

Sāmaṇṇa / Sramanas

Around the 7th to 6th century B.C., society evolved, groups of people became dissatisfied with Brahmanism. They saw the wastefulness in the sacrifices and uselessness of rituals and mantras; with no lasting happiness. They felt that Brahmanism was primitive, as all practices were based on the concept of Brahma with the ultimate goal of union with Brahma. They were known as **Paribbajaka**, i.e., living a homeless life with no fixed abode and they lived by begging. They were known as **sanghi, ghani, ganacariya, yati, samanna, muni**.

The philosophers of the new schools grew out of ordinary society with aim to discover the truth and attain happiness, peace of mind. Having abandoned all social commitments, they were free to spend their time thinking, trying out ascetic practices, studying nature; setting up schools and training pupils to remember and disseminate their teachings.

They rejected the Vedas with their many contradictions; the authority of the Brahmin priests who claimed to be in possession of revealed truths. They ridiculed the complicated rituals, and declared that the Brahmins were merely enriching themselves by charging exorbitant fees for rites performances.

Their outlook was that of scientists investigating the nature of the universe. They were responsible for the considerable progress made in the natural sciences, astronomy, mathematics and medicine of the time.

They rejected the values of ordinary society; with the exception that they agreed that happiness was the aim of life. They lived as far as possible outside ordinary society, seeking truth and happiness. Real happiness consisted in peace of mind. They felt that seeking happiness through wealth and power would not work and would lead to more unhappiness.

Samanas sought pupils who would leave society and follow them in their wanderings. Some of them established regular communities outside ordinary society, outside the jurisdiction of the governments but having their own codes of discipline. An example is the Jain community under the leadership of Nigantha Nataputta. These communities of monks and nuns were the first groups of

wanderers in the forests. Later, they developed organized settlements, at the outskirts of towns and supported by sympathetic laymen and even governments. Samanas were the ancient religious teachers distinct from Brahmins by their doctrine of salvation through ascetism. They

- Refused to accept the authority of the Vedas
- Rejected caste and sacrifices
- Taught a doctrine of salvation by atheism and ascetism

There were six prominent Samanna teachers: Nigantha Nataputta, Ajita Kesakambali, Sanjaya Belatthaputta, Makkhali Gosala, Purana Kassapa, Pakudha Kaccayana.

In the time of the Buddha, there were 62 religious views as illustrated in **Brahmajala Sutta**, the first discourse of Digha Nikaya. This Supreme Net described the prevalent views held by Brahmins and sramanas then.

They were essentially: 18 views of the past and 44 views of the future.

The 18 views of the past encompass those who proclaim

- Eternity of self
- Eternity and partial eternity of self
- Finitude and infinitude of the world
- Chance origin of the self and
- Those who are evasive on issues (eel wrigglers)

The 44 views of the future encompass those who proclaim

- States of conscious / unconscious / neither conscious nor unconscious states after death in their material/immaterial/both/neither forms
- Annihilation of self in the disintegration of elements, sense spheres, spheres of infinite space, infinite consciousness, nothingness or perception & non-perception

These 62 views were wrong views which were conditioned by repeated contact through the 6 sense bases; contact conditions feeling; feeling conditions craving;

craving conditions clinging; clinging conditions becoming; becoming conditions birth; birth conditions ageing and death, sorrow, lamentation, sadness and distress.

Nigantha Nataputta

Vardhamana, also known as Mahavira, the great hero; was an elder contemporary of the Buddha. Born second son of a Khattiya chieftain near Patna in 599 BC and died 527 BC. Well educated, a bachelor who renounced his family life at 28 upon death of his parents. He joined the Nigantha sect founded 250 years earlier by Parsva. For 12 years, he wandered from place to place and lived a life of greatest austerity, wearing only a single piece of cloth but discarded even that later.

“A bodily state, void of all garments of hemp and hair, of grass, bark, and leaves and clear of every ornament and covering of decency, i.e. a stark naked state and the heart free from every knot of anger, deceit, etc. is said to be the worshippable nakedness.”

He was believed to be the 24th great teachers of Jainism (Tirthankaras – ford makers who guide their followers across the river of transmigration. At 40 years of age, he realized enlightenment (kevala) after a long fast. He became a kevalin (perfected soul) or conqueror (Jina) and was released from the forces of Karma, which had bound him to repeated rebirths.

He died of voluntary self –starvation at Pava at the age of 72. His soul was believed to have risen to the top of the cosmos where it exists in an isolated and changeless state beyond birth and death.

Jainism

Mahavira did not found Jainism. He revitalized the tradition. His parents were Jains. Followers were mainly from his own caste, that of Khattiya. There was a well-organized community of monks, nuns and lay followers. But women were believed to be unable to achieve liberation in their current lives.

