

NEW QUESTIONS, NEW IDEAS



The age of the mahajanapadas was one of great excitement. It was an age of basic changes when lots of new questions were cropping up. You read about some of these questions in the previous chapters. We found raja Purujit thinking, 'Why should one perform yagnas?' In Shrivasti, Rangu was asking of Basanti, 'How can one get rid of sorrow?' If you glance at the sub-titles of this lesson, you will learn more about the varied kinds of questions the people of those times were raising. Have such questions arisen in your mind as well? If so, discuss what you think about them.

What Happens After Death ?

There is a very famous story about a boy of your age called Nachiketa. Perhaps you have heard this story. A question arose in his mind, 'What happens after death?' He thought that since Yama was the god of death, he should ask him for an answer. Nachiketa went straight to Yama to question him. In his quest for knowledge, he did not even fear the god of death! So, Nachiketa went to Yama and asked him, 'What happens after death?'

Yama wanted to avoid answering this complex question. He offered Nachiketa lots of gold, silver and cows, if only he would not insist on asking this question. 'For even the gods do not know the answer!' But Nachiketa stuck to his question and forced Yama to answer. This story is to be found in a book called the Kathopanishad.

- What do you think happens to us after death? Discuss in the class.

What Is It That Will Never Perish?

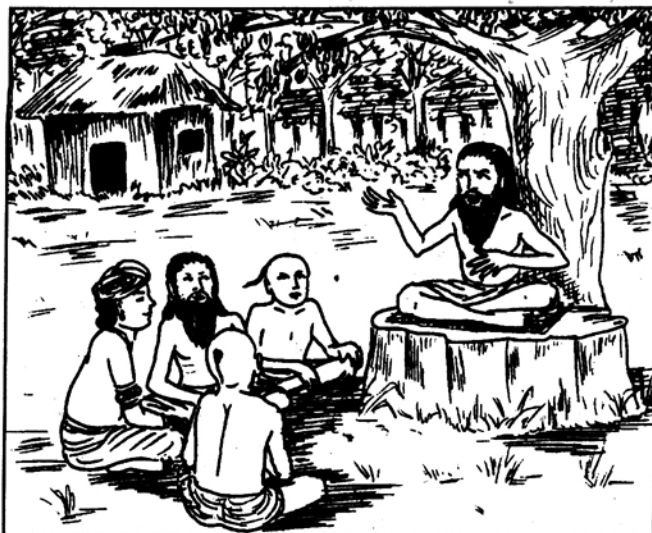
In those days, many people went to live in the forests in *ashrams*. In these *ashrams*, they meditated and pondered over several questions. They also had discussions with people who came to visit them, and shared their teachings with others. People who lived in *ashrams* like this were called '*Rishis*' and '*Munis*' (sages). Several kings too were in the

forefront of this kind of thinking. The views of these *rishis* and kings can be read in texts called the Upanishads. Yagnavalkya and Uddalaka Aaruni were famed *rishis* of those times.

The *rishis* were in search of something which would neither die nor be afflicted by sorrow. They called this indestructible being the *Atma* or *Brahman*. They believed that by understanding the *atma* or *brahman*, immortality could be attained. In order to know the *atma*, one had to perform penance or *tapaśya*.

- Relate all that you have heard about *atma* and *tapaśya*.

What is imperishable?



PARIVRAJAKAS

There were other seekers of truth who did not live permanently in any one place. They left their homes and wandered from village to village and forest to forest. Hence they were called *Parivrajakas* (wanderers) or *Bhikshus* (mendicants, or those who begged). Among these *parivrajakas*, Vardhamana Mahavira, Gautama Buddha, Makhkhali Goshala and Ajita Keshakambalin became very famous.

How Can One Attain Liberation from the Cycle of Births and Deaths? (Vardhamana Mahavira)

Vardhamana Mahavira was born in a *ganasangha*. He left his family and home at the age of 30 years, and became a *parivrajaka*. He was seeking an answer to the question, "How can we get rid of the cycle of birth and death in this world?" After years of meditation and hard penance, Mahavira finally found an answer to his question.

