

**1. Examine the factors that led to the decline of Buddhism in India. How did political, social, and religious changes contribute to its downfall?**

Buddhism, born in the spiritual crucible of ancient India, once flourished under the shade of royal patronage and the devotion of commoners. Its message of compassion, renunciation, and the middle path echoed from the mighty Himalayas to the shores of Southeast Asia. Yet, by the 12th century, it had become a fading whisper in its homeland, retreating from the mainstream of Indian religious life. The decline of Buddhism was a multifaceted process, triggered by shifting political alliances, religious transformations, and socio-economic upheavals.

**1. Political and Military Factors**

- Withdrawal of State Patronage: Post-Gupta era rulers like the Rashtrakutas, Rajputs, and Cholas increasingly favored Shaivism and Vaishnavism.
- Islamic Invasions (10th–13th centuries): Monasteries at Nalanda, Vikramshila, and Odantapuri were destroyed by Muhammad bin Bakhtiyar Khilji, leading to mass killings of monks and burning of scriptures.
- Feudalization of India: Fragmented regional kingdoms led to a collapse of centralized support to monasteries, eroding their resource base.
- Rajput Resistance: Their warrior ethos, aligned with Brahmanical values, found Buddhism's non-violence incompatible, further sidelining the faith.
- Islamic Iconoclasm: Invasions targeted Buddhist idols, centers, and texts—associating them with “idolatry.”
- Brahmanical Hostility: According to recent archaeology, some Buddhist sites were converted into Hindu temples even before Islamic invasions (e.g., Sarnath under Gahadavalas).

**2. Religious and Philosophical Shifts**

- Assimilation into Hinduism: Buddha was incorporated as the ninth avatar of Vishnu, blurring distinctions and absorbing Buddhist symbols and rituals.
- Rise of Bhakti Movements: Devotional Hinduism, emphasizing personal deities and vernacular languages, appealed more directly to common people.
- Neglect of the Laity: Buddhist texts largely ignored lay practices; only one major text on lay conduct appeared as late as the 11th century, compared to over 50 in Jainism.
- Loss of Distinct Identity: Vajrayana Buddhism's adoption of Tantric practices made it ritually similar to Hinduism, diminishing its separate appeal.

**3. Socio-Economic and Internal Decline**

- Decay of Monasteries: Large monastic institutions became land-rich but disconnected, with monks acting more as landlords than spiritual guides.
- Corruption and Decline in Discipline: Worldliness and complacency had crept into the Sangha, alienating the faithful.
- Fall in Trade and Patronage: With the decline of urban trade routes, merchant class donations dwindled, weakening the monastic economy.
- Language Barrier: Continued use of Pali and Sanskrit alienated the rural masses, while Bhakti saints spread ideas in vernaculars.

**The decline of Buddhism in India exemplifies a critical historical insight:**

Survival of a religion = State Patronage + Adaptability + Mass Appeal – Persecution

Buddhism, over time, lost royal support, failed to adapt its practices to popular needs, neglected the masses, and eventually suffered from violent invasions and ideological persecution. Each variable in this equation played against it. While the world embraced the Buddha's message across Asia, in India, the institutional vacuum, rigidities, and political marginalization led to its

retreat. Still, its universal message of compassion and wisdom endures globally, making it one of India's most profound contributions to world civilization.

### 1.(b) Elucidate on Sangam age literature and society.

In famous Tamil epic Silappathikaram vividly portrays the complex societal structure of the Sangam Age. In the epic, the protagonist Kannagi, a woman of virtue, challenges the ruler of Madurai after the wrongful execution of her husband, Kovalan, based on a false accusation. The event is not just a narrative of personal loss but serves as a reflection of societal norms, gender roles, and the place of justice and governance in Sangam age, an era where literature, society, and governance were deeply interconnected.

#### 1. Sangam age Literature: It's sources and significance

- **Diverse Literary Works:** Sangam literature includes major texts like Tolkappiyam (a foundational work on grammar), Ettutogai (Eight Anthologies), Pattuppattu (Ten Idylls), and Silappathikaram (one of the five great epics), each contributing to different aspects of Tamil culture, governance, and social life.
- **Cultural and Emotional Insights:** These works provide deep emotional expressions in poems about love, valor, separation, and family dynamics, offering a window into the personal and intimate lives of the people during the Sangam period.
- **Societal Reflections:** Sangam texts critically engage with societal norms, such as the status of women, caste dynamics, gender roles, and the concept of kingship, portraying the complex interplay of various social elements within Tamil society.
- **Economic and Agricultural Commentary:** The literature sheds light on the agrarian economy, detailing the lives of farmers and cultivators in the Marutam region, and discussing the trade, commerce, and occupation of the people, reflecting the socio-economic conditions of the time.
- **Philosophical and Governance Insights:** Sangam literature also addresses the role of governance, justice, and morality, presenting an early form of political thought and ethical frameworks, as seen in works like Thirukkural, which emphasizes the values of knowledge, wisdom, and social responsibility.

#### 2. Society during the Sangam Age:

The Sangam Age (300 BCE - 300 CE) was marked by the rule of the Chera, Chola, and Pandya dynasties, which fostered a vibrant culture and robust economy.

- **Social Hierarchy:** Sangam society had a four-fold division, influenced by Aryan ideas but adapted to local conditions. The groups, Antanar (Brahmins), Arasar (Kings), Vanikar (Merchants), and Velalar (Peasants), represented key occupations. There was social mobility, as noted in the Purananuru poems, where people could rise through education and moral deeds.
- **Women's Role:** Women, though often depicted in traditional roles, were also active in literature and culture. Female poets like Avvaiyar and Kakkaippadiniyar contributed significantly, and women displayed bravery in wars, as depicted in the Purananuru.
- **Economic Structure:** The economy was primarily agrarian, with Marutam regions being the heart of rice cultivation. The Kurunji and Mullai regions were focused on pastoral activities, while the Neytal region was known for fishing and salt production. Trade was also vital, with Tamilakam having links to Sri Lanka, Southeast Asia, and Rome.
- **Cultural Practices:** The Tinais, five ecological regions defined distinct social behaviors, occupations, and religious practices. Religious beliefs ranged from animism and nature worship to early forms of Hinduism, with deities like Murugan and Siva gaining prominence.
- **Language and Education:** Tamil language flourished, with education (Kalvi) being accessible to both men and women. The Sangam poets came from various social backgrounds, contributing to the rich literary tradition. Thiruvalluvar's Thirukkural highlighted the value of education and wisdom.

The Sangam Age reflects the rich cultural fabric of ancient Tamil society, with its literature highlighting themes of love, valor, and harmony. Though political shifts and external forces led to its decline, the Sangam spirit continues to influence the present-day Tamil culture, shaping literature, arts, and identity. The values of social cooperation, human emotions, and connection to nature in Sangam literature remain timeless and relevant today.