The goal is to obtain liberation from cycle of reincarnation. They believed in existence of soul and non-souls (animate and inanimate objects). Animals and

plants have souls. These are at different levels of growth and evolution. The soul is originally pure but is covered by karmic particles that bind the soul to samsara. Karma consists of fine and subtle particles that adhere to soul, as clay to pot. The state of soul is due to Karma accumulated over countless lives. Heavy karma is a result of selfish, careless and cruel actions.

Suffering has the effect of dispersing karma already accumulated. To achieve salvation (moksha), man must free his soul from matter through his own efforts, by practicing austerities to the extreme. Mahavira believed that the more the flesh is mortified, the more effective is the practice to liberate the soul. By eliminating the effects of past karma and preventing the influx of new karma, the soul is liberated and becomes pure again.

They do not believe in a creator god, relying on oneself to achieve liberation.

The Three Jewels

Right knowledge, right faith, right conduct.

Right knowledge is knowing the Jain creed; right faith is believing in it and right conduct through following it.

Non-violence

The most harmful karmic effect is to injure living beings. They are vegetarians and are not involved in farming. Their predominant occupations are trading and money lending. Mahavira was against plucking of a plant.

5 vows

Non-injury. Truthfulness Non-stealing. Chastity. Non-attachment to possessions.

To fast, not to eat at night, endure hardships in 22 ways and to bear suffering till death. They are to avoid the 7 bad habits of gambling, eating meat, wine, adultery, hunting, stealing and debauchery.

The life of an ascetic

Begins with initiation and gives away his possessions to his relatives and dons the dress of an ascetic. Shaved and has a cloth to strain insects, a cloth mask to avoid injuring insects in the air; a brush or whisk to sweep insects from the path before him.

Sankha Sutta of Samyutta Nikaya (Conch Trumpet)

A disciple of Nigantha Nataputta said that his teacher taught, “All those who take life are destined for a state of deprivation, are destined for hell”

For a disciple who believes in the above view, then he would think such, “There are living beings that I have killed. I, too, am destined for a state of deprivation and am destined for hell.” If he clings on to this view and does not abandon this state of mind, then he would indeed be in hell when he passed away.

In this Sutta, Buddha explains that the actual complexity of kamma allows for a way in which past evil deeds can be overcome: through refraining from evil now and into the future. The mind should be freed from debilitating thoughts of guilt and remorse. The mind then cultivates the 4 Brahma viharas, which are expansive, without hostility and without ill-will. This is likened to the blowing of conch trumpet, sounding the 4 directions without difficulty’

With regard to self-mortification, the Buddha said,

To such a pitch of asceticism have I gone that naked was I, flouting life’s decencies, licking my hands after meals...I have visited only one house a day- or one every seven days, or only once a fortnight ... and there taken only one morsel of food.... I have plucked out the hair of my head and the hair of my beard,... have couched on thorns, have gone down to the water punctually thrice before night fall to wash away the evil within. In such a fashion have I lived torment and torture my body, to such a length in asceticism have I gone.

He discovered a fundamental truth about austerity and self-mortification: the pain such practices create produces in turn delusions, fears, and doubts magnified by deprivation and clinging to life. It will not and cannot, lead to wisdom.

This view on kamma was in opposition to the Ajivikas. In Apanṇaka Sutta, Majjhima Nikaya # 60; Purana Kassapa taught the doctrine of non-doing or non-action, Makkhali Gosala on the doctrine of Non causality, Ajita Kesakambali on doctrine of Nihilism while Pakudha Kaccayana on doctrine of indestructibility of the seven elements. In propounding these views of kamma and vipaka, they would avoid wholesome conduct by body, speech and mind; which are “blessings of renunciation and an aspect of cleansing”. They would undertake and practise the three unwholesome states as they do not see the danger, degradation and defilement in these.

With wrong views as the condition, they would have wrong intention, wrong speech, and opposition to noble ones; convince others to accept the untrue Dhamma with self praise and disparagement of others. In the present lives, they would be censured by the noble ones. Upon dissolution of the bodies, they would reappear in states of deprivation, unhappy destination or even in hell.

In Anguttara Nikaya, Book 4,#65; Volition expressed bodily, verbally or mentally would bring arising in oneself of pleasure or pain. This kamma-formation is brought on by one own’s impulse or induced by others, one is clearly knowing or not clearly knowing. All this is conditioned by ignorance.

In the first Twin verses of Dhammapada, Pain pursues him who speaks or acts with evil mind just as the wheel which follows the hoof of the ox. Happiness would follow him who speaks or acts with pure mind as a shadow that never leaves.

In Anguttara Nikaya, Book 4, #56, The Four Unthinkables include results of kamma, range of a Buddha, meditative absorptions and speculations of the world. They are not to be pondered upon as they would lead one to distress and insanity. There are results but they should not be speculated upon.