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Mains Practice Questions

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Q. Discuss the reasons for rise of Jainism and Buddhism in India and their impact. (150 words)

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Approach:

- Discuss the conditions prevailing prior to rise of Jainism and Buddhism
- Discuss the factors that led to their rise
- Examine the impact that Jainism and Buddhism made on India

Introduction:

- Jainism and Buddhism emerged as the most potent religious reform movements during later Vedic period.
- Both Jainism and Buddhism was founded in the 6th century BC, and they sprung out of the same roots.

Body:

Reasons for rise of Jainism and Buddhism

- **Social cause:** Caste system became rigid and it created inequality in the society. The Kshatriyas had resented the domination of the priestly class, and both Buddha and Mahavira belonged to Kshatriya origin.
- **Religious unrest:**
 - Religious life in ancient India was originally very simple. But in the Later Vedic period complex rituals and ceremonies began to dominate the practice of worship. The complex rituals and sacrifices were not acceptable to the common people.
 - It became expensive and elaborate. Blind faith and superstitious beliefs confused the people.
- **Economic cause:** The growth of trade led to the improvement in the economic conditions of the Vaisyas. Now, they wanted to enhance their social status but the orthodox Varna system did not allow this. Similarly, money-lending was imperative for traders, which was prohibited in Vedas. Thus, merchant class extended the chief support to these new religions.
- Moreover, rise of agriculture raised demand for drought animals which were being sacrificed for religious ceremonies. The principle of nonviolence, suited settled agrarian community better which was brought by Jainism and Buddhism.
- **Brahminic supremacy:** Priests considered themselves superior and others as inferiors. They took advantage of knowing Sanskrit, and interpreted religion according to their convenience. Whereas these new religions were open for all and preached in local language like Prakrit and Pali, which found appeal to common masses.

Impact on Indian society

- **Languages and Literature:** Jaina contribution to Prakrit and Kannada literature. The language of Pali and other local languages developed through the teachings of Buddhism.
- **Arts and Architecture:** The stupas at Sanchi, Bharhut and Gaya, Jaina temples at Mount Abu in Rajasthan in the domain of architecture are wonderful pieces of architecture. Buddhism takes the credit for the chaityas and viharas in different parts of India.
- **Philosophy:** The concept of ahimsa was chief contribution. Later, it became one of the cherished values of our nation.
- **Political progress:** Sabhas and samitis find its roots here. It had also promoted the spread of Indian culture to other parts of Asia.
- **Simple Religion:** Its principles were very simple. It was easily followed by the people. It was not complex like Vedic religion.
- **Opposition to Caste System:** Due to their opposition the complexity of caste system reduced from the society.

Conclusion:

- Jainism and Buddhism arose to suit the needs of a changing society, patronised by an emerging class and left an indelible mark on India's culture, architecture, philosophy and way of living.
- Some tenets of these religion have been adopted by hinduism in their long course of association and have become an integrated part of the society.
- These religions also found their influence in neighbouring countries and helped India expand its footprint in these regions, paving way for a cultural connect to this day.