடிநில குகை
8.	Hillock	Small hill, mound	சிறு குன்று
9.	Façade	The front of a building	கட்டடத்தின் முகப்பு
10.	Frescoes	Paintings done in water colour on a wall or ceiling	சுவரில் அல்லது மேற்கூரையில் வரையப்படும் ஓவியங்கள்
11.	Mural	A large picture painted on a wall	சுவரோவியம்
12.	Impetus	Motivation, stimulus	உத்வேகம், உந்து சக்தி
13.	Salvation	Saving from harm, ruin or loss	இரட்சிப்பு, முக்தி, விமோசனம்
14.	Sceptic (skeptical)	Someone who habitually doubts accepted beliefs	ஐயுறவுவாத, சமய ஐயுறவாளர்
15.	Craving	A strong desire	அடக்கமுடியாத ஆசை, மிகு விருப்பம்
16.	Persecution	Unfair treatment of a person or a group, especially because of their religious or political beliefs	துன்புறுத்தல், அடக்குமுறை

Do you know?

Five Great Vows of Jainism:

1. Non-violence– Ahimsa.
2. Truth– Satya.
3. Non-stealing –Achaurya.
4. Celibacy/Chastity – Brahmacharya.
5. Non-possession – Aparigraha.

The Jainacharitha of Kalpa Sūtra is a Jain text containing the biographies of the Jain Tirthankaras, notably Parshvanatha, founder of Jainism as well as the first Tirthankara, and Mahavira, the last and the 24th Tirthankara. This work is ascribed to Bhadrabahu, who along with Chandragupta Maurya migrated to Mysore (about 296 B.C.) and settled there.

Tirthankaras are those who have attained nirvana and made a passage from this world to the next.

The total population of Jains in Tamil Nadu is 83,359 or 0.12 per cent of the population as per the 2011 census.

A Vihara in Sanskrit means 'dwelling' or 'house'. Originally, viharas were dwelling places used by wandering monks during the rainy season. Later they transformed into centres of learning through the donations of wealthy lay Buddhists. Royal patronage allowed pre-Muslim India to become a land of many viharas that imparted university education and were treasure troves of sacred texts. Many viharas, such as Nalanda were world famous.