

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF BUDDHIST PHILOSOPHY IN GUJARAT

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### ABSTRACT

*The modest attempt of this article is to understand the historicity and development of Buddhism in Gujarat. Buddhism is recognized as both a religion and a philosophy. Philosophy is a field of study that involves the investigation, analysis, and development of ideas. It deals with a fundamental comprehension of morals and reality. The discipline is used to explain key ideas and concepts such as those related to God, moral responsibility, knowledge, causality, etc., to solve issues and problems, to provide logic and ethics, to provide conceptual analysis and a theoretical aspect, to proceed by reasoning and argument, to pose pivotal questions, and to deal with interdisciplinary knowledge. Historically, In 640 AD, the Chinese traveller Hiuen Tsang discovered the earliest archaeological evidence of Buddhism's existence in Gujarat. In Bharuch, Atali, Kheta, Valabhi, Anandapura, and Saurashtra, Chinese traveller Huen Tsang recorded the existence of 200 monasteries housing 10,000 monks. Therefore, Buddhism thus encompasses all branches of knowledge or science about human existence, including peace. Thus, the present research paper explores the history of Buddhism in Gujarat. The article also deals with the growth and development of Buddhism in Gujarat. And also, Buddhist philosophy deals with the context of social issues in Gujarat.*

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**Keywords:** Buddhism, Gujarat, Philosophy, Knowledge, Hiuen Tsang.

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### Introduction

Gujarat, a state in western India, has a long history of supporting Buddhism, one of the main global faiths. The history of Buddhism in Gujarat dates back to antiquity, with notable advancements taking place in various eras. This article will examine the historical background of Buddhism in Gujarat, covering significant occasions, notable individuals, and the influence of Buddhism on the culture and society of the area.

### Historical Background

Before the advent of the Mauryan Empire in India, Buddhism existed in Gujarat. Gujarat was a part of the Mauryan empire at this time (268–232 BCE), which was ruled by Emperor Ashoka. Following his conversion to Buddhism, Ashoka spread the Buddha's teachings across his kingdom, including Gujarat. As a result, Gujarat witnessed the construction of several stupas, viharas (monasteries), and pillars throughout this period. The edicts of Ashoka, written on pillars and rocks, were instrumental in spreading Buddhist principles and philosophy throughout the area. Before the advent of the Mauryan Empire in India, Gujarat had a long history of Buddhism. Gujarat was a part of the Mauryan empire during this time, ruled by Emperor Ashoka (268–232 BCE). After converting to Buddhism, Ashoka spread the

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teachings of the Gautama Buddha across his kingdom, which included Gujarat. As a result, Gujarat saw the construction of a large number of Buddhist stupas, viharas, and pillars throughout this time. Buddhist ethics and philosophy were widely spread across the area thanks to Ashoka's decrees, which were written on pillars and rocks (Heinz, 1984, p. 275).

Further, after the decline of the Mauryan Empire, the Satavahana dynasty rose to prominence as a significant force in Western India. In Gujarat, the Satavahanas promoted Buddhism and made a substantial contribution to its growth. They erected Buddhist institutions and monastery complexes, drawing academics and monks to the area. During this time, a large number of Buddhist caves and rock-cut buildings were built, giving areas for prayer, study, and meditation (Oza, 2022).

Gujarat had a notable expansion of Buddhism under the Gupta Empire (4th to 6th century CE). The Guptas were renowned for their tolerant encouragement of Buddhism as well as other forms of art, culture, and religion. They created educational institutions like universities and learning hubs, drawing academics from all around India and outside. Two famous Buddhist institutions, Nalanda and Vikramashila, made a vital contribution to the advancement of Buddhism, and their influence even reached Gujarat. Many Gujarati Buddhist monks and intellectuals visited these institutes to learn about and spread Buddhism.

After the Gupta period, there were several local dynasties emerged in Gujarat. In Gujarat, the Vallabhi dynasty in particular was essential in promoting and maintaining Buddhism. Located in modern-day Gujarat, Vallabhi developed into a significant academic contribution for Buddhist intellectuals. In the 7<sup>th</sup> Century A.D. Vallabhi, the Chinese traveller and scholar Xuanzang described it as a thriving Buddhist centre. During his visit, he came across several monasteries, temples, and knowledgeable monks, demonstrating the long-lasting impact of Buddhism in the area (Oza, 2022).