Mahavira taught the people that when we inflict sorrow on other living beings, we add to our load of sins. Therefore, as far as possible, we should avoid hurting any living thing however small. In order to become free from our burden of previous sins, we must be austere, put our own bodies through a lot of hardship and perform penance. In this way, we can be freed of our load of sins and become liberated.

Mahavira kept wandering and spreading his teachings among the people. A large number of people began to follow his preachings. Thus began Jainism.

Why is There Sorrow In This World? How Can One Attain Freedom From Sorrow? (Gautama Buddha)

Like Mahavira, Gautama Buddha too was born in a *ganasangha*. He found that people everywhere were miserable and in conflict with each other. He began to think, 'How can we get rid of this misery?'

Gautama also left his family and home in search of answers to such questions. He



became a *parivrajaka*, and after years of penance and meditation, arrived at some answers to these questions.

According to Gautama Buddha, sorrow is caused by excessive craving and desire. We can attain freedom from sorrow if we control our desires. In order to gain control over our desires, we need to live a balanced and controlled life, and should not cause pain to any living being. The teachings of the Buddha came to be known as Buddhism.

• Fill in the blanks -

_____ lived in ashrams whereas
_____ wandered from place to place.

The views of rishis like Yagnavalkya are recorded in the _____.

The religion spread by Mahavira is known as _____.

The religion spread by the Buddha is known as _____.

- What is the question to which Nachiketa was seeking an answer?
- What were the rishis seeking?
- Why did Mahavira say that we must not give pain to any living beings?
- What did the Buddha suggest as a way of getting rid of misery?
- You too must have seen many sadhus who wander from place to place. What do they do, and what do they preach? Discuss in the class.

- **What questions do your parents and grandparents ask these sadhus?**

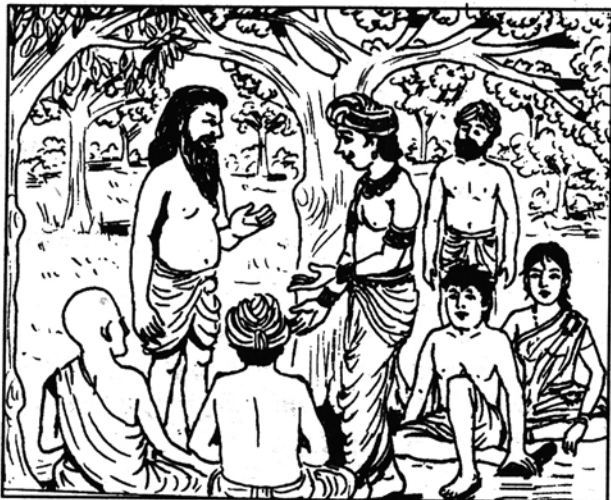
Besides Mahavira and the Buddha, there were many *parivrajakas*. They too had their own messages. In those days, everyone, from kings to labourers, used to discuss their problems and questions with the *parivrajakas*. You will read in the following story about the kind of questions they asked, and the sort of discussions they had.

KAUTUHALA SHALA - A STORY

There was a grove of trees on the outskirts of the city of Shravasti. There were shelters and platforms under the shade of the trees. This was Shravasti's Kautuhala Shala - a place where people could come and satisfy their *kautuhala* or curiosity. Here, people of diverse views and opinions like the brahmins, rishis and bhikshus, came and expounded their views. The people of the town used to listen to them and also asked questions that were troubling them.

Should Yagnas be Performed?

One day, Rangu and Basanti went to the Kautuhala Shala. People were discussing various topics in several small groups. Under a large tree, where a rishi was seated, a prince was asking whether one should perform yagnas. The rishi began to explain, "Yagnas must be performed. It is also necessary to sacrifice animals. You will thus obtain merit and go to heaven. However, when that merit gets exhausted in heaven you will be reborn here. The merit obtained from yagnas thus gets exhausted."



The prince then asked, "What should I do then?" The rishi replied, "The Upanishads refer to fools who consider yagnas to be the ultimate goal. You must perform penance and strive for knowledge of the self (*atma*)." The prince further questioned, "Should I leave the duties of state and do penance?"

A *parivrajaka* who was standing nearby and listening to this dialogue interjected loudly, "I do not agree with this rishi! There is no such thing as *atma*. After death, our body mingles with the soil and nothing else remains. Hence, as long as we live, we must eat well and live in comfort. One should not bother about things like penance, merit and sin."

