**Spread of Buddhism**

* At Isipatana in Benares, the Buddha said to the first sixty Arahants:

“Go forth, O bhikkhus, go forth on mission for the good of the many, for the happiness of the many, with compassion towards the world, for the benefit, the welfare and the happiness of men and gods.

Let not two of you go the same way. Preach to them, O bhikkhus, the doctrine, lovely in the beginning, lovely in the middle, lovely in the end; full of meaning and distinctive characteristics. Proclaim to them pure and complete higher life. I will proceed to Uruvelā to preach the doctrine.”

Thus began a mission of incessant activity which lasted forty-five years.

* During that period, the Buddha laid the foundation for a spiritual and cultural movement, which has spread to all parts of Asia and influenced the lives and thoughts of millions of people for over two thousand five hundred years.
* The mission has found expression in a voluminous literature in hundreds of languages, in a vast collection of works of art and in the lives of devotion of successive generations of monks and recluses who dedicated themselves to the promotion, propagation and preservation of the words the Buddha preached, and the life he advocated.
* No single teacher, who stood before men as a man without claiming divine assistance, inspiration or guidance and who preached a doctrine of rationalism, had evoked the response of mankind to the degree the Buddha had.

Without the aid of military territorial expansion or commercial patronage and in spite of a rare spirit of tolerance and a unique absence of centralized organisation, the Buddhist Order had spread to every corner of a vast continent and is now making its presence felt in the Western world as well.

**Factors contributing to the Buddha’s success in spreading the Teachings**

(1) Personality of the Buddha

* His royal background, the voluntary renunciation of worldly comforts, the persevering search for an answer to life’s problems and his humility which enabled him to beg for food in his father’s kingdom, as well as wash the sores of his ailing disciple, have captured the people’s trust and confidence.
* He wandered about at great personal discomfort and even risk, to preach his doctrines to those who were prepared to listen. Those who were not ready to listen, he won them over by means of his convincing logical argumentation.
* He adopted the language of the people in preference to that of scholars and philosophers. In all probability, he got his teachings methodically codified such that within three months of his demise, the disciples could hold a council to settle the initial form and content of what, in course of time, became the Tipitaka.
* He was a great educationalist who utilized unfailing tenets of common sense as well as advanced principles of psychology in dealing with his disciples.
* His positive approach to life problems - guiding man to a salvation which was to be achieved by man alone; he instilled into the minds of his disciples a spirit of inquiry so that they thought for themselves, unhampered by conventions, traditions, orthodoxy bigotry or intolerance.
* Though he was the teacher, he avoided dogmatism. He neither claimed infallibility nor demanded intellectual surrender. As a philosopher, he separated the essentials from superfluous academic issues.
* He was a pragmatist and emphasized that all activities should be purposeful and conducive to the spiritual advancement of man

In Alagaddūpama sutta (MN22.13 / i 136) – The Raft (kullūpamā)

*The Dhamma is compared to the raft that it is for the purpose of crossing over (samsāra), and not for grasping*

* In Saccasamyutta sutta (SN56.31) – The Siṃsapā Grove (simsopamā)

*The handful of leaves is as the handful of knowledge that Buddha taught, beneficial in solving the basic issues of human experiences.*

* In refusing to waste his time on the origin of the universe or man, the Buddha expounded the famous “parable of the wounded man” which reflects his pragmatic attitude to all problems:-

“*If a man were pierced through by a poisoned arrow and his relations called in a surgeon and the man said, ‘I will not have this arrow pulled out until I know who the man is who wounded me’ verily such a man would die before he could get to know who was the culprit.*

* Equally refreshing was the Buddha’s rejection of the supernatural and the miraculous. The most effective miracle, he believed in, was the power of the word to carry conviction to the listener

 When faced with the situation where Kisāgotami expected the Buddha to give life to her dead child, he chose to teach her the true nature of life and lead her to salvation. He sent her to beg from house to house for a mustard seed from a home that had not seen death, reflects his masterly grasp of the inner working of the human mind.

* He contrived situation which could drive home the truth of what he taught. To stress the futility of worldly pleasures, he offered for sale the decomposing corpse of a courtesan to the wealthy young men, who vied with one another for her favours and lavished their riches on her when alive.
* He would interrupt the preparation for an elaborate ritual of a Brahmanical sacrifice to save the animals about to be sacrificed and to preach to the priest a more efficacious way of achieving his goal.

In Kūţadanta sutta (DN5), brahmin Kūţadanta asked Buddha how should one conduct sacrifice. Buddha first delivered a gradual discourse on generosity, morality, heavens, danger, corruptions of sense-desires and the blessings of renunciation; when the mind is ready and prepared, the excellent teachings of the Buddha is preached to him

* He deliberately acted contrary to the prevailing social order. Not only did he denounce caste, which decreed man to be high or low according to birth, but showed that he meant what he said by making a barber of humble origin take a place of precedence - chief disciple in attending to vinaya discipline and was ordained as senior over the other disciples. This shows the Buddha gave equal opportunities for all and raised the status of the people.
* The happiness of the scavenger and the slave was as much his concern as that of the king and the wealthy banker. He would accept the invitation for lunch from a poor householder in preference to that of a king or a prince.