During the 10<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> century Gujarat was governed by the Solanki dynasty, commonly referred to as the Chalukyas of Gujarat. Great patrons of the arts, architecture, and religion were the Solankis. Many of the great temples they built had Buddhist architectural features. A blend of Buddhist and Hindu architectural forms may be seen in the well-known Dilwara Temples in Mount Abu, Rajasthan, which were constructed by the Solankis. This demonstrates how Buddhist aesthetics and philosophy influenced the growth of temple construction in the area. (Desai, 1990, pp. 3-32)

#### **Buddhism in Gujarat: Decline and Revival**

Buddhism saw a collapse in Gujarat as a result of the fall of the Solanki monarchy. The decline of Buddhist dominance was caused by political unrest, invasions, and the rise of Islam as the main religion in the area. However, Gujarat never totally lost its Buddhist population. Buddhism was still practised by a few tiny communities but on a much-reduced scale. In Gujarat, there has been a significant resurgence of interest in Buddhism. This resurrection has been aided by the growth of Buddhism on a worldwide scale, more knowledge of the teachings of Gautama Buddha, and the activities of Buddhist organisations draw both domestic and foreign tourists. Finally, it should be noted that Gujarat's Buddhist philosophy has a long history that includes stages of expansion, fall, and resurgence. Buddhism has made its mark on Gujarat's cultural and religious environment from the time of Ashoka to the present. The distinctive Buddhist history of Gujarat has been shaped by the sponsorship of kings, the building of monastic complexes and institutions, and the merging of Buddhist components in temple design. Buddhism continues to be a crucial component of the state's cultural fabric as it embraces its historical past (Thompson, 2022).

The Solanki dynasty's collapse coincided with a drop in Buddhism in Gujarat. The decline of Buddhist dominance was caused by political unrest, invasions, and the rise of Islam as the main religion in the area. However, Gujarat never totally lost its Buddhist population. Buddhism was still practised by a few tiny communities but on a much-reduced scale. In Gujarat, there has been a significant resurgence of interest in Buddhism. This resurrection has been aided by the growth of Buddhism globally, increasing knowledge of Gautama Buddha's teachings, and the work of Buddhist organisations. Gujarat now has several Buddhist temples, meditation facilities, and monastic establishments that draw both domestic and foreign tourists. Finally, it should be noted that Buddhist philosophy has a long history in Gujarat that includes stages of expansion, fall, and resurgence. Buddhism has made its mark on Gujarat's cultural and religious environment from the time of Ashoka to the present (Thompson, 2022). The distinctive Buddhist history of Gujarat has been shaped by the sponsorship of kings, the building of monastic complexes and institutions, and the merging of Buddhist components in temple design. Buddhism continues to be a crucial component of the state's cultural landscape as it embraces its historical past.

### **Hiuen Tsang: Buddhist Scholar and Traveller**

The historical information you gave me has to be corrected. A Chinese Buddhist monk, scholar, and traveller named Hiuen Tsang (also known as Xuanzang) did make a trip to India in the seventh century AD. He failed to find Gujarat's oldest archaeological indications of Buddhism, though. Before Hiuen Tsang arrived, Buddhism had been practised for many centuries in India. The Buddha, also known as Siddhartha Gautama founded the religion in the fifth century BCE. Buddhism was eventually practised across India and beyond. During the Gupta Empire's rule, between 630 and 645 AD, Hiuen Tsang travelled to India. He went to India primarily to study the Buddhist scriptures and to visit significant Buddhist places. He travelled to numerous important Buddhist sites, including Nalanda, one of the most well-known ancient institutions in the world. Hiuen Tsang did not "discover" Buddhism in Gujarat or anyplace else, even though he documented his observations of many monasteries and Buddhist communities. By the time of his voyage, Buddhism had already been firmly entrenched in Gujarat and other parts of India (Sumel, 1993).

However, his records have given important historical insights into the status of Buddhism at that time. Hiuen Tsang did not discover Buddhism in Gujarat or any other region of India, but his contributions are essential for understanding the historical evolution of Buddhism and Indian culture. The growth and development of Buddhism in Gujarat have had a tremendous impact on the region's religious and intellectual environment. Siddhartha Gautama (the Buddha), who established Buddhism in present-day Nepal in the sixth century BCE, saw it quickly expand to other regions of India, including Gujarat. Gujarat was a significant economic and cultural exchange hub in the mighty Magadha Empire during the time of the Buddha. As Buddhism grew in popularity, traders, missionaries, and pilgrims brought it to Gujarat. The physical position and interconnectedness of the area aided in the spread of Buddhist teachings, encouraging the construction of monasteries, stupas, and other religious buildings (Thompson, 2022).