Rangu found this debate very lively and interesting. Basanti also began to wonder, "Indeed, does anything remain of us after death?"

- **In the view of the rishi which of these would be correct?**

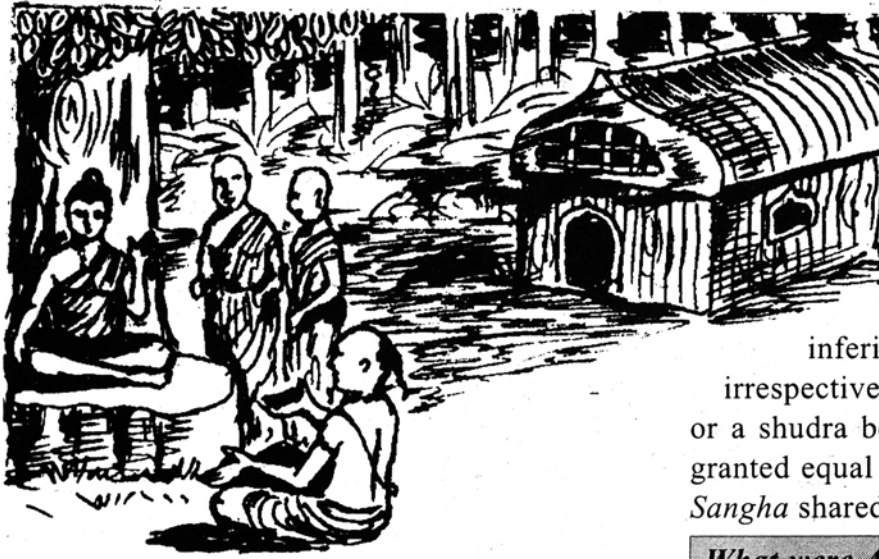
- i. Performance of yagnas.
- ii. Non-performance of yagnas.
- iii. One can obtain merit from yagnas.
- iv. Animals should not be slaughtered in yagnas.
- v. The merit obtained from yagnas will get exhausted in due course.
- vi. Knowledge of the self is the supreme goal.

- **In the view of the *parivrajaka*, which of the following would be correct?**

- i. One should perform penance and attain knowledge of *atma*.
- ii. There is no such thing as *atma*.
- iii. Live in comfort as long as you live.

What is a True Yagna?

Rangu and Basanti reached another tree where a *bhikshu* was seated. The same prince was asking of him, "O *bhikshu*, I want to perform a yagna. Some people say that one gets merit from performing yagnas, while others say that there is no such thing as sin or merit. What is your view? Should one perform yagnas? What is a true yagna?"



birth is not of consequence. Conduct alone is important. Everyone can attain liberation through good conduct."

Rangu and Basanti found this message of the Buddha very appealing. Thereafter, they met many others in the Jetavana.

Many people had left their homes and had

become disciples of the Buddha. They were called Buddhist *bhikshus* (monks). There was an organisation of Buddhist monks called the *Sangha*. There were also women in the *Sangha*. No one was considered superior or

inferior in the *Sangha*. Every monk, irrespective of whether he was a brahmin or a shudra before he became a monk, was granted equal status. All the members of the *Sangha* shared all the tasks equally.

What were Ashvalayana and the Buddha discussing?

Complete the sentences -

Ashvalayana said that brahmins were superior because _____.

Buddha said that only those whose _____ was good could attain _____.

EXERCISES

1. *Yagnas* were considered very important till the age of the small *janapadas*. Later, what did the *rishis* and *bhikshus* place emphasis on? Write in five sentences.
2. According to Vardhamana Mahavira, what were the consequences of violence and causing injury and pain to others?
3. a. According to the Buddha, how could misery be reduced?
b. At that time, were there *parivrajakas* who did not believe in penance, restraint, etc.? What did they think about sorrow and happiness?
4. What argument did the Buddha give to prove that brahmins were not superior by birth?
5. Who said that suffering can be reduced by controlling desires? Under which sub-title will you find the answer to this question?
6. Use the following words and phrases in your own sentences -
According to; sacrifice; curiosity; conduct