 He would chide a person for wasting his time on useless pursuits but would not preach to a hungry man until he had had his food.

* He was humble and rejected the praise offered by even his close associates. When his chief disciple Sāriputta tells him, *“You, Sir, are the greatest Buddha.”* His response is one of severe admonition: “*Do not resort to vain flattery. How can you compare me with other Buddhas when you have known neither those who had been nor those who are yet to come?”*
* Whenever he and the monks accepted an invitation to a home for mid-day meal, it will be followed by a special sermon which the Buddha himself or a senior disciple delivered.
* He appointed no successor, nor did he think in terms of a well-defined administrative set-up. The Sangha was provided with a strong and comprehensive constitution in the form of the Pātimoka rules.
* The tolerant spirit shown to convert is seen in Upāli sutta (MN56). Buddha advised the former disciple of Mahāvira to continue to give support to his teacher after his conversion.
* The Buddha discouraged vain and misleading disputations. He delivered his discourses through dialogues in the following four tactful ways:
1. Some should be answered directly;
2. Others should be answered either by way of analysing them or
3. Answered by counter-questions;
4. Lastly, there are questions which should be put aside.
* In Upali sutta (MN 56), when Upali the millionaire after listening to his teachings wanted to be his follower, the Buddha advised him to make a thorough investigation on his teachings.

Though Upali became a Buddhist, he was advised to continue to support his previous religious teacher. This show the boundless compassion and perfect tolerance of the Buddha

2) The six attributes of the Dhamma

1. Clear exposition (svākkhāto) without secrecy and to be realised through direct experience.
2. Self-realization (sanditthiko) through one’s effort.
3. Timeless (akāliko) in the sense of yielding immediate results.
4. Come and see (ehipassiko) - the teachings are open to investigation and verification, there is no place for blind faith.
5. Practicability (opanayiko) – the teachings can be practiced by any interested person.
6. Each by himself (paccatam), attained (veditabbo) by the wise (viññuhi) – personal and direct experience in realizing the truth.

(3) Buddha’s immediate disciples

* Sāriputta who excelled in wisdom, self control virtue, was expert in the knowledge of the doctrines and had the ability to preach persuasively.
* Moggallāna valiant, who possessed supernatural powers was able to raise the disciples to the highest stages of moral and spiritual progress.
* Mahākassapa was the foremost in the ascetic ways.
* Mahākaccayana was a great expositor of Dhamma.
* Punna Mantāniputta was an appealing preacher.
* Ananda was the foremost bhikkhu in erudition, morally watchful steadfast and eloquent.
* Anuruddha was the foremost in the exercise of divine eyes.
* Upali was the foremost in the vinaya rules.
* Vakkali was of implicit faith.
* Nanda was chief amongst disciples in respect of self-control.
* These disciples were very steadfast and united in their propagation of Buddhism, they all respected the Buddha greatly, thus they were able to perform their duties well.

(4) Women’s role

* Mahāpajāpati Gotami was responsible for the formation of bhikkhuní order. Under her leadership, many sākyan ladies joined the bhikkhuni’s order.
* Visākhā, the devout and generous daughter of millionaire Dhanañjaya, was responsible for converting all the members of her father-in-law’s family from Jainism to Buddhism.

She donated the Eastern monastery, Pubārāma in Sāvatthi, to the Buddha and his sangha. She was also responsible for framing many of the vinaya rules for both monks and nuns.

(5) Patronage of kings, clans and others

* King Bimbisāra of Magadha attended to the welfare and protection of the sangha. He offered the park, Bamboo Grove (Veluvanārama or Sanctuary of the Squirrels) in Rājagaha, as the first gift to the Buddha and his sangha for their lodging.

On some occasions, he advised the Buddha on the framing of vinaya rules such as not to ordain one who was in the service of the king; to hold religious assemblies on uposatha days; to observe vassa.

* King Pasenadi of Kosala was also a great benefactor of the Buddha and his sangha. When his queen Malikā gave birth to a daughter, the Buddha paid a glowing tribute to women with the statement that some women are even better than men, thus, uplifted the status of women in ancient India.

(6) Support of influential people

* Anāthapindika was a millionaire and foremost almsgiver who offered to the Buddha and his sangha the Jetvana monastery in Sāvatthi, where Buddha spent most of his vassa.

It was through his effort that few of the discourses were served as the guide for the duties and responsibilities of the lay-buddhist.

He also requested that bodhi tree to be planted for the devotees to pay their respects to the Buddha during his absence.

* Ambapāli, a courtesan, was very generous to offer her mango grove to the Buddha and his sangha in Vesālí.
* Jivaka was Buddha’s personal physician and he offered the sangha a monastery, Jivaka-ambavana, to accommodate the sangha in the twentieth vassa in Rājagaha.

**References:**

**(1) Buddhism the Religion and Its Culture by Ananda W.P. Guruge**