Ancient History · GS - I

Pala period is the most significant phase in the history of Buddhism in India. Enumerate.

EXAM YEAR	PAPER	SUBJECT
2020	GS - I	Ancient History

MARKS	WORD LIMIT
10	~150 words

Answer Hint

Royal patronage; Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhism; Nalanda and Vikramashila; Buddhist art and sculpture; international connections; limitations and historical context

Model Answer

Introduction

The Pala dynasty, which ruled much of Bengal and Bihar from the eighth to the twelfth centuries, played a crucial role in sustaining Buddhist institutions and scholarship during a period when Buddhism was declining in several other parts of India.

Significance of the Pala period

- **Royal patronage:** Pala rulers, particularly Dharmapala and Devapala, supported monasteries, universities and Buddhist scholars.
- **Centres of learning:** Nalanda continued to flourish, while Vikramashila, Somapura and Odantapuri emerged as important centres of Buddhist education.
- **Philosophical development:** Mahayana and Vajrayana traditions received substantial institutional and intellectual support.
- **Art and architecture:** Pala sculpture, bronze images and terracotta ornamentation developed a distinctive style. Somapura Mahavihara illustrates the architectural achievements of the period.

- **International influence:** Buddhist teachers such as Atisha travelled to Tibet, facilitating the transmission of Indian Buddhist ideas abroad.
- **Manuscript traditions:** Buddhist texts, illustrated manuscripts and scholarly exchanges helped preserve philosophical and ritual traditions.

Limitations

Despite royal patronage, Buddhism gradually lost its social and institutional base in much of India. Changes in patronage, competition among religious traditions and the destruction of major monastic centres contributed to its decline.

Conclusion

The Pala period represented a major phase of Buddhist intellectual, artistic and international influence. Although it did not prevent Buddhism's eventual decline in much of India, it preserved traditions that profoundly influenced Buddhism across Asia.

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