Gujarat has a long history of the philosophy of Buddhism. It is important to investigate how Buddhism is growing and developing in Gujarat. Gujarat was home to several significant Buddhist monasteries and stupas, demonstrating that Buddhism was once very prevalent in the area. The dynamics of Gujarat's culture and religion at that time may be better understood by comprehending the reasons that contributed to the spread and expansion of Buddhism there. Buddhism has historically been recognised for emphasising compassion, nonviolence, and an awareness of suffering. It would be fascinating to watch how Gujarat's socio-economic problems are addressed by Buddhism. It is possible that the literature reading examines how Buddhist teachings were used in the area to deal with problems like social unrest, inequality, and poverty. The region's cultural environment has been profoundly influenced by Buddhist structures, sculptures, and texts. Studying archaeological discoveries, historical documents and writings that offer insights into the life and teachings of Buddha and the following development of Buddhism in the area is crucial to gaining a thorough understanding of Gujarat's Buddhist past. The first archaeological proof of Buddhism's existence, according to history, was discovered in Gujarat by the Chinese traveller Hiuen Tsang about 640 AD. According to Chinese traveller Hiuen Tsang, 20,000 monks were housed in 200 monasteries in Bharuch, Atali, Kheta, Valabhi, Anandapura, and Saurashtra. As a result, Buddhism encompasses all areas of inquiry into or investigation into human existence, including peace. This research paper investigates Gujarat's Buddhist roots. The work also discusses the development and growth of Buddhism in Gujarat. Buddhist doctrine also tackles Gujarat's social problems (James, 1889).

### **Growth of Buddhism in Gujarat**

Gujarat was a favourable environment for Buddhism for several reasons. Many people, including business owners and members of the neighbourhood community, were drawn to the principles of nonviolence, compassion, and equality. Buddhist practises' simplicity and emphasis on each person's spiritual development also drew adherents from a variety of social backgrounds. Buddhism got imperial backing and patronage during the time of Emperor Ashoka (3rd century BCE), which helped it grow throughout Gujarat and other areas. Buddhist ethics and values were pushed through Ashoka's inscriptions and rock edicts, which had a long-lasting effect on the region's religious and intellectual environment (James, 1889).

The comprehension of suffering (dukkha) and the quest for freedom (nirvana) from the cycle of birth and death (samsara) is fundamental to Buddhist philosophy. The teachings of Buddhism provided insightful perspectives and practical remedies in the context of Gujarat's socio-economic problems and social equality. The concept of social equality is one of Buddhism's main precepts. The Buddha taught that anybody might achieve enlightenment and spiritual emancipation, regardless of caste, social

standing, or gender. This message of equality struck a chord with the Gujarati populace and perhaps contributed to societal cohesion and the removal of barriers between various social groupings. Violence and strife have occasionally occurred in Gujarat, as they have in many other places. Buddhism promoted ahimsa, or nonviolence, and compassion for all living things. These values promoted compassionate behaviour in society and promoted the peaceful settlement of disputes. Buddhism places a strong emphasis on the application of ethical behaviour (*sila*) in daily life.

The Five Precepts provided a moral foundation for people to behave morally and responsibly. They include refraining from injuring living things, stealing, indulging in sexual misbehaviour, using deceptive speech, and drunkenness. Contribution to Culture and the Arts. Gujarat's art and culture were inspired by the advent of Buddhism in the country. Buddhism's exquisite carvings and imposing stupas contributed significantly to the region's architectural history. Buddhism's creative representations assisted in spreading its message and core principles. Overall, Gujarat's development and growth of Buddhism improved the region's religious environment while also strengthening its moral, social, and cultural fabric. Its worldview offered insightful approaches to dealing with societal problems and fostering a more peaceful and caring society (Kale, 1966).

### Conclusion

The development and significance of Buddhism in Gujarat throughout the ages are fascinatingly shown by looking at its historical roots. Gujarat has played a significant role in the development and spread of Buddhist teachings over the years. Even though Gujarat had phases of Buddhism collapse and resurgence, the philosophical influence has endured in the region's cultural and spiritual environment. Gujarat is thought to have received Buddhism during the reign of Emperor Ashoka (3rd century BCE). However, throughout the mediaeval era, Buddhism saw a renaissance in the area, in part because of the efforts of well-known monks and academics. Interactions between diverse philosophical systems were made possible by Gujarat's physical position and historical prominence as a trading and cultural centre. The advancement and richness of Buddhist philosophy in the area were aided by this interchange of thoughts and information. Gujarat's abundance of Buddhist stupas, monastery complexes, and other architectural marvels is evidence of the enormous influence that Buddhism has had on the area's art and cultural history. The patronage of the governing class and the local community is also reflected in these systems. In conclusion, the historical context emphasises Buddhism's flexibility and tenacity in the face of several difficulties. This region's philosophical traditions have left a lasting legacy that has shaped the spiritual and intellectual environment for millennia